



West Thames College Further Education Corporation

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporation

held at 6.00pm on Wednesday 26 March 2025
at the College

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

1/25 **Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. CZ was attending the meeting virtually. Apologies for absence were received and accepted from TH, CAS, BB, HAH and FA.

It was confirmed the meeting was quorate. There were no declarations of interest concerning items on the agenda.

2/25 **Minutes of the Last Meeting**

a) **Minutes from the Last Meeting**

Minutes from the meeting of the Corporation held on 11 December 2024 (Paper 2a) were received in advance of the meeting. IT WAS DECIDED they were a true record of the meeting and they were approved.

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b) **Matters Arising**

An update on progress towards the actions agreed at the last meeting was received in advance of the meeting and was noted.

3/25 **Risk Register**

The 'Risk Register: March 2025' (Paper 3) was received in advance of the meeting. Since the last meeting, the following changes had been made.

- A new risk had been added: Risk 26: 'Leadership' relating to the recruitment and retention of members of the Executive Team.
- Risk 20: 'Competition for students' had moved to the oversight of the Curriculum, Quality & Student Experience Committee.
- Risk 3: 'Ofsted' had been amended to reflect the recent Ofsted grade of Outstanding.
- Risk 15: 'Facility Integrity' had been amended to cover wear and tear.
- A new risk had been added: Risk 27: 'Inappropriate Staff Behaviour'.

Governors asked for the following controls to be added to the risk register: Risk 15: add the schedule of maintenance and insurance. Risk 27: add insurance.

Action: MC

4/25 **College Performance**

a) **Data Dashboard**

The Board reviewed the status of KPIs in the Data Dashboard:

- Learning Walks: 93% of learning walks had been graded as good or better which was in line with expectations.
- Attendance: There had been a slight improvement in attendance at 87.3%. Governors asked what the College was trying to do to close the gap to achieve the target or was it better to change the target. MGK said she thought the target was right confirming the College wanted to be ambitious. There was a range of strategies in place and work was underway to close the gap. Governors asked if the target was different for adult learners who had other pressures. MGK said the target and measurement was the same but the College supported adult learners to study outside of time table hours if necessary.
- Achievement: Predicted achievement rates were broadly in line with last year. Level 2 achievement was predicted to decline slightly from last year due to the significantly increased number of students taking GCSE English and Maths exams. Governors asked if the targets were set too high. MGK said the targets were ambitious but it would be something to consider for the next strategy.
- Deep Dives: Two deep dives were being completed each week. There were no concerns at this stage.
- Finance: The projected Financial Health Grade was Good with a score of 210. The predicted surplus for the year was £20k compared to a budget of £150k. This compared to a Financial Health Grade last year of Outstanding. The decline was due to a deterioration in profitability. Student number targets had

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been met and the College had exceeded the funding allocations for adult skills. As there was no opportunity to earn any more funding for adult courses, the College was going through a process of rationalising provision.

- Human Resources: Sickness absence had increased significantly, particularly long-term sickness which was up 2.4%. The proportion of BAME staff was up 2%, there had been an 13% increase in BAME CMT from last year and student BAME had increased by 1%. Staff turnover was 9% compared to the target of 15% which was slightly higher than the same point last year.

Governors asked if long-term sickness was due to stress or physical health. MC said it was due to both but there had been no reports of work-related stress. Governors noted the level of sickness absence was higher than it had been in the middle of the COVID pandemic. MC said he would expect the level to drop by the end of the year but it was unlikely to come down significantly.

- Health and Safety: There had been an increase in the number of accident reports and near misses, which was seen as a positive development. Work had been undertaken to inform staff about reporting procedures for accidents and near misses. A total of 90 risk assessments had been completed, up from 69 the previous year, most of which related to educational trips and visits. 20 students had a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) in place.
- Sustainability: There had been a reduction in the consumption of gas and electricity and a reduction in cost, in part due to lower consumption and in part due to improved contracts for both. There had been an improvement in the amount of energy being produced by the solar panels. Governors asked if the College used all of the energy produced by solar panels. LS confirmed it did.

b) Review of Progress towards the Development Plan

A 'March Update of the Development Plan 2024-25' (Paper 4b) was received in advance of the meeting and was noted.

