



West Thames College Further Education Corporation

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporation

held at 6.00pm on Wednesday 9 October 2024
at the College

Present:	Mr S McGeoch (SM)	Chair
	Ms T Aust (TA)	CEO
	Mr S Taylor (ST)	
	Ms R Turner (RT)	
	Mr P Sullivan (PS)	
	Ms A Cornish (AC)	
	Mr A Rides (AR)	
	Ms C Zervoudakis (CZ)	
	Ms H Abdul Hakkeem (HAH)	
	Mr G Casley (GC)	
Apologies:	Mr T Hayhoe (TH)	
	Mr M Othi (MO)	
	Ms B Bata (BB)	
In Attendance:	Mr J Bolt (JB)	Associate Member
	Ms C Ajit Singh (CAS)	Associate Member
	Ms K Frost (KF)	Head of Governance
	Mr T Stevens (TS)	Executive Director
	Mr M Cooper (MC)	Executive Director
	Ms M Gajewska-Kopczyk (MGK)	Vice Principal
	Ms S Louisy	Director of Student Experience

33/24 **Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly HAH who was attending her first meeting. Introductions were made.

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from TH, MO and BB. CAS was attending the meeting virtually. It was confirmed that the meeting was quorate.

There were no declarations of interest concerning items on the agenda.

34/24 **Appointment of Governor**

A 'Recommendation from Interview' (Paper 2) was received in advance of the meeting.

On the recommendation of a recruitment panel made up of members of the Governance, Search and Strategy Committee, IT WAS DECIDED to appoint Faroque Ahmed as an Independent Governor for a term of four years starting from 14 October 2024. Faroque would join the Audit Committee.

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35/24 Safeguarding

a) Safeguarding Update

SL attended the meeting to give a safeguarding update. A handout was distributed summarising the changes in Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2024 and detailing the Governing Body's responsibilities for safeguarding. SL confirmed that she met regularly with the Safeguarding Link Governors, GC and AG.

b) Annual Safeguarding Report

The 'Annual Safeguarding Report' (Paper 3b) was received in advance of the meeting. The report had been scrutinised by the Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience Committee who were recommending it to the Corporation.

IT WAS DECIDED to note the Annual Safeguarding Report.

c) Safeguarding Policy

The 'Safeguarding Policy' (Paper 3c) was received in advance of the meeting. The policy was recommended for approval by the Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience (CQSE) Committee following a thorough review at their last meeting.

The Chair of the CQSE Committee reported that the Committee was confident in the robustness of the Safeguarding Policy. Assurance was provided that consistent safeguarding processes were being followed across both sites. Additionally, safeguarding leads from each site met regularly to ensure continued alignment and coordination.

Governors asked for a wording change on page 8 to clarify it was the Governing Body's responsibilities.

Action: SL

Governors asked about the list of Governing Body responsibilities on page 8 of the policy and noted that it would be helpful to receive a report detailing how each responsibility was being fulfilled. It was agreed that the safeguarding link governors would take this forward and report back through the CQSE Committee.

Action: GC/AG

Governors asked about the expectations regarding adherence to the code of conduct for visitors. SL explained that each visitor received a leaflet containing information about the expected code of conduct. This information was provided at reception upon arrival.

Governors asked about students with learning difficulties and whether this posed challenges or required more emphasis compared to other areas. SL responded that there was no need to place additional emphasis on this area, as every referral was robustly supported in line with guidance. AG explained that a different approach was taken when teaching personal safety to students with learning disabilities. SL added that staff were trained and understood the unique challenges these students faced.

Governors asked about the impact of COVID. SL reported there had been an increase in mental health, well-being, and emotional health issues, as well as a rise in family breakdowns. The economic impact also resulted in some students working to contribute to their family's income.

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Governors asked about the increase in safeguarding incidents and whether a return to pre-COVID levels was expected. SL responded that an increase in incidents was expected, rather than a decline.

