

Corporation Board

Wednesday 25 March 2026, 16:00 - 18:30

C100 / Teams

Attendees

Board Members

Beej Kaczmarczyk (Chair), Lou Mycroft (Vice Chair), Howard Freeman, Jason Evans, Jill Mannion-Brunt, Chantal Brown, Stuart Lindeman, Peter Dewhurst, Jan Hemper, Leigh McKenzie, Andrew Kelly, Julie Richards (Principal & CEO), Nicola Beldham (Staff Governor (Support)), Lily-Anna Radford (Apprentice Governor)

Absent: John Croot, Sue Martin-Standley

In Attendance:

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

Meeting Minutes

1. Chair's Retirement Presentation

The Vice Chair (LMY) and Principal (JR) led a presentation recognising the Chair's (BK) extensive service to the Corporation Board and College. The Board formally recorded its thanks for the Chair's great contribution to the College and governance during his longstanding term of office. The Chair confirmed his intention to step down at the conclusion of the meeting and governors were informed that BK had been appointed as a co-opted member of the Audit Committee.

2. Membership Update

The Chair (BK) commenced the official Board meeting and notified the Board that L Needham had resigned from the position of Staff Governor for Curriculum. The Head of Governance (JS) advised that a staff election would be held following the Easter break.

Amy Kingham (AK) was formally introduced and welcomed as the newly appointed Student Governor. It was noted that AK is also the HE Student Representative for the Standards & Performance Committee.

3. Declarations of Interest

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.

4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Part 1 minutes of the previous Corporation Board meetings held 17 December 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 – 25.3.26*)

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

Decision

5. Strategic Focus/Training - Green Skills

The Vice Chair and Green Skills Lead Governor (LMY) delivered a strategic presentation focusing on the College's approach to green skills, sustainability and cultural change.

LMy set out the rationale for the “Green Change Makers” model, explaining the evidence-base drawn from sector research which demonstrates that training a small but critical proportion of an organisation’s workforce as changemakers, approximately 3%, can generate momentum for wider cultural transformation. It was emphasised that green skills should not be restricted to technical or estates-based activity but should encompass systems thinking, behavioural change, leadership, empathy and long-term planning.

It was explained that the College’s model focuses on developing staff as change-makers, building momentum through incremental change, and embedding sustainability into decision-making, including within the risk register and strategic processes. The Board also heard that the College was increasingly recognised nationally for its work and contributing to sector development through conferences and partnerships.

Governors observed that the approach demonstrated strong staff and student agency and questioned how this model could be extended into wider community engagement, including schools, local authorities and housing providers, where knowledge gaps remained around sustainable technologies. LMy confirmed this was an emerging area of focus and that the model was transferable beyond the College, with growing external engagement and national influence already underway.

The Board queried whether green skills were sufficiently understood as transferable skills (e.g. systems thinking, leadership, empathy) rather than technical environmental skills alone. It was confirmed that transferable skills were central to the College’s approach and were intentionally embedded into teaching, leadership and strategic planning processes.

The Board participated in an exercise designed to identify governance-level actions that could further support a green culture within the organisation. Governors reflected positively on the strategic nature of the session and its relevance to governance culture and values. LMy confirmed that she would collate the outputs from the governance activity and share these with the Board to inform future work.

6. Student & Apprentice Governor Report

The Assistant Principal for Student Experience & Wellbeing (JD) and Apprentice Governor (LAR) presented the Student & Apprentice Governor Report.

JD summarised the outcomes of student consultation activity undertaken during the January event, including engagement in the Mayor’s Transport Plan consultation. The strongest themes from learners related to improved transport connectivity and environmental protection.

Feedback on the Empower Personal Development curriculum indicated that students placed particular value on mental health support, wellbeing, and the development of practical life skills. First-year students expressed a desire for more activities focused on budgeting, independent living and time management, while second-year students prioritised mental health and wellbeing.

CH: Governors asked how the College was responding to the strong emphasis on mental health and wellbeing. JD explained that enhanced support was already in place, including trained student Be Well Ambassadors, external agency involvement and specialist staff delivering personal development content.

CH: Governors questioned whether the delivery model for personal development had contributed to improved engagement. Management confirmed that delivery had intentionally been moved away from main curriculum teachers to specialist engagement and progress coaches, which had improved both staff confidence and student receptiveness.

