

# Corporation Board

Wednesday 17 December 2025, 16:30 - 18:30

Boardroom & Teams

## Attendees

### Board Members

Beej Kaczmarczyk (Chair), Lou Mycroft (Vice Chair), Julie Richards (Principal & CEO), Howard Freeman, John Croot, Sue Martin-Standley, Jason Evans, Jill Mannion-Brunt, Stuart Lindeman, Peter Dewhurst, Andrew Kelly, Nicola Beldham (Staff Governor - Support), Lily-Anna Radford (Apprentice Governor)

Absent: Jan Hemper, Lee Needham (Staff Governor - Curriculum), Chantal Brown, Leigh McKenzie

### In Attendance:

Jessica Shore (Head of Governance), Claire Godfrey (Deputy Principal), Tom Kidsley (CFO), Craig Acaster (AP People & Culture), Jo Down (AP Student Experience & Wellbeing), Michaela Greaves (AP Teaching, Learning & Quality Improvement)

## Meeting Minutes

### 1. Welcome & Declarations of Interest

The Chair opened the meeting, welcomed all attendees, and introduced the two new governors; Andy Kelly (Headteacher, Parkside Community School) & Lily-Anna Radford (Health & Safety Apprentice).

Members were reminded of the need to disclose an interest in any item of business to be considered during Part 1 of the meeting. No declarations were made.

### 2. Minutes of the Previous Meetings & Matters Arising

### Decision

The Part 1 minutes of the previous Corporation Board meetings held 22 October 2025 were reviewed and agreed as a true and accurate record. The review of confidential minutes is recorded under Part 2.

The action log was reviewed and there were no matters arising. Previous actions were updated and either marked as complete or carried forward as appropriate. (*Refer to Corporation Action Log – 17.12.25*)

**Resolution:** The Board **approved** the non-confidential minutes (Part 1) of the previous meeting

### 3. Strategic Focus - Ofsted Update

The Deputy Principal (CG) & AP Teaching, Learning & Quality Improvement (MG) delivered a strategic training session using the Ofsted Toolkit.

The new Ofsted framework focuses heavily on Leadership & Governance, inclusion, and contribution to skills needs. It was stressed that the final grades to be approved within the Self-Assessment Report must be robustly evidenced. Governors undertook a collaborative exercise to review the toolkit criteria, particularly point 2 of the Expected standard; vision, strategy, support/challenge and resource oversight. Further discussion was held later in the meeting under approval of the Self-Assessment Report.

### 4. Student & Apprentice Governor Report

The AP Student Experience & Wellbeing (JD) presented the Student & Apprentice Governor Report, with contributions from the newly appointed Apprentice Governor (LAR).

The Board received an update on the revised Empower Your Voice structure. All student representative vacancies across curriculum areas have been filled, however, the newly elected Student Governor has withdrawn due to a change in personal circumstances. Work is underway with curriculum teams to identify a replacement representative, elected by peers, with the aim of having the replacement in post for the next Board meeting in March. It was positively noted that engagement levels in the new student representation model are higher than in previous cycles.

JD provided an overview of upcoming student voice activities and the Board noted plans for a large-scale consultation event on 21/1/26 for all students and apprentices. The event will serve as a team-building and induction for new representatives and the consultation exercises will support the Mayor's Big Transport Conversation, as part of the East Midlands Combined County Authority engagement. Feedback on the first-term delivery of the Personal Development (PD) Curriculum will also be collected, as well as the promotion of digital study skills to enhance learner independence. The Board endorsed the value of this event in strengthening representation, participation, and civic engagement among students.

MG briefed the Board on initiatives to strengthen leadership and employability skills for student and apprentice representatives, including leadership development sessions ran by the Chamber and additional leadership training opportunities through external partners, which are currently being explored.

CH: The Board encouraged consideration of opportunities for collaboration with trade unions or civic organisations to ensure that training for student representatives encompassed democratic participation, representation, and negotiation skills. It was noted that much of the rights and responsibilities education is embedded within the PD curriculum.

CH: Questions were posed on whether any separate student union activity still existed. It was confirmed that the new student voice framework fully replaces the outdated model, with unified structures delivering clearer governance and more consistent engagement. Governors supported a continued shift away from the former Student Union model, described as historically ineffective, and endorsed the strengthened, modernised representative structure now in place.

The Chair thanked JD and colleagues for the continuous work being undertaken to enhance student engagement.