Governors shared that during a link visit, they became aware of the significant amount of time staff were dedicating to safeguarding-related issues, which raised concerns about diverting attention from other important areas of work. SL highlighted that this issue was compounded by the strain on external agencies, particularly in mental health services, which lacked the necessary infrastructure to provide adequate support. The CEO added that external specialists had worked with college staff which had positively influenced the culture around mental health and had a positive impact.

Governors asked what long-term strategies were in place to mitigate the impact on staff. The CEO explained the measures that were in place, such as training and increased resources for mental health and counselling support. However, there remained a question of where the college's responsibility begins and ends, as some of the support being provided should come from external agencies.

Governors asked if this issue was being discussed in local Principal meetings. The CEO confirmed that it was an ongoing topic of discussion and that colleges across the country were experiencing similar challenges.

Governors thanked SL for the comprehensive policy. They said it was important to note that governors had both collective and individual responsibilities for safeguarding.

Governors asked about homelessness and whether that impacted on pupils in the college. SL said that last academic year saw several referrals related to homelessness. The college provided advocacy and support for affected students, though the primary focus remained on education, which could be challenging for students in such situations. SL emphasised that the college did everything possible within its scope and boundaries to ensure students were supported.

The Chair of the CQSE Committee reported that when the Committee reviewed the policy, they had asked the Staff Governor whether staff had received the necessary training, and the Staff Governor confirmed that they had. Similarly, they asked the Student Governor if students were aware of where to report safeguarding concerns, and the Student Governor confirmed that they were.

Governors asked if there were any external reviews or checks regarding safeguarding. SL explained that the college had collaborated closely with partners, including the Local Authority, and had submitted its Safeguarding Policy to the Local Safeguarding Board. The college did not operate in isolation; some partners provided policies, while others offered training, feedback, and assistance. Additionally, the college was required to complete an annual safeguarding audit.

Governors thanked SL for the update.

After making the amendment to actions reports. IT WAS DECIDED to approve the Safeguarding Policy.

SL left the meeting at 6.30pm.

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36/24 Minutes of the Last Meeting

a) Minutes from the Last Meeting (3 July 2024)

Minutes from the meeting of the Corporation held on 3 July 2024 (Paper 4a) were received in advance of the meeting. IT WAS DECIDED they were a true record of the meeting and they were approved.

b) Matters Arising

The 'Summary Action List' (Paper 4b) was received in advance of the meeting and progress made towards the actions was noted.

37/24 Strategic Items

a) Executive Report

The 'Executive Report – Oct 2024' (Paper 5a) was received in advance of the meeting. The CEO drew attention to key points in the report including the launch of the Skills and Logistics Hub on Thursday 17 October 2024.

The primary area of risk identified was staffing. The CEO said there were challenges in finding appropriately qualified staff in certain areas, specifically in Motor Vehicle and English. To address this, actions were being taken, including a recruitment campaign for the Skills and Logistics Centre and initiatives to support the development of existing staff internally. The situation was similar to what other colleges were experiencing.

Governors asked the Student Governor how she became aware of concerns about the college from other students. HAH responded that there were not many concerns in her own department, and that when issues arose, she spoke to teachers who were able to resolve them.

Governors asked about the student groups that were in place. HAH mentioned attending an event last year that was beneficial. She highlighted a "Question Time" event hosted at Isleworth with Council members, where students participated and posed questions. The response from the leader of the Council was positive, acknowledging the valuable contributions made by the students.

Governors asked about the Further Education Commissioner (FEC) Active Support the college was receiving for apprenticeships. The CEO explained the college had asked for the support from the FEC. Feedback from the support was being reported to the CQSE Committee.

Governors suggested conducting a future deep dive into the recruitment issues. The CEO stated that the Head of Human Resources would attend the next meeting of the Finance, Resources, and Capital Projects (FRCP) Committee to provide an overview of the ongoing activities. The CEO also noted that it would be worthwhile for the Committee to consider whether the score for the relevant risk on the risk register needed to be increased.

b) Development Plan 2023-24

The 'Development Plan Oct 2024' (Paper 5b) was received in advance of the meeting and progress made towards the actions was noted.