CH: Governors queried the effectiveness of digital tools used within personal development. JD reported that trial feedback from students on the Peer Scroller platform was less positive than anticipated and confirmed that the College would adapt its approach based on this feedback.

The Board noted the report and thanked the Student/Apprentice Governors and staff for their contribution.

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

7. Performance Report

The Deputy Principal (CG) referred governors to the full Performance Report circulated with the papers, noting that it had been scrutinised by the Standards and Performance Committee on 10/3/26. The Board received a summary paper for review, which also contained standing items for information, including Performance Key Risks, KPIs, and EDI and Safeguarding updates. The Board was invited to raise any questions on the report before moving on to the key focus items. It was noted that some governor questions had been received in advance of the meeting, which CG confirmed she would address.

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

7.1. Performance Data

CG outlined that attendance remained a key challenge, particularly in relation to GCSE English and maths, emphasising that the College continued to focus on both attendance and progress from starting points, recognising that traditional attendance measures did not fully capture learner achievement.

In relation to destinations, the Board heard that progression into apprenticeships varied across curriculum areas and remained an area of focus.

CH: Governors expressed concern regarding attendance, particularly in GCSE English and maths, and questioned whether this reflected systemic national issues rather than institutional performance, and whether national policy requirements were contributing to disengagement. CG confirmed that attendance challenges reflected national trends, particularly linked to policy requirements for GCSE resits, with the College engaged in sector-level discussions. The Board acknowledged the limited ability of the College to directly influence national policy.

CH: The Board queried the use of data to understand attendance patterns and the effectiveness of current interventions, and sought assurance that they were having an impact. CG confirmed that enhanced analytics were being developed to identify patterns by student characteristic and inform targeted intervention, with success measured particularly through improvements in examination attendance and outcomes. The Board were informed that a range of targeted interventions were in place, including prioritisation of students most at risk, increased parental engagement through structured communication, and enhanced monitoring of examination attendance.

CH: The Board further questioned progression into apprenticeships and CG confirmed that work was underway to strengthen pathways, although system complexity remained a challenge, with variability across curriculum areas. She reported that internal performance indicators were being introduced to strengthen accountability and that the Youth Guarantee Trailblazer would provide additional support to students transitioning into employment or apprenticeships. The importance of simplifying communication for both students and employers was emphasised and CG confirmed that this was a priority.

7.2. Ofsted Inspection Ready

The Assistant Principal Teaching, Learning & Quality Improvement (MG) presented the Ofsted update, outlining emerging national inspection themes identified through review of recent inspection reports across the sector. These included an increased focus on inclusion across all provision, the expectation of

demonstrable progress in English and maths from learners' starting points, and a stronger emphasis on high-grade achievement for young learners.

MG highlighted the College's proactive response, including targeted staff development on inclusion, strengthened quality improvement processes, and monthly inspection-readiness activity focused on evidence requirements and teaching and learning priorities. The Board also heard that wider inspection themes included learning environment quality, employer engagement and robust attendance monitoring processes.

CH: The Board observed increased unpredictability in inspections and questioned how confident governors were in articulating the inclusion strategy. MG confirmed that inclusion had been embedded across development activity and inspection readiness processes were ongoing.

CH: The Board queried whether inspection outcomes could be influenced by isolated issues. It was acknowledged that inspection methodology could focus on specific lines of enquiry, reinforcing the need for consistent quality across provision.

8. Finance & Corporate Services Report

The Chief Finance Officer (TK) presented the Finance & Corporate Services report, noting it had been reviewed in detail by the Finance & Corporate Services Committee on 11/3/26. The Board was invited to raise any questions ahead of the key focus discussion.

8.1. Funding Announcement

TK outlined the recent funding announcement from 10/3/26, noting that the increase in the national funding rate for 16-19 year olds was limited to 0.5%, representing an increase of £28 per student and the lowest uplift since funding rates were frozen in 2021–22. It was explained that, although government had previously signalled a real-terms increase in funding, the impact of demographic growth meant that the £800m additional funding announced had effectively been absorbed by increased student numbers entering the sector.