**Resolution:** The Board **received** and **noted** the Student & Apprentice Report.

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## 5. Performance Report

The Board received the full Performance Report and the Deputy Principal (CG) and AP Teaching, Learning & Quality Improvement (MG) presented an overview of the key focus areas. In addition to the key focus items discussed below, the following items were also included within the report as standing/annual items for governor information: Performance Key Risks, Performance KPIs, EDI & Safeguarding Updates.

The Chair invited governors to provide comment or ask any questions relating to the full report, prior to the key focus presentation and discussion. Governors confirmed they were satisfied with the information provided within the report and no further discussion was held.

**Resolution:** The Board **received** and **noted** the Performance Report.

### 5.1. Performance Data - 2024/25 Outcomes & 2025/26 Update

CG outlined the overall performance for 2024/25, reporting that outcomes across the College had continued an upward trajectory for the second consecutive year, noting in particular that the results for 16–18 study programmes were now above national averages. It was emphasised that this improvement demonstrated sustained progress and reflected the impact of strengthened curriculum and quality measures introduced over the preceding period. However, adult learning outcomes did not show the same positive movement, with persistent under-performance in GCSE English and maths, and ESOL. CG assured the Board that an Intensive Support model had been introduced to address this, bringing together curriculum redesign, specialist delivery oversight and more frequent quality assurance checks; the impact

of which will be monitored by the Standards & Performance Committee. For apprenticeship outcomes for 2024/25, CG advised that whilst results were broadly stable, there continued to be notable variation between different apprenticeship standards. She explained that the main areas requiring strengthened focus were employer engagement, on-programme progress monitoring and EPA readiness, and the revised employer review processes and gateway readiness checks had been implemented in response.

CG then presented the current in-year position for 2025/26. She reported that attendance was slightly below the level recorded at the same point last year, although governors were reassured that there were improvements in some curriculum areas. Retention remained broadly positive, with early withdrawals lower than in the previous year. It was highlighted that approximately 70% of learners were now categorised as disadvantaged, which was described as a significant contextual factor influencing attendance, learner readiness and the scale of pastoral support required. Attendance incentive schemes and strengthened tutorial-based interventions would be relaunched in January to address this, drawing on previous projects that had demonstrated positive impact.

When discussing A-level and AS outcomes, CG informed the Board that this continued to be the most substantial curriculum risk, with under-performance concentrated in Biology, Chemistry and Psychology. CG explained that the previous rapid AS model had contributed to insufficient depth of learning in Year 1. She confirmed that management had already taken corrective action by piloting a 2-year A-level model, introducing a strengthened “learning-to-learn” induction and applying entry criteria with greater consistency.

#### Governor Challenge

CH: In relation to adult outcomes, the Board asked whether the under-performance in adult English, Maths and ESOL was driven by structural issues within provision, and whether the Intensive Support model would be sufficient to shift performance midway through the year. CG responded that early indicators suggested improved attendance and a more consistent approach to diagnostics, directed study and targeted tutorials. She explained that the model was already producing positive signals in pilot areas, although a fuller picture would emerge over the coming months as the new structures embedded.

CH: Governors questioned the extent to which the high proportion of disadvantaged learners was driving the lower attendance position and asked for clarification on the exact changes that would take place in January. CG confirmed that disadvantage remained a significant contextual challenge and that motivational factors linked to post-pandemic learning behaviours continued to affect attendance. She explained that the January re-launch would include a structured group-attendance incentive, revised tutorial scripts, tighter case-tracking and strengthened reporting, with weekly heatmaps provided to teaching and learning leaders.

CH: The Board questioned the depth of the A-level changes and asked whether the 2-year model would be sufficient to prevent a recurrence of the high number of U-grades previously seen at AS, and what specific support would be provided to borderline GCSE entrants. CG explained that internal quality reviews had shown early signs of improved preparedness under the 2-year pathway. MG added that students now undertook more rigorous diagnostic assessments and subject-specific tutorials, and that study-skills elements were embedded throughout the induction period. They both emphasised that clearer entry criteria had also been applied to ensure the right students were placed on academic pathways.

CH: Further challenge was raised around apprenticeships. Governors queried the level of variation between individual standards and asked whether the strengthened employer engagement processes were sufficient to support gateway progression and EPA readiness. CG responded that variation was largely contained within specific standards and that staff were already monitoring progress more closely through revised dashboards and employer liaison arrangements.

