

**UNCONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 2ND
JULY 2025**

PART ONE

Present: Ali Amirkhalili, Gary Baines, Penny Haughan, Gill Banks, Paul Gaskell, Paul Smith (minute 297 onwards), Phil Vickerman, Simon Wrigley, Jo Henney, Debbie Wilkinson, Karen Lowe

In attendance: Christine Carter, Vice Principal – Curriculum
Phil Jones, Vice Principal – Quality & Student Experience
Kevin Williams, Vice Principal – Finance, Estates & MIS
Lesley Venables, Governance Professional

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

283 Apologies for absence were received from Ian Evans. The absences of Lucky Ali and Ethan Stewart were noted.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

284 Paul Smith declared a standing interest in relation to his employment by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council and his spouse being a member of staff at the College.

MINUTES

285 **Resolved -** That the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd April 2025 (Parts 1 and 2) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to one minor amendment

MATTERS ARISING

286 Governors received for information a progress report on actions arising from the previous meeting and noted that these were either under development or featured on the agenda.

CHAIR'S UPDATE

287 The Chair had attended regional networking meetings arranged by the Association of Colleges, regular meetings/contact with the Principal and the Governance Professional. Earlier she had been involved in the opening of the Whitbread Premier Inn training facility and the Annual Strategic Conversation with the Department for Education. As part of the latter, there had been a discussion on the level of the College's staff costs to income ratio which was high compared to the recognised benchmark. However, the DfE representatives had been able to obtain the full picture of the College's strategic direction and its journey in improving performance. Further support from the FE Commissioner's team may be available, which would be explored by the SLT.

- 288 Governors were also informed of the main outcomes of the recent performance review meetings conducted by the Chair and the Governance Professional. A number of key themes and areas for development had emerged, which would be set out in greater detail in the report to be prepared for the Governance & Search Committee. One of these centred around the introduction of an additional set of KPIs relevant for each committee through which performance could be monitored.
- 289 Support from a National Leader in Governance may be sought in terms of best practice on data dashboards. The Board was reliant on accurate information and needed a strong relationship with the SLT in order to achieve this. It had been suggested that a scheme of delegation between the various layers of the governance framework may be beneficial in setting limits of authority and accountability.
- 290 The performance reviews had concluded that it was important for papers on possible capital or curriculum investments to outline what success would look like. Governors should also be aware of examples of local employers influencing the shape of the College's curriculum offer and any resulting improvements in performance. Other measures should be devised on the organisation's culture, the impact of changes to pay and terms/conditions of employment and governors needed to be able to articulate the relationship between the College and key partners/employers within the local community.
- 291 It was suggested that a list of 10 things governors should know could be drafted for consideration at the next meeting, for example the amount invested in modernising pay scales and the associated reduction in sickness absence and agency expenditure.

BURSARIES POLICY 2025/2026

- 292 The Vice-Principal (Finance & Resources) presented a revised Policy on Bursaries for 2025/2026.
- 293 The main changes related to the removal of weekly cash payments of £40, the ability for the College to apply for additional support for vulnerable students which would be assessed on a case-by-case basis and an increase in the household income threshold to £42K for the categories of 16-18 discretionary, 19+ LSF and ALL Bursary.
- 294 A governor asked whether the College could signpost students to other external agencies for financial or other support and was advised that the Student Services team was experienced in dealing with queries and able to ensure that students were receiving the maximum benefits.
- 295 In response to a further query as to whether there were any measures in place to track the number of students in receipt of bursary support and the impact this had on educational outcomes the Vice-Principal advised that this was undertaken in relation to free school meals but could be widened to other categories of support and included in the new data dashboard. It was noted that it was possible for one individual to have support needs or disadvantage on several levels.
- 296 **Resolved -** That the revised Bursary Policy for 2025/2026 be approved

Paul Smith joined the meeting.