5/25 Strategic Items

a) Executive Update

The 'Executive Team Report: March 2025' was received in advance of the meeting. The CEO highlighted key points from the report:

- Funding changes: There would be an increase of 3.79% for 16-18 funding. For adult funding there would be a 1.65% cut for next year and 3% the following year.
- Curriculum changes: The outcome of the Rapid Review of Qualifications Reform was received in December and the outcome of the Curriculum and Assessment review was expected to be published in the Autumn Term. Both would have an impact on the strategy moving forward.
- The College was the first College in the country to achieve the Good Business Charter.
- The Further Education Commissioner was due to visit the College on 23 April 2025.

Governors asked what impact the defunding of courses would have on revenues and how it would be budgeted for. The CEO said the curriculum planning process would ensure that only funded courses would be chosen.

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6/25 **Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience (CQSE) Committee Report**

Minutes from the meeting of the Committee held on 25 February 2025 were received in advance of the meeting. (Paper 6a). The Chair of the Committee drew attention to key points from the meeting:

- The Apprenticeship Report had been received which had included a number of recommendations. The Committee would review progress towards the recommendations at every meeting. The Committee had emphasised the need for greater investment to achieve the target number for starts, particularly in marketing.
- The Annual Higher Education report had been received. The Committee discussed whether the College should continue to offer Higher Education but the view was that it met a local need and could present opportunities in the future. CZ had carried out a link visit to Higher Education and noted that students studying were not necessarily those who would easily transition to a traditional degree. The current provision helped meet a community need. The College had a strong reputation in certain areas, such as creative and access courses which resulted in good enrolment numbers but this wasn't the case in all subjects. AG highlighted the importance of access and equity in the College's approach.

It was agreed to arrange a governor briefing session on the topic of Higher Education next academic year.

Action: KF

7/25 **Governance, Search and Strategy (GSS) Committee Report**

a) **Committee Report**

Minutes from the meeting of the Governance, Search and Strategy Committee held on 5 February 2025 were received in advance of the meeting.

The Committee had discussed the strategy for the Skills and Logistics Centre. Negotiations had started with Hounslow about renewing the lease. The aim was for the College to retain access to the site, with full use of the building and permission for future development. Gaining access to the entire site would result in a 17.5% increase in total space which would provide opportunity for growth.

b) **Governance Self-Assessment Process 2024-25**

The Governance, Search and Strategy Committee had approved the Governance Self-Assessment process for 2025 at their meeting. The approved process was received as part of the papers for the meeting. (Paper 7b)

c) **Governor Use of College Emails**

Governors were asked to use their college email addresses for governor business from the summer term onwards. KF would send round guides about how to access them and IT were available for support if needed.

Action: KF

8/25 **Finance, Resources and Capital Projects (FRCP) Committee Report**

a) **Committee Report**

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Minutes from the meeting of the Committee held on 5 March 2025 were received in advance of the meeting (Paper 8a). The Chair of the Committee gave a verbal update from the meeting.

The Annual Procurement report had been delayed to the next FRCP Committee meeting. Benchmarking data would be reviewed at the next meeting.

A large part of the meeting had been a discussion about the latest Management Accounts (Jan 25). MC summarised key points from the accounts.

There had been a significant shift in terms of projections of income and expenditure from the previous set with the budgeted surplus dropping from £150k to £20k. This was largely due to an adverse movement on pay costs of just over £600k. The FRCP Committee had challenged how the position could be improved for the remainder of the year and had asked for a bottom up forecast of pay costs which had been completed. There were a number of factors contributing to the adverse variant including the additional pay award, the increased National Insurance contributions and an overspend on high cost agency staff. The College had tightened up on the use of agency staff and were filling vacant posts as a priority. The full £200k contingency would need to be used to give a break-even budget for the year.

Governors said it would be challenging to meet the predicted £20k surplus and stated that more frequent management accounts would enable the College to keep on track with spend. MC said he was confident the team would be able to provide monthly management accounts moving forward.