CH: The Board questioned the impact of unconditional university offers on student motivation and attendance. CG acknowledged that this trend was increasingly common across the sector and explained that staff were actively addressing it by reinforcing the importance of completing qualifications, managing

progression expectations and embedding motivation-focused content within the Personal Development curriculum.

CH: The Board sought assurance that alumni activity was having a measurable impact. CG reported that alumni continued to contribute to mentoring, career talks and progression events across departments, and she confirmed that student feedback was consistently positive. She also explained that curriculum areas were increasingly integrating alumni case studies into progression-focused sessions.

In drawing the discussion to a close, the Chair stated that the narrative provided by management, together with the detailed responses to governor challenge, gave clear assurance on how the College had reached its SAR judgements. The Chair noted that the mitigations introduced by management were proportionate to the identified risks in adult provision, A-level consistency and attendance, and that the College continued to demonstrate a positive performance trajectory in key 16–18 areas.

## 5.2. Student Satisfaction Outcomes

MG presented the findings of the Student Induction Survey, reporting that the results were broadly positive, with students expressing high satisfaction with transition arrangements, early curriculum experiences and the availability of support services.

CH: The Board queried the robustness of the Induction Survey, particularly in relation to response rates and representativeness. MG confirmed that the methodology was sound and that participation was high across key groups. She added that a mid-year pulse survey would take place to assess changes in attitudes and perceptions.

## 5.3. Final SAR 24/25 & QIP 25/26 - College

CG/MG presented the final College Self-Assessment Report (SAR) for 2024/25 and the accompanying Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) for 2025/26, noting that both documents had received rigorous scrutiny through internal quality processes, the Standards & Performance Committee and an external validation panel including governors and external Quality Managers from other colleges, with all feedback and any changes to grades incorporated into the final versions presented for Board approval. The Board were informed that the SAR included the full organisational context and all curriculum-area grades.

CH: Governors noted that during validation, the High Needs provision grade had been reduced from “Strong” to better align the judgement with the evidence. It was also highlighted that during validation, Leadership & Governance had been challenged and it was questioned whether the final 'Strong' grade remained appropriate. CG confirmed that governors' earlier feedback during the strategic focus session, including concerns about triangulation, evidence-trails and consistency of challenge, aligned with the issues highlighted during the validation process.

CH: The Board queried why the SAR's overall grading profile appeared strong when in-year data continued to show weaknesses in AS-Level achievement, Adult English, Maths and ESOL and some attendance concerns. CG explained that SAR grades are calculated proportionally across all curriculum areas, and that the weaker areas represented a much smaller proportion of total learners than the large, strong-performing vocational cohorts. For example, only c.100 learners were enrolled on AS qualifications, whilst over 3k were enrolled across the majority of high-performing diploma and technical programmes. Therefore, individual weak areas were not sufficient to alter the overall College-level grade, but were clearly captured in the QIP as priority risks.

CH: The Board held a detailed and reflective discussion regarding the Leadership and Governance judgement, specifically considering whether the grading should remain as 'Strong' or be amended to 'Expected'. Governors noted that, although governance practice had strengthened over the past year, the evidence base was not yet sufficiently robust to justify assigning a 'Strong' judgement for 2024/25. It was emphasised that the 'Expected' standard within the new Ofsted inspection toolkit already represents a high

## Decision

level of performance, and governors expressed the view that not all elements of this standard were yet evidenced consistently enough to warrant a higher grade.

In addition, governors highlighted the need to strengthen the impact evidence trail by making clearer links between governor challenge, the actions taken by management, and the resulting improvements in performance and assurance. Governors recognised that this explicit "challenge–action–impact" cycle is a critical expectation within the updated Ofsted framework and acknowledged that the College must continue developing this area of practice. The Board also reflected on external validation experience, noting that self-assessment judgements presented to inspectors must be secure, defensible and supported by robust evidence. Governors expressed caution that overstating a judgement could create risk during an inspection, as inspectors are more likely to challenge and downgrade an overstated position than upgrade one that is modest but evidence-aligned.

Management acknowledged the concerns and CG stated that although the validation panel had supported the Strong judgement, the broader discussion held by the Board suggested that the College may be positioned on the border between Expected and Strong. She noted that whilst leadership activity had been strong during 2024/25, evidence of impact was still developing in several areas and governors' insight had highlighted the need for ongoing work on triangulation, impact tracking and consistent governance assurance.