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Governors asked whether the document was useful for the Executive Team. The CEO responded that it helped focus some of the work being carried out and served as a means of monitoring objectives for the year. MGK said she used the Development Plan to set targets for the curriculum areas which fed into the Quality Improvement Plans.

c) **Development Plan 2024-25**

The 'Draft Development Plan 2024-25' (Paper 5c) was received in advance of the meeting.

The CEO explained that the objectives in the development plan were derived from the third year of the strategic plan, with some amendments made following discussions with governors, particularly in areas such as apprenticeships and achieving high grades in GCSEs. The Development Plan objectives also took into account the Accountability Statement and the college's Journey toward Outstanding (J20).

Governors discussed whether the Corporation needed to receive the full Development Plan. Ideas included providing information on an exception basis rather than in full detail. However, it was agreed that receiving the complete plan at the beginning of the year was essential, and there were benefits to having access to comprehensive data throughout the year. The Data Dashboard offered a summary of progress toward the objectives for governors, while committees reviewed the relevant areas specific to their focus. Governors suggested the Executive Team could highlight key points to bring to the attention of the Corporation.

Governors expressed concern that a significant percentage of students were still not achieving Level 4 in English and Maths after a year of study. They suggested that the objectives in the Development Plan should include not only tracking progress but also the quality of teaching and the strategies in place to support students in progressing from Level 3 to Level 4. MGK responded that this was addressed in more detail within the English and Maths Strategy.

IT WAS DECIDED to approve the Development Plan 2024-25.

d) **Development of the new Strategic Plan**

'Initial Strategy Thoughts' and 'CMT Strategy Brainstorm' (Paper 5d) was received in advance of the meeting.

The Chair reported that a meeting of the Chairs and the Executive Team had taken place in August to discuss the plans for developing the new Strategic Plan. The Chair summarised the progress made so far, including attending a meeting of the College Management Team (CMT) and facilitating an open table session focused on three key questions: What are they proud of about the college today? What areas do they believe need improvement? What could be different about the college? The output from this meeting had been circulated as part of the papers for the meeting.

The next step would be to broaden the discussion with other stakeholder groups. A questionnaire had been drafted to be sent out to governors, staff, and managers. Consideration was also being given to how to engage external stakeholders and employers, which would be more structured, potentially including interviews.

Governors asked how the output from the College Management Team (CMT) meeting would be translated into actionable steps. The Chair explained that the current phase was focused on data gathering. In the first half of the next year, the Corporation would evaluate the available strategic options. It was noted that capturing the external

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requirements expected in three years would be crucial, as they were likely to differ from the present. These requirements might include economic factors, policy changes, and community needs.

Governors offered suggestions, such as considering changes in Maths education and addressing gaps in the job market, including roles like planning officers and maintenance for heat source pumps. They highlighted the college's unique position as a provider of logistics education.

It was emphasised that collaboration with schools was essential. Questions arose about whether school staff were aware of the breadth of Post-16 options available to effectively signpost their students. Governors stressed the importance of identifying what the college does best and what makes it distinctive, cautioning against the risk of trying to cater to all needs. Additionally, it was noted that faith is significant to a considerable number of students at the college, a point that had become evident during governor link visits when speaking with students. This aspect might warrant further exploration.

It would be important to build on the existing information and intelligence, including the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), the AoC Colleges of the Future initiative, and the local plans for Hounslow.

Governors asked whether schools had been invited to the opening of the Skills and Logistics Hub. The CEO said the focus had primarily been on inviting students from the college although another local college would also be sending a group of students.

Governors said the college had a good reputation locally for its approach to diversity and its efforts to encourage positive relationships. Interfaith Week was an integral part of college life, along with the Iftar event that the college hosted. Student Ambassadors played a significant role in these initiatives. The college served as a vital part of the community and the community was an essential part of the college. The college's multifaith position within the community was a significant asset and consideration should be given to how this could be incorporated into future plans. The CEO said one outcome from the recent Matrix inspection was the recognition of the college's commitment to its values and the positive feedback from both staff and students regarding the celebration of diversity within the college.

The Chair said that the Corporation would hold an all-day Strategy Day in January 2025, which would be facilitated by an external facilitator.