In addition to bottom up forecasts, the Committee had asked for a review of the way projections were made as there had been no warning of the issue when the decision about the staff pay award had been made. They also asked for stress testing of loan covenants and the Financial Health Grade. At the next meeting the Committee would discuss whether to increase the level of probability of the risk of costs exceeding income.

The Committee had reviewed segment reports for Higher Education, the Nursery and Apprenticeships and considered whether there would be a benefit in the CQSE and FRCP Committees meeting to discuss the situation with apprenticeships.

Governors said there were heating issues in different parts of the buildings and asked what actions were being taken to address this. LS said the College was expecting a report from a design engineer who had been looking into the issues. Once received, actions would be prioritised in terms of capital funds available.

The Committee had received indicative funding allocations but they required further analysis. The Treasury Management policy had been approved and the Financial Regulations would be reviewed at the next meeting. The Committee had asked for further information about the Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy, the Sexual Harassment Policy and had suggested some updates to the Human Resources data dashboard.

Financial contracts had been reviewed and approved. It was noted that preparatory work for renewal of the contracts for insurance, electricity and gas was underway.

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9/25 **Audit Committee Report**

a) **Committee Report**

Minutes from the meeting of the Committee held on 12 March 2025 were received in advance of the meeting. It was noted that the meeting had ceased to be quorate partway through and so discussions had continued on an informal basis.

The Committee had received an update on the review of data protection. Overall the policies and procedures were robust although some updates were required. Further staff training was required in some areas. The Committee would monitor progress towards the data protection action plan.

The Cyber Security risk assessment had been reviewed. There were some serious risks involved but the College was taking steps in the right direction to control them and was working towards the Cyber Essentials accreditation.

Reports from two internal audits had been reviewed. There were no concerns with either.

The tender process for internal audit had been planned.

b) **Whistleblowing Policy**

The 'Whistleblowing Policy: March 2025 Update' (Paper 9b) was received in advance of the meeting.

Governors asked whether the list under section 4 of the policy should include Sexual Harassment and asked for a process to be added to the policy about who someone should escalate issues to if they had concerns with the area director.

Action: MC

10/25 **Strategy Development**

The Chair explained that the CQSE and FRCP Committees had recently met to discuss objectives for the new strategic plan.

Overall, the main objectives of the new strategic plan would be: To maintain an Outstanding grade, to maintain growth around SEND, to grow Apprenticeships, to further develop Employer Engagement and to develop the Digital Strategy.

Feedback from the Committee's strategic discussions had been received in advance of the meeting and the Committee Chairs summarised key points from the meetings.

The next steps were agreed. The Chair would collate the key outcomes from the strategic discussions and share with the management team who would develop a draft strategic plan to be reviewed at the Corporation Strategy day in the summer term.

The aim was to have the final version of the new strategic plan ready for the start of the academic year. However, a review would likely be required in 2026 due to curriculum changes and the appointment of a new CEO.

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11/25 **Dates of Meetings Next Year**

Corporation meeting dates for 2025-26 were received in advance of the meeting and were noted.

12/25 **Confidential Items**

Confidential items were discussed.

13/25 **Date of the Next Meeting**

The date of the next meetings of the Corporation were:

- Corporation Extra Ordinary Meeting: 6pm, Wednesday 2 April 2025. ;
- Corporation Strategy Day: 2pm to 6pm, Wednesday 7 May 2025
- Corporation Meeting: 6pm Wednesday 26 March 2025

Summary of Actions

Minute No.	Action	Lead	Target Date
3/25	Add the following controls to the risk register: Risk 15: Add the schedule of maintenance and insurance. Risk 27: Add insurance.	MC	July 25
6/25	Arrange a governor briefing session on the topic of Higher Education next academic year.	KF	July 26
7/25	Send around how to guides for governors' college email addresses.	KF	July 25
9/25	Find out whether section four of the Whistleblowing policy should include Sexual Harassment in the list of subject areas the policy covers and add in a process about who someone should escalate issues to if they have concerns with the area director.	MC	July 25

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