Following this discussion, and taking account of the points raised, the Board agreed that the Leadership and Governance judgement should be amended from 'Strong' to 'Expected' within the final SAR for approval. All other curriculum grades would remain as validated.

The Board agreed to convene a Standards & Performance Committee working group in early 2026 to review and strengthen the Leadership & Governance evidence-base, prioritise improvements needed to meet the 'Strong' standard, with a specific focus on triangulation, impact tracking, and alignment to the new Ofsted toolkit. The group will report to the Standards & Performance Committee and feed into the mid-year review of the 2025/26 Self-Assessment process. **Action: HoG to liaise with MG/LMy to arrange a working group meeting in early 2026.**

**Resolution:** Subject to the agreed grade amendment for Leadership & Governance, the Board **approved** the College Self-Assessment Report 2024/25 and Quality Improvement Plan 2025/26.

#### 5.4. Final SAR 24/25 & QIP 25/26 - TS2000

## Decision

CG presented the TS2000 Ltd Self-Assessment Report (SAR) for 2024/25 and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) for 2025/26, noting that TS2000 had undergone the same structured internal review process as the main College SAR. She explained that TS2000 performance in 2024/25 had remained broadly stable, with clear strengths in employer partnerships, pastoral support for apprentices and timely progress for most learners. Governors attention was drawn to the areas identified for improvement, which included variations in achievement between standards, employer-side delays impacting progress, and the need for accelerated EPA readiness. CG confirmed that the TS2000 QIP mirrored the College's performance framework, with actions targeting improved employer engagement, strengthened progress monitoring and greater standard-level consistency.

CH: The Board challenged whether the TS2000 SAR sufficiently captured the impact of shifting apprenticeship funding patterns and EPA availability. CG confirmed that the SAR contextualised these issues and that the QIP included measures to mitigate them.

CH: The Board questioned whether apprentices at TS2000 received the same quality of pastoral and academic support as those on main College-delivered programmes. CG responded that TS2000 had strong structures in place for learner welfare and communication with employers and that internal audits showed parity of experience.

CH: The Board queried the disparities between different apprenticeship standards. CG explained that some variation was expected due to small cohort sizes and employer-specific factors, but confirmed that targeted interventions had been built into the QIP to address weaker standards.

CH: A further challenge was raised regarding employer engagement and whether TS2000 had sufficient capacity to strengthen workplace liaison. CG confirmed that capacity had been reviewed and that employer reviews, gateway readiness checks and EPA preparation activities were now being scheduled more systematically.

The Chair of the Standards & Performance Committee (LMY) confirmed that the Committee had scrutinised both SARs in depth, including their evidence bases and the alignment between the SAR findings and each QIP. She reported that the Committee was satisfied that both SARs represented accurate, credible and fair evaluations, and that both QIPs demonstrated clear, measurable, and appropriately prioritised actions. Governors expressed confidence that the College had taken an honest and self-reflective approach in both SARs and that the improvement plans addressed the most significant risks, including adult basic skills performance, A-level consistency and apprenticeship variation.

Following discussion, the Chair confirmed that the Board had received sufficient assurance regarding the rigour of the internal self-assessment process, the accuracy and transparency of the judgements within both SARs, the alignment and quality of the QIPs and the Board's continued oversight of high-risk areas through scheduled performance monitoring.

**Resolution:** Subject to the agreed grade amendment for Leadership & Governance, the Board **approved** the TS2000 Self-Assessment Report 2024/25 and Quality Improvement Plan 2025/26.

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## 6. Finance & Corporate Services Report

The Board received the full Finance & Corporate Services Report and the CFO (TK) presented an overview of the key focus areas. In addition to the key focus items discussed below, the following items were also included within the report as standing items for governor information: Finance Key Risks and Finance KPIs. The Chair invited governors to provide comment or ask any questions relating to the full report prior to the key focus presentation, however, nothing was raised.

The Board **received** and **noted** the Finance & Corporate Services Report.

### 6.1. Annual Audit Committee Report & Statutory Accounts 2024/25

TK reported that the following statutory accounts for the College and its subsidiaries had been completed and were required to be submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) by 31/12/25: Chesterfield College Group 2024/25; Learning Unlimited ATA Ltd 2024/25; Chesterfield College Enterprises Ltd 2024/25; Recruit Unlimited Ltd 2024/25 and Training Services 2000 Ltd 2024/25. It was noted that they had been scrutinized by both the Audit and Finance & Corporate Services Committees, and were recommended for Board approval.