It was agreed to create a folder in Governor Hub to store documents that might be of interest during the Strategic Planning process.

Action: KF

38/24 Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience Committee Report

Minutes from the Committee meeting held on 9 October 2024 were received in advance of the meeting (Paper 6). The Chair of the Committee gave a verbal report from the meeting:

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- Risks around Curriculum Reform were discussed. It was agreed to rename Risk 4 Curriculum Reform and to widen the scope of Risk 5 to include all provision, not just apprenticeships and T Levels.
- A strategic brainstorm had been held. Key themes coming out of the brainstorm included: Inclusion, Partnership, Employers, Growth, High Achievement. Potential challenges to be considered: curriculum reform, inspection, staffing shortages, the future of HE in FE, apprenticeship growth.
- From a strategic plan point of view, a discussion would be needed under the staffing pillar to look at how to overcome the issues being experienced, particularly with Motor Vehicle.

39/24 Finance Report

'Management Accounts Apr 24' (Paper 8b) were received in advance of the meeting. MC reported that there might be further adjustments following the External Audit scheduled for the week commencing 14 October 2024.

Overall, it had been a positive year, with a good end-of-year result. The operating surplus was £513k, exceeding the budgeted figure of £400k. MC summarized both favourable and adverse variances.

The most significant favourable variance was the adjustment to the 16-19 revenue funding, which was announced after the budget had been set. The additional funds were allocated to cover the additional 2% pay award and to add one hour to the 16-19 programmes of study. Other favourable variances included growth in interest income, increased commercial income, and curriculum infill.

Adverse variances were noted in premises costs, energy costs, and apprenticeship income.

The college remained compliant with loan covenants, had a healthy cash projection for the next couple of years, and met its financial targets, with the exception of apprenticeships.

Governors asked whether there was any risk of the college losing the Capital Expenditure funding if it wasn't spent. MC explained that there were specific timeframes associated with the expenditure and listed the relevant deadlines. He confirmed that plans were in place to ensure the funding would be utilised appropriately.

Governors asked whether the college was experiencing any difficulties in identifying contractors to carry out the work due to the upturn in construction markets. MC stated that they had been able to turn projects around quickly and did not foresee any issues.

Governors asked whether the college required contractors to take on apprentices as part of the contract conditions. The CEO responded that this had been implemented in the past, not only for apprenticeships but also for work experience. The college made efforts to do this in any commercial setting possible, always considering the benefits of a contract for the students.

Governors asked about the utilisation rates for the 16-19 Discretionary Bursary, noting that only 60% had been used for 16-19 and just 35% for the Advanced Learner Loan Bursary. They asked whether unspent funds were returned. MC explained that the funds allocated for the Discretionary Bursary were used alongside free school meal provisions. Any

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underutilised funds could be carried forward to the new year; however, if not used within two years, the college would lose them.

Governors expressed concern about the consistent underspending on the bursary, highlighting the wider context of serving a number of deprived areas. They questioned whether the college was attracting enough students from these areas and if any marketing research had been conducted to examine the correlation between the catchment area and student enrolment. The CEO confirmed that they had information available but was unsure of the latest position. MC was tasked with investigating this matter further.

Action: MC

Governors suggested that if there were 16-19 bursaries available, efforts should be made to inform students in those areas about the support that is available.

40/24 Confidential Item

A confidential item was discussed.

41/24 Date of the Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting of the Corporation was Wednesday 11 December 2024.

Summary of Actions

Minute No.	Action	Lead	Target Date
35/24	Change the wording on page 8 of the Safeguarding Policy to confirm that it is the Governing Body who has the responsibilities.	SL	Dec 2024
35/24	Provide a report on how the Governing Body is meeting its responsibilities as listed in the Safeguarding Policy via the CQSE Committee.	AG/GC	Mar 2025
37/24	Create a folder on Governor Hub to store documents for the Strategic Planning process.	KF	Dec 2024
39/24	Look into the current correlation between students living with in areas of deprivation locally and student enrolment. Consider ways of informing students in those areas of the support that is available to them.	MC	Dec 2024

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