The Board also heard that several funding adjustments were being introduced, including the removal of the 5% uplift for certain T-Level subjects and changes to guided learning hours. These changes, alongside sustained pressure on costs, were expected to present ongoing challenges to financial planning.

CH: Governors challenged the adequacy of the funding settlement and expressed concern regarding the disconnect between government policy and sector need. TK confirmed that the increase fell significantly short of expectations and that financial pressures across the sector remained high. The Board and management further acknowledged the frustration across the sector and the limited responsiveness of national policy.

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

8.2. Management Accounts – Period 6

Period 6 Reforecast

The Board received an update on the Period 6 financial reforecast. TK reported that the College was forecasting an Education EBITDA of approximately £2.9m, exceeding the original budget of £2.5m. This reflected a strong in-year financial performance, despite the challenging funding environment.

The Board noted that this performance had been achieved through careful financial management, alongside stable income levels and ongoing oversight of expenditure.

Decision

Sensitivity Testing

TK presented the sensitivity analysis, outlining potential variations in the financial forecast based on a range of risks and assumptions. It was explained that the College had modelled both best-case and worst-case scenarios, with EBITDA projected to range between £1.9m and £3.8m depending on factors such as income levels, staffing costs, inflationary pressures and delivery of funded programmes.

The current forecast of £2.9m was described as a prudent and realistic position based on available data. The Board noted that this analysis provided assurance that financial planning was robust and that key risks were being actively monitored.

KPIs – Prosperity

TK outlined performance against the key financial performance indicators. It was reported that the College was on track to meet the majority of its targets, with the exception of non-grant income, where performance was expected to be below target due to changes in funding streams and a shift from loan-funded provision to grant-funded provision. This variance was explained as largely neutral in financial terms, as overall income levels were being maintained through alternative funding routes.

FEC Benchmarks & Financial Health

The Board received an update on performance against the Further Education Commissioner benchmarks and financial health measures. It was reported that the College was on track to achieve 5 out of 6 benchmarks, with the only exception being the staff cost to income ratio. It was noted that this was a sector-wide challenge and reflected the College's decision to retain in-house services rather than outsourcing. The Board was advised that financial health remained classified as 'Outstanding', with the College expected to achieve a strong overall score based on current projections.

Financial Risks

TK summarised the College's key strategic financial risks. These included risks relating to staffing, financial sustainability, infrastructure investment and the development of a low-carbon estate. It was noted that most risks were assessed as being within appetite, with the exception of staffing pressures, which remained outside of risk appetite and required continued monitoring and mitigation. Governors noted these risks and the mitigating actions in place.

Governors reflected on the financial position of the College and expressed concern regarding the wider funding environment and policy instability. The Board acknowledged the strong financial performance achieved and the robustness of financial planning, while recognising the challenges ahead.

Resolution: The Board **approved** the Period 6 Management Accounts, as recommended by the Finance & Corporate Services Committee.

8.3. Financial Forecasting 2026/27

The Board received an early view of the indicative budget for the forthcoming financial year. TK explained that this was based on current assumptions regarding funding levels, student numbers and cost pressures, and that further refinement would follow through the curriculum planning and moderation process.

It was reported that, at this early stage, the College expected to maintain a broadly similar level of financial performance, although this remained subject to change as further information became available. The Board noted that strategic considerations, including investment in estate and equipment, would need to be balanced against future demographic changes and financial sustainability.

8.4. Transformation Fund Update

TK provided an update on the new build project, confirming that the development was approaching practical completion and that final handover and compliance processes were underway. The Board was

advised that standard funding conditions, including a Department for Education legal charge, would apply and may require formal approval through governance arrangements.

In addition, the Board heard that the College was entering a critical period in which demographic growth provided a short-term opportunity to generate additional financial capacity. It was explained that strategic decisions would be required regarding the balance between investing in the estate and infrastructure, including equipment and facilities, and maintaining financial resilience in anticipation of a future decline in student numbers. This was identified as a key consideration for future financial planning.

9. Corporate Report

The Principal (JR) introduced the Corporate Report, noting that the standing items included updates on Health & Safety and Environment, People & Culture, and wider strategic policy developments. An In-Year KPI update was also provided. The Board was reminded that the full narrative was contained within the circulated papers. Governors were invited to raise any questions prior to the key focus presentation which focused on 2 key areas of national development impacting the College.