The Chair of the Audit Committee (HF) provided strong assurance to the Board regarding the outcome of the external audit for FY24/25, which was presented to the Audit Committee on 25/11/25. HF confirmed that the external auditors, Mazars, had issued a very positive audit completion report, noting that no significant findings, no material weaknesses and no adjusted or unadjusted misstatements had been identified during their work. It was noted that only minor narrative amendments would be made to reflect changes in sector-wide guidance (e.g., Managing Public Money) but the underlying numbers in the financial statements would remain unchanged. HF highlighted that the audit had been conducted by a new audit partner and audit manager, providing a fresh perspective on the College's systems and processes. Both auditors were satisfied that the College's financial controls, reporting arrangements, and underlying records were robust and reliable. HF further confirmed that the Going Concern assessment had raised no concerns, with auditors supporting the College's conclusion that it remained financially sustainable. Based on this, the Audit Committee was fully satisfied with the integrity of the statutory accounts and recommended their approval to the Board. HF expressed confidence in the financial management of the College and commended the finance team for achieving such a strong audit outcome.

**Decision**

A copy of the External Audit Completion Report (Mazars) 2024/25, the Annual Internal Audit Report (ICCA)2024/25, and the Annual Audit Committee Report 2024/25 were shared with the Board for information and review, as part of the full meeting pack.

On behalf of the Board, the Chair thanked TK, Finance Team and the Audit/Finance & Corporate Services Committees for their work.

**Resolution:** The Board **approved** the 2024/25 statutory accounts for the College and its subsidiary companies.

### 6.1.1. Going Concern Assumptions

A Going Concern paper was shared with the Board for information and review. TK confirmed that the Going Concern assessment, including financial assumptions and sensitivity analysis, had been reviewed by the external auditors and the Audit Committee. He reported that auditors had no concerns regarding the College's ability to continue as a going concern, and that the strong financial performance and improved cash position supported this conclusion.

**Resolution:** The Board **approved** the Going Concern statement, as part of the statutory accounts.

**Decision**

### 6.1.2. DfE Regularity Self-Assessment 2024/25

The DfE Regularity Self-Assessment for 2024/25 was shared with the Board for information and review, as part of the full meeting pack.

**Resolution:** The Board **approved** the DfE Regularity Self-Assessment 2024/25, as part of the statutory accounts, as recommended by the Audit Committee and Finance & Corporate Services Committee.

**Decision**

### 6.1.3. Wind-up Proposal - Chesterfield College Enterprises Ltd

TK presented the proposal to wind up the subsidiary company, Chesterfield College Enterprises Ltd, which had been dormant since the closure of the hospitality outlet during the pandemic. He explained that the 2 routes available were either strike-off or Members' Voluntary Liquidation (MVL). Following advice from Mazars and detailed discussion at the Audit Committee, TK recommended the MVL route, noting that it offered stronger legal protection for the named directors, particularly given historical activity predating the current finance leadership. The Audit Committee had reviewed the proposal in detail and recommended the MVL route for Board approval.

**Resolution:** The Board **approved** the wind-up proposal for Chesterfield College Enterprises through Members' Voluntary Liquidation (MVL).

**Decision**

## 6.2. Management Accounts - Period 3

TK presented the P3 management accounts, which had been scrutinised by the Finance & Corporate Services Committee at its meeting on 3/12/25.

It was reported that year-to-date income was above plan, and although some in-month variances existed, these were mainly timing differences. He highlighted that improved learner recruitment was contributing positively to the income position.

TK explained that pay costs were broadly in line with expectations overall, though some areas continued to be supported through agency staffing due to recruitment challenges, particularly in examinations and specialist technical posts. Governors noted the operational risks and costs associated with ensuring suitable staffing coverage.

**Decision**

TK highlighted that the College's unrestricted cash position was significantly stronger than in previous years. This was reinforced by the Chair of Finance & Corporate Services Committee (JC), who confirmed that cash days had increased materially and now compared favourably with sector expectations.