PRINCIPAL'S UPDATE

- 297 The Principal presented an update on recent issues, predicted outcomes and sector developments.
- 298 At 90% overall the predicted retention rate for 2024/2025 was lower than the National Rate of 91.8% and previous years, however, it was noted that it had been previous practice at the College to keep non-achieving students on programme. This had now ended and all students progressing to the next level had passed their qualifications.
- 299 Predicted retention rates had increased and were 88.2% for 16-18s and 93.9% for 19+, which were below the College's target. In relation to 16-18s the Principal reported that this was partly due to performance on the aspiring professionals' programme in Construction (which had been addressed for 2025/2026), students not enrolling on a full study programme and the need for earlier interventions.
- 300 For pass rates the estimated outturn was 96.8% overall, compared to 92.2% in 2023/2024. Management had made a strategic decision last year to fail a large group of 19+ Functional Skills students who had not achieved for several years and this legacy issue had impacted on pass rates. Governors had been aware of this decision.
- 301 Attendance at the English & Maths examinations had been high (91%) despite the significant increase in the number of entries. A whole-College approach had been adopted for the examinations process and curriculum managers would continue to be held accountable for levels of performance.
- 302 Governors congratulated the Principal and all staff for the predicted outcomes. The Principal commented that the impact of the current strategy would be evidenced through student progression and a more structured approach.
- 303 The college had plans for significant work to support learners on Functions Skills and English and Maths GCSE courses.
- 304 The SLT had modelled the possible outcomes of a number of predicted achievement percentages. The target level was 86.5%, which would be a 1.3% improvement on 2023/2024 and 1% higher than the national rate.
- 305 Performance on apprenticeship programmes was predicted to be between 69% and 79% (best-case scenario).
- 306 Curriculum planning and timetabling were now complete for 2025/2026. A number of new courses had been introduced and the College had increased the learning pathways for members of the local community to progress to College programmes. Changes had also been made to adult education courses and apprenticeships in manufacturing and logistics in line with local demand.
- 307 The Principal reported on some changes to management responsibilities at Vice-Principal level. This had resulted in Phil Jones becoming the VP for Quality, Adults & Commercial and Christine Carter as the VP for Curriculum & Student Experience.
- 308 Governors were advised of a new partnership with Cammell Laird on an "aspiring

shipbuilders” programme, This was a pilot project and potential for it be rolled out to other APCL sites within the group if successful. Progression from the programme, if successful, would be onto the Apprenticeship programme at The Engineering College.

- 309 The Board was reminded that the College had recently received additional funding from the DfE to support staff pay and retention. A decision had been made by the SLT to award all staff up to grade 9 a £500 non-consolidated payment in their June salaries. Although this was welcomed, the Principal commented that the FE sector still would not be able to match salary levels within schools.
- 310 Further monies for the increase in Employers’ National Insurance Contributions and capital funding had been received.
- 311 The Principal outlined a number of national initiatives, including the AoC Strategy Group’s update, the Curriculum & Assessment Report, changes to sector benchmarks by the FE Commissioner, the Safer Streets mission and the 16-18 Enrichment Guarantee.
- 312 The Government had recently established Skills England and advocated closer working between devolved authorities, local councils and FE colleges. The Post-16 White Paper was expected shortly and an announcement had been made on Technical Excellence Colleges for Construction being created within each region, but limited to colleges graded as Good or Outstanding.
- 313 The College had volunteered to become a pilot college for the new Ofsted inspection framework which was due to be implemented in the Autumn, and was now waiting to be contacted.
- 314 It was agreed that a regular summary of briefings published by the DfE, Association of Colleges and other relevant organisations and a schedule of College events would be compiled and circulated to governors.

STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

- 315 The Vice-Principal Quality, Adults and Commercial presented an update on performance against the KPIs in the Strategic Plan. Progress against the financial indicators was consistent with the content of the Management Accounts.
- 316 Retention levels had decreased, but pass rates had improved compared to the previous report (May 2025). Management felt that this was due to the robust processes now in place and a high level of challenge on student performance by curriculum teams.
- 317 [Governors asked questions of the senior team and satisfied themselves that the positive shift in culture was having an effect college-wide.](#)

AUDIT COMMITTEE

- 319 The Chair of the Audit Committee presented a summary of the meeting held on 4th June 2025.
- 320 Internal Audit reports on Curriculum Equipment Controls (partial assurance) and Staff and Space Utilisation (substantial assurance) were received, together with a progress report from the Internal Auditors on the implementation of audit recommendations.

- 321 The regular monitoring on progress against the Internal Audit Plan showed that this was on track for delivery by the end of the academic year, with the remaining reports due to be submitted to the Committee's September meeting.
- 322 The Committee had recommended for approval by the Board the External Audit Plan for the 2024/2025 Financial Statements. Further work on the Internal Audit Plan for 2025/2026 was requested with an updated version to be presented to the Committee's September meeting and the Board in October 2025.
- 323 This was due to a difference of view between management and RSM over the most appropriate number of days required to deliver each element of the Internal Audit Plan. It had been agreed that the Committee Chair and the Vice-Principal Finance & Resources would meet with RSM to finalise the content of the Plan. The Board was advised that a decision on the re-tendering of the Internal Audit contract would need to be made in the Autumn Term 2025.
- 324 Information on the Department for Education's new Framework for External Auditors and Reporting Accountants was received. Revised terms of reference for the Committee were also recommended for approval.
- 325 A progress report on the recent Funding Assurance Audit and mitigating controls was provided for information and implementation of the recommendations was on track.
- 326 The regular Risk Management update was received and the Committee recommended approval of a revised Risk Management Policy for 2025/2026. The latter was subject to checking that the Audit Committee's workplan and terms of reference covered all items set out in the Risk Management Policy.
- 327 It was agreed that the Committee would receive the same presentation as the Finance & Resources Committee on the College's cyber-security framework.
- 328 **Resolved** – That the following items be approved:
- 1 External Audit Plan for 2024/2025 Financial Statements
 - 2 Revised Terms of Reference for the Audit Committee
 - 3 Updated Risk Management Policy for 2025/2026, subject to further review of its alignment with the Committee's cycle of business and terms of reference

QUALITY & STANDARDS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

- 329 The Chair of the Quality & Standards Scrutiny Committee presented a summary of the meeting held on 11th June 2025.
- 330 The pace and level of challenge of Teaching, Learning and Assessment had been noted. Information had been received on areas graded as 'effective', 'improving' and 'inconsistent', together with actions in place. The College's 5-step guide to feedback had been shared with the Committee. A total of 391 teaching observations had been undertaken in 2024/2025 and any resulting interventions were having a positive impact.
- 331 An improving culture and of staff feeling appreciated for their efforts was evidenced in

the Curriculum Area Reviews. Activities included an analysis of in-year performance, classroom visits, staff and student focus groups, work scrutiny and a review of student progress monitoring.

- 332 Predicted Achievement level improvements had been noted by the Committee and that pass rates were key for 2024/2025. The challenges in English & Maths were highlighted, against a background of increased numbers and the logistical requirements. Retention rates had fallen slightly compared to 2023/2024. Apprenticeship performance had increased compared to the previous year and was above the national benchmark.
- 333 A central toolkit had been created for curriculum planning, together with higher levels of scrutiny of proposed courses. It was noted that the process had been completed much earlier in the year and the next steps for 2025/2026 were outlined.
- 334 There had been a slight decrease in apprenticeship enrolments (currently 273), however, the income target had been met and performance was above the national benchmarks. In-year achievement for Apprenticeships was 67.5%, with a best-case achievement rate of 79.5%. Challenges included staff shortages in Construction & Engineering, Performance levels in Construction and Business Admin programmes had improved considerably this year. An external review of apprenticeship delivery and compliance was now underway to support concerns from Ofsted's recent monitoring visit.
- 335 The College was participating in an English & Maths pilot project with a number of other institutions to determine the potential impact of small group tuition on levels of achievement.
- 336 A total of 185 Higher Education students had been enrolled in 2024/2025. Levels of performance in terms of attendance and continuation (91.4%) were strong. A new Access & Participation Plan had recently been approved by the Office for Students. This area of provision's contribution to the inclusion agenda was significant and the high level of welfare and financial support available to students was commended for its impact. Strategic review underway of potential growth areas for its HE activity with local partner HEIs. There had been a total of 157 applications to date for 2025/2026, with 88 offers made.
- 337 Assurance was received by the Committee that all areas identified by the Ofsted inspection were being addressed through the Quality Improvement Plan.