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

9.1. Qualification Reform

JR outlined the current position in relation to qualification reform, noting that the government had confirmed the introduction of new V Level qualifications, alongside wider reforms to Level 2 and English and maths provision. The Board was advised that V Levels would be introduced initially in a limited number of subject areas and would sit alongside A Levels and other existing qualifications, creating a more complex curriculum offer. It was further explained that the government had extended the life of existing Level 3 diploma qualifications into the next academic cycle, providing a short-term continuation but not long-term certainty.

The Principal described emerging proposals for Level 2 provision, including the introduction of two distinct pathways. One pathway would be focused on occupational preparation leading to employment or apprenticeships, while the second would be designed for progression to Level 3 study. It was noted that this represented a significant structural shift, with potential implications for curriculum design, timetabling and student choice. The Board was advised that, at this stage, there remained a lack of detailed information about the content, assessment and delivery requirements of the new qualifications, which presented challenges for forward planning.

CH: Governors expressed concern regarding the pace and scale of reform. JR emphasised that the pace and scale of reform, combined with limited clarity, created a high degree of uncertainty for colleges. It was reported that senior leaders were actively engaged with the Association of Colleges and other sector bodies to seek further information and to contribute to national discussions, including lobbying for greater clarity and, where necessary, potential delays to implementation.

CH: The Board questioned how reforms could be communicated effectively. JR confirmed that communication and scenario planning were priorities despite limited clarity.

9.2. Communication from New FE Commissioner

JR drew the Board's attention to a recent communication from the newly appointed Further Education Commissioner (FEC), which set out emerging national expectations for the sector. The Board heard that the FEC's priorities included the development of a high-performing, world-leading further education system, with particular emphasis on leadership, governance and student outcomes. It was reported that a new oversight model would be introduced, including the establishment of Regional Improvement Teams and a tiered framework of support ranging from universal support to targeted and, where necessary, mandated or intensive intervention.

The Principal highlighted that there was a clear and increasing focus on the role of governance, including expectations regarding the effectiveness of Board challenge, the transparency of decision-making and the strength of relationships between the Chair, Principal and Head of Governance ('The Triumvirate').

The Board noted that these expectations aligned with current practice within the College and reinforced the importance of maintaining strong governance oversight and strategic challenge.

10. Governance Report

The Head of Governance presented the Governance Report which provided an overview of key governance activities since the previous meeting. In addition, the following information was also provided as standing items: DPO Report, Meeting Attendance (Board KPI), Written Resolutions/Chair's Actions, Ratified Committee Minutes and Committee Policy Approvals.

It was confirmed that the Board had achieved full compliance with the mandatory annual Safeguarding and Prevent training for governors. Progress against the Governance Quality Improvement Plan was also outlined, with the majority of actions assessed as complete or on track, demonstrating continued development of effective governance practice. The report also drew attention to the recent link governor visits which took place over National Apprenticeship Week and provided opportunities for governors to engage more directly with staff and students and strengthen their understanding of operational delivery. No substantive questions or challenge were raised by governors in relation to the report. The Board acknowledged the continued progress in governance effectiveness and compliance and noted the report.

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

10.1. Membership Vacancies

The Board noted updates in relation to governor recruitment and succession planning, including ongoing efforts to strengthen committee membership and fill existing vacancies. The Head of Governance reiterated the invitation for governors to consider the vacant role on the Audit Committee, as well as the Lead Governor roles for EDI and Careers, as previously discussed as part of the action log from the previous meeting.

11. Statutory Reporting & Lead Governor Reports

The Board received the latest Lead Governor Reports, including Green Skills and Digital updates. No further discussion or challenge was raised by the Board.

Resolution: The Board **received** and **noted** the Lead Governor Reports.

12. Meeting Reflection

The Board reflected on the effectiveness of the meeting. Governors agreed that the meeting maintained an appropriate strategic focus, the quality of papers and discussion was high, challenge was constructive and supported by strong relationships between governors and senior leaders and student impact had remained central to decision-making.

13. Confidential Items - Part 2

Staff & Student Governors to withdraw from the meeting

14. Date of Next Meeting - 20 May 2026

Wednesday 20 May 2026, 4.30pm.

Part 1 of the meeting closed.