TK confirmed that the P3 reforecast indicated that the College expected to achieve an educational EBITDA broadly in line with the original budget. Increased income arising from higher enrolment and uplifts in funding rates had largely offset the increased pay costs resulting from the enhanced pay offer. He advised that several risks and opportunities remained, but sensitivity analysis indicated that the College remained on track to deliver a stable financial outturn.

TK reported that based on the P3 reforecast, the College continued to project Outstanding financial health for FY25/26. Further detail and figures were provided within the report and as part of the presentation.

**Resolution:** The Board **approved** the Period 3 Management Accounts, as recommended by the Finance & Corporate Services Committee.

### 6.3. Risk Register

TK provided a brief update on the College's risk register, informing the Board that changes had been made to the risk register and further work was underway to refine the wording and format. The updated presentation of risks would be linked to the '5Ps' of the strategic plan and that the revised documentation would be taken through the Audit Committee for review. The report highlighted several changes to individual financial-related risks and TK explained that these adjustments reflected both operational developments across the College and improved financial resilience.

The full updated risk register was shared with the Board as part of the meeting papers, and several emerging financial risks were also highlighted within the Finance Report including industrial action, adult funding changes, the Transformation Fund liability, the NCFE cyber incident, and the updated LGPS valuation which will reduce employer contributions, generating significant in-year and future savings.

CH: The Board noted that the College had cyber insurance in place but queried whether the recent NCFE cyber incident posed a risk to the College. TK responded that NCFE is the data controller for EPA-related data and holds only minimal non-sensitive information. He confirmed that the College continued to monitor the situation but that the risk was considered low.

**Resolution:** The Board **received** and **noted** the Risk Register update.

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## 7. Corporate Report

The Principal (JR) introduced the Corporate Report, noting that the standing items included updates on Health & Safety, Environment, People & Culture, and wider strategic policy developments. The Gender Pay Gap Report and In-Year KPI update were also provided. The Board was reminded that the full narrative was contained within the circulated papers. The Chair invited governors to provide comment or raise any questions prior to the key focus presentation.

### People & Culture Update

CH: The Board acknowledged the significant improvement in staff turnover and queried what had contributed to this. The AP People & Culture (CA) advised that multiple factors contributed, including: strengthened induction and onboarding, market-rate supplements, targeted retention payments, leadership programmes, improved PDR and internal progression strategy, as well as 3 consecutive years of cost-of-living awards following a long pay-freeze period.

The Board **received** and **noted** the Corporate Report.

### 7.1. Political Landscape - Government Policy Update

JR highlighted key strategic developments and national policy changes affecting the FE sector. She noted the publication of the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper, summarising its implications for curriculum reform, accountability changes and sector funding. The major themes of the paper were outlined and JR explained that it represented a significant shift in the national approach to post-16 education and skills. Key elements included the introduction of a Youth Commitment, providing an automatic college place for all 16-year-olds without a post-16 plan, additional measures aimed at reducing NEET levels, enhanced support for disadvantaged students, and the launch of Foundation Apprenticeships, accompanied by new employer incentives. The Board noted the proposals for an employer-led skills system through the creation of Skills England, intended to give a single national view of labour-market needs. JR highlighted further proposals to reform the Apprenticeship Levy into the Growth & Skills Levy from April 2026 and the expansion of Skills Bootcamps and Sector-Based Work Academies to support upskilling in priority sectors.

The Board also discussed the planned introduction of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE), allowing adults to access loan-funded modular learning at Levels 4–6, with applications opening in 2026 and first teaching scheduled for January 2027. Significant qualification reforms were also noted, including the introduction of V-Levels as the primary Level 3 vocational route, with other Level 3 vocational qualifications being phased out, and changes to Level 2 programmes, which would be divided into occupational and further-study pathways supported by a new Level 1 English and maths offer.

JR advised that the paper also set out wider measures aimed at strengthening the FE sector, including substantial capital investment, expansion of Technical Excellence Colleges in priority industries, reforms to teacher education and retention incentives, and strengthened governance and accountability expectations.

CH: The Board welcomed the update and stressed the importance of aligning the College's response to the White Paper with local needs, particularly the work to reduce NEET levels. It was emphasised that developing strong partnerships with schools, employers and local authorities would be essential for successful implementation of the Youth Commitment and wider reforms. JR agreed, confirming that this work was already underway and would continue to be prioritised.

CH: Governors highlighted the challenges young people face in transitioning from school into FE, noting differences in structure, independence and study expectations. It was emphasised that the reforms increased the importance of early and well-supported transition activity. Governor AK welcomed the developing partnership between the College and his secondary school, as an example of effective collaboration that aligns with the direction of national policy.

CH: The Board reflected on the scale of reform and emphasised the need for strong governance oversight. The importance of clear evidence trails, triangulation and impact reporting was stressed, to ensure that governors can hold leaders to account as the College prepares for implementation. Governors acknowledged the tight consultation deadlines and volume of change placed pressure on curriculum and quality planning, reinforcing the need for clear and comprehensive reporting to the Board.

CH: The Board raised concerns about the capacity and workload implications of the proposed reforms, noting that curriculum redesign, qualification changes and expanded employer engagement would require careful planning and monitoring. The need for the Board to continue receiving clear evidence of impact as changes develop was emphasised. JR acknowledged these points and confirmed that initial modelling work had already begun.

The Board noted the scale and significance of the proposed reforms and agreed that the political landscape would remain a standing focus for future Corporate Report updates. The Chair requested continued monitoring of national developments and their implications for curriculum planning, partnerships, staffing and governance expectations. JR confirmed that a further update would be provided to the Board in early 2026 once the government had issued additional guidance and outcomes from the ongoing consultation.

## 7.2. Policy Approvals

Craig Acaster

The AP People & Culture (CA) presented the following policies for approval:

- GOV02 - Environment Policy
- GOV08 - Health & Safety Policy

CA advised that both policies had undergone a scheduled review to ensure continued compliance with statutory requirements, good practice guidance and recommendations arising from recent internal audit activity. An overview of the key updates was provided.

For the Health & Safety Policy, a series of operational developments were highlighted, including the roll-out of new “Safety First” branding and confirmation of the updated Safety Shield contract, designed to reinforce consistent safety standards across the College estate. He noted that the policy had been strengthened to provide clearer articulation of the role of the Health & Safety Lead Governor, ensuring governance responsibilities were appropriately defined and aligned to sector expectations. CA further explained that, in response to a recommendation from the most recent audit, the policy had also been updated to specify the responsibilities of visitors and contractors while on site. This clarification aimed to ensure full compliance with legal obligations and to support safe working practices across all College locations. He confirmed that operational teams had already been briefed on the updated expectations and that implementation arrangements were in place.

In relation to the Environment Policy, CA reported that this had been refreshed to better reflect the College’s strategic commitment to sustainability and environmental stewardship. Key additions included strengthened references to the work of the Green Skills Strategy Group, the College’s alignment to the Climate Action Roadmap, and the integration of the UN Sustainable Development Goals within the policy framework. These updates were designed to support consistency between operational practice, curriculum activity and wider strategic objectives relating to climate action and sustainability.

A full overview of the policy changes was provided within the accompanying Policy Report, and the respective Equality Impact Audit Assessments were also shared with the Committee, alongside the full policy documents, for review and consideration by the Board.

The Board acknowledged that the updates provided enhanced clarity around responsibilities, governance oversight and alignment with the College’s strategic priorities.

**Resolution:** The Board **approved** the above policies.

## 7.3. Industrial Action – UCU Strike

JR provided an update on the UCU strike action planned for 14–16 January 2026, explaining that approximately 30–40 teaching staff were expected to participate. It was noted that out of 29 colleges across sector, only 3 have settled on their pay award offer with the unions. Reassurance was provided to the Board in that all students would be provided with learning for the strike days through a combination of face-to-face, remote, or supervised independent learning. A full workload support plan would be issued to all staff, following sector-wide concerns about workload included within the dispute. JR confirmed that no union members opted to refuse the recently approved pay award, despite being given the option to do so.

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## 8. Governance Report

The Board received the full Governance Report and the Head of Governance (JS) presented an overview of the key focus areas. In addition, the following information was also provided within the report for information purposes: Link Governor Feedback & Reports - November 2025, DfE FE Governance Guide & College Oversight updates and the Stone King & University of Sunderland Report - Supporting effective college governing in England.

The Board **received** and **noted** the Governance Report.

## Decision

### 8.1. Chair Election

#### ***SL withdrew from the meeting.***

The Head of Governance (JS) confirmed that 1 nomination had been received for the role of Chair of the Corporation Board from S Lindeman. As no other nominations had been submitted and no requests for a closed ballot had been received, the election proceeded by open vote. The nomination was seconded by HF and supported by the current Chair and Committee Chairs.

Following a unanimous show of hands, the Board approved the appointment of SL as Chair, with effect from the end of the current Chair's term in March.

#### ***SL rejoined the meeting.***

SL was invited back into the meeting and thanked governors for their confidence, noting his commitment to supporting the College's continued progression and acknowledging the strong culture of openness, emotional intelligence and collaborative challenge demonstrated by the Board and the executive team.

**Resolution:** The Board **approved** the appointment of S Lindeman as the new Chair of Corporation Board, effective from 26/3/26.

### 8.2. Governance Self-Assessment 2024/25 & Quality Improvement Plan 2025/26

## Decision

The Board received the annual Governor Self-Assessment Report (GSAR) for 2024/25 and Governance Quality Improvement Plan (GQIP) for 2025/26, noting that both had been reviewed in detail by the Governance & Search Committee and were recommended for Board approval.

The Head of Governance highlighted that the recommended overall grade for governance for 2024/25 was Good, with areas for development incorporated into the GQIP, including stakeholder engagement and enhanced governor visibility. It was noted that some improvement actions were carried forward from the previous year, particularly in relation to community and employer stakeholder engagement work. JS reminded governors that the GQIP will be reviewed and monitored by the Board on a termly basis as part of the annual business cycle.

It was noted that the GSAR also included the individual Committee Annual Reports and Self-Assessment; all of which self-assessed as 'Good' for 2024/25.

On behalf of the Board, the Chair thanked JS for undertaking the process and producing a comprehensive review of the governing body's effectiveness.

**Resolution:** The Board **approved** the Governor Self-Assessment Report for 2024/25 and Governance Quality Improvement Plan for 2025/26

### 8.3. Committee Terms of Reference 2025/26

## Decision

JS confirmed that an annual review cycle was now in place for all committees and presented the following Terms of Reference (ToR) for approval: Audit Committee / Finance & Corporate Services Committee / Remuneration Committee and Standards & Performance Committee. It was noted that the Governance & Search Committee ToR had been approved at the previous meeting. Following approval, the ToRs will be replaced on the College website.

**Resolution:** The Board **approved** the Terms of Reference for all committees without amendment.

### 8.4. Membership: Audit Committee & Lead Governor Vacancies

JS advised that, due to his election as incoming Chair of Corporation, SL would no longer be able to serve as a member of the Audit Committee. His departure will create a second vacancy on the Committee, one of which ideally should be a member of the Board. Governors were advised that the Committee meets 3 times per year and were invited to express interest in joining the Committee prior to the summer-term meeting in June. The Chair of Audit Committee (HF) noted the importance of ensuring strong financial and audit oversight, and JS agreed to circulate follow-up information and the terms of reference to support governor consideration. JS advised that recruitment of a co-opted member would also be progressed.

**Action: Governors to consider joining the Audit Committee to support the Chair of Audit (HF).**

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## 9. Statutory Reporting & Lead Governor Updates

The Board received the latest Lead Governor Reports, including the Green Skills Newsletter produced jointly by the Lead Governor (LMy) and student representative. It was noted that this report would also be issued to staff in the new year.

The AP Teaching, Learning & Quality Improvement (MG) highlighted forthcoming governor development activity, including a March 2026 Development Day focusing on sustainability in the morning and staff wellbeing in the afternoon. Governors were also informed of opportunities for ongoing briefings on FE funding reforms, and JR proposed running a webinar to support newer governors' understanding of the funding system ahead of major reforms.

The Board noted the positive partnership developments underway, including strategic collaboration with Parkside Community School. This work would continue to strengthen governance links across the local education landscape.

JS signposted the Link Governor feedback from the November session, noting particularly strong engagement in quality and curriculum areas. Full written reports were included in the meeting papers.

JS advised that the Lead Governor Roles for EDI and Careers were vacant. Governors were encouraged to consider the roles and contact JS for further information, if interested. During the discussion, PD volunteered to act as Lead Governor for Learning to Learn, noting the significance of this theme across both adult and 16–19 learning.

**Action: Governors to consider the vacant Lead Governor Roles for EDI and Careers.**

**Resolution:** The Board **received** the Link and Lead Governor Reports and **noted** the updates and vacancies for consideration.

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## 10. Confidential Items

**Decision**

Confidential items are minuted under Part 2.

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## 11. Date of Next Meeting - 25 March 2026