FINANCE & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

- 338 The Chair of the Finance & Resources Committee provided a summary of the meeting held on 25th June 2025.
- 339 The Committee had received a detailed report on estates and facilities issues, including the additional site security measures being implemented for September, such as 'speed-lanes', with a focus on training and prevention of poor behaviour.
- 340 The College's property consultant had provided a presentation on progress with the draft Estates Strategy, where detailed work was being undertaken to align with the Curriculum Plan, the wider educational initiatives and local/regional skills needs. A

- final draft would be submitted to the November Committee meeting for recommendation to the Board.
- 341 The Three Year Financial Forecast and Budget for 2025/2026 had been discussed and recommended for approval by the Board.
- 342 Governors were reminded that the budget included an assumption for 16-18 funding, pending confirmation of the allocation for 2025/2026 by the DfE.
- 343 The College had set targets for enrolling and retaining learners on 16-18 programmes.
- 344 Achievable targets had also been set for enrolment on apprenticeships and higher education programmes.
- 345 The level of EBITDA was projected at a similar level to the current year.
- 346 The proposed budget was viewed as prudent.
- 347 The Financial Regulations for 2025/2026 and a number of associated financial policies had been recommended for approval.
- 348 Monitoring reports had been received on Human Resources, Cyber-Security and the Towns Fund project. In relation to the first of these, the Committee had been advised that the impact of a more robust attendance policy should be evident in 2025/2026 in reducing sickness absence.
- 349 Governors noted progress on Health & Safety matters, including strengthened trips and visits processes, site security (new CCTV system) and staff training in areas such as first aid and dealing with challenging student behaviours.
- 350 The Committee had commended the Estates & Facilities team and other staff in dealing successfully with the logistics of the significant increase in examination numbers. Further social spaces were being identified for student breakout activities at the Twelve Quays Campus.
- 351 The majority of capital projects were on track in terms of timescales and budget. However, there was currently a 10-week slippage on 2 projects – Centre for English & Maths and the Motor Vehicle Workshops – the deadline for which was 31 March 2026. Management had asked for a cashflow forecast to be prepared for each of these and once the scale of any potential overrun was determined an action plan would be devised.
- 352 The Executive Team had met with the Department for Education earlier today as part of the Annual Strategic Conversation process at which this item was discussed. It may be possible for the College to enter a legal contract with the successful bidder to pay the contract fee upfront prior to the March 2026 deadline.
- 353 [A governor suggested that the new Scheme of Delegation to be introduced for 2025/2026 should include accountability for any property leases. The first draft of this document would be presented for discussion to the next Finance & Resources Committee meeting.](#)
- 354 The Management accounts for May 2025 were scrutinised.

355 **Resolved -** That the following be approved:

- 1 Three Year Financial Forecast & Budget for 2025/2026
- 2 Financial Regulations 2025/2026 and Financial Policies & Procedures
- 3 Standing Orders for Purchasing & Contracting
- 4 Supply Chain Fees & Charges Policy
- 5 Social Value Policy

DEPARTURE OF GOVERNANCE PROFESSIONAL

356 On behalf of the Board and the College the Chair expressed thanks to Lesley Venables for her outstanding contribution to governance over the past 7 years and wished her well for the future.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

22nd October 2025, 4.30 p.m.

Signed: _____
Chair

Dated: