

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CORPORATION BOARD

THURSDAY 22 MAY 2025

Location: Boardroom 2, Cauldon Campus / Microsoft Teams

Time: 09:30

Present:	Jeremy Cartwright, Chair	In person
	Hassan Rizvi, Principal & CEO	In person
	David Boughey	In person
	Sally Garratt	In person
	Rob Fisher	Remote
	Bernard Kumeta	In person
	Tom Nadin	In person
	Marcin Musial	In person
	Ben Richards	In person
	Steve Sawbridge	Remote
	Jenny Scrivens	In person
	David Shufflebottom	Remote
	Chrissy Pawliszyn, Staff Governor	In person
	Mekdes Mideksa, Student Governor	In person
	Farhad Arian	In person
In Attendance:	Cath Brierley, Deputy Principal	In person
	Antoinette Lythgoe, Chief Financial Officer	In person
	Nova Abela, Chief People Officer	In person
	Kay Kavanagh, Director of Governance	In person
	Dave Hopley, Assistant Principal Student Experience	In person

No.		Action
1-7	See Confidential Minutes See confidential minutes.	
8	Welcome & Apologies Apologies for absence were received from Hannah Molloy, Raheel Nawaz Tony Matthews and Carmen Gonzalez-Eslava. The Chair welcomed Marcin Musial to the meeting as a new governor.	
9	Declaration of Interest in any of the items on the agenda The Chair reminded everyone present to declare any interests that they may have in agenda items to be discussed. No specific declarations were made, and standing declarations were noted.	
10	Minutes of the meeting held on Governors approved the minutes of the meetings held on 20 March 2025 and 3 April 2025 as accurate records. Governors noted the written resolution passed on 31 March 2025.	

11 Action Progress Report

The Director of Governance confirmed that the eight actions from previous meetings are either complete, will be addressed in this agenda, or are scheduled for completion by the next meeting in July 2025.

There were no questions.

12 Student Voice & Enrichment Report

The Assistant Principal Student Experience presented the report.

The cross-College Enrichment activities on site finished on Friday 2nd May for this Academic year, although we are still offering curriculum-based targeted Enrichment and a range of trips/visits. Participation to date is 51%. Retention for learners participating in extra-curricular Enrichment is 4% higher than those not participating.

Nominations are open for student union elections for 2025-26, with 34 students standing for 9 places. The process has been reviewed to ensure a fairer representation from both campuses.

The Youth Social Action Programme, in partnership with The Pears Foundation and the AoC has now been completed. To celebrate the ambassador's journey, we hosted the Youth Social Action Celebration Event in the Hammersley Restaurant. Many of our partners who have supported the programme were in attendance.

The Assistant Principal Student Experience thanked Mekdes and Farhad for their contributions to Learner Voice this year.

Next steps/Actions include:

- Challenge Erlangen visit takes place 25th – 28th June.
- Next Talking Heads video to be produced at the Learner Voice Conference in May.
- Students' Union Elections take place 19th – 23rd May.

Governors **asked** for the current turnout levels for student election, and the reason behind the increased number of applications to stand. The Assistant Principal Student Experience confirmed that there had been 318 votes so far. The reason for the increased number of applicants is not clear but could be due to increased awareness of politics recently, or also due to successful applicants having more involvement with trips.

The chair raised a query about the Enrichment data. **Action:** The Assistant Principal Student Experience to liaise with the Chair to confirm data requirements.

A governor raised a previous query concerning the differing student experience between campuses and asked if there had been any progress to confirm the differences. The Assistant Principal Student Experience explained that a cohort of students had been identified who had attended courses across both campuses. A focus group is due to be held. **Action:** The Assistant Principal Student Experience to provide a summary of the output of the focus group being held to establish any differences between the student experience at each campus.

Assistant
Principal
Student
Experience

Assistant
Principal
Student
Experience

13 Principal/CEO Report

The Principal & CEO presented the report stating that the College, overall, remains in a strong position. The focus continues to deliver technical/vocational programme pathways to meet the Skills Needs in line with Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) while being an anchor institution of the community.

The College continues to strengthen and build new links with various external stakeholders. We have secured 9 out of 10 Skills Pledges, making very strong progress against the College's Accountability Statement 2024/25.

Study programme enrolment has remained strong at 2329, against the allocation of 2048 (11% increase).

Adult courses delivery under the Adult Skills Fund (ASF) is on track, with an initial subcontracting of £500k to three subcontractors in line with skills and community need areas. The college will meet the allocation and should exceed 100%. For next year, there is a 6% decrease in adult funding, and in line with our business plan for next year, we are unlikely to use subcontractors.

For capital projects, Cauldon completion is expected to be July 2025 (previously June). At Burslem, the contractor is currently reporting delays of up to 8-12 weeks while discussions are in hand with the DfE to delay the demolition of B Block.

Progress is being made on the current strategic cycle, incorporating the 'all-inclusive approach'. Both areas of focus, the Green Skills Centre, and High-Needs, are advancing. An initial meeting has taken place with the local authority to discuss the high-needs requirement. The council is interested in moving forward promptly; however, it is necessary to ensure that any provision meets high standards.

The College's Annual Strategic Conversation with the DfE took place on Thursday, 15th May. The overall outcome was very positive, with the DfE, accompanied by an FEC representative, acknowledging the continuing progress the College has made. The progress against the accountability measures for 2024/25 was also recognised. The FEC offered further support regarding the curriculum review, which will be considered in the autumn if needed.

The Principal & CEO attended a seminar on the future of secondary education in Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent. The main proposal was to introduce the Manchester Baccalaureate (MBacc), which offers vocational subjects starting from year 7 and more curriculum flexibility. Although still in initial stages and not widely adopted, the MBacc is favoured by local MPs. This could impact the number of level 1 learners at the College.

Staffordshire County Council is currently conducting an Estates capital requirement exercise. This project aims to present the needs of Staffordshire colleges, including their current conditions and new requirements, to the Government. The exercise is expected to be completed by August 2025 for further consideration by Members of Parliament.

Governors **welcomed** the update regarding the MBacc and **noted** the upcoming merger of Cheshire and Macclesfield Colleges, which could prove to be an opportunity for the College, especially in relation to high needs.

The Chair **asked** how the high-needs discussions with the local council link with the wider Staffordshire County council. The Principal & CEO explained that the College work with Staffordshire County Council for high needs currently, but funding comes via Stoke on Trent council.

The Principal & CEO has requested a meeting with the newly elected MPs for Staffordshire, as some approaches could be different moving forward.

The Principal & CEO provided an update on Curriculum and Quality, highlighting:

- Retention is above KPI for all aspects, + 3% for all ages, +4.9% for 16-18 and +3.0% for adults, this is an improvement on this time last year.
- The 3yr predicted achievement is maintained. The College is confident that it will stop the declining trend in achievements. We are cautiously optimistic that we will meet/exceed national levels.
- An updated TLA strategy underpinned with scientific principles, measured against Education & Training Foundation (ETF) standards, aimed at dual professionalism and incorporating AI to support better experience for learners and staff, is now in place.
- A new Digital Strategy has been written in collaboration with the Director of IT and Digital Services. This has been shared with internal stakeholders for input and recommendations. 100 Co-Pilot licences have been purchased and a pilot sample selected from Curriculum and Corporate Services. 30 TeacherMatic licences are also being acquired to support with TLA.
- The Curriculum Planning for 2024-25 is completed. The fundamental principle is its agility and responsiveness to demand and employer needs. The key elements remain the planning in line with LSIP and meeting community needs.

The Chair **suggested** that an AI session be scheduled for governors, to detail the progress of AI use within the college and the work undertaken regarding safeguarding and security of data. **Action:** Director of Governance to schedule an AI session for board members in the Autumn term, to be led by the Deputy Principal, Director of IT and Digital, in coordination with Raheel Nawaz.

Director of
Governance

Since joining the College, The Principal & CEO has engaged with multiple stakeholders to build new links. The Senior Team and managers also continue meeting relevant stakeholders to make impactful partnerships for learners and the organisation. New projects such as SMART Home Technologies, Retrofit, and Roofing are already underway at various stages.

The board **noted** that the lead Ofsted inspector for the college has been replaced, and a meeting with the new inspector has been requested.

14 **TF&R Committee:**

1. TF&R Summary

The committee Chair reported that the committee discussed capital projects, management accounts, and staff survey in detail. A concern was raised about growth not yielding financial benefits, and the board should monitor this closely.

2. Management Accounts

The Chief Financial Officer provided the following highlights from the Management Accounts:

- The College now expects the financial health for the year outstanding.
- The DfE issued the in year 16-18 growth allocations in March 2025, with the college receiving only two thirds of the expected funding.
- Apprenticeship income results to date indicate that the College will exceed the original budget of £2.4m.
- Forecast staff costs are at 63.61% of income taking account of the growth funding income increase.
- The planned upgrade to the HR system has been delayed until 2025/26 leading to the release of forecast expenditure of £200k.
- The College's cash position remains strong with £4.8m in the bank as of 31st March 2025

There were no questions.

3. Staff Survey update

The Chief People Officer stated that the full staff engagement survey typically happens every 2 years. Due to leadership changes in 2024/25 and pulse surveys, this survey was conducted in early 2025.

The 2024/25 survey is the first externally benchmarked survey undertaken by the College, with engagement at 70% (up from 55% in 2022).

A governor **questioned** the lack of annual staff surveys, a concern shared by others. The Chief People Officer clarified that pulse surveys have been used in interim years. **Action:** The Chief People Officer to consider implementing an annual staff survey using QDP for consistent benchmarking.

Chief People
Officer

Governors **noted** the responses concerning the college meeting skills needs, being very different for assessors. The Chief People Officer confirmed that this is an area of focus to establish a better understanding of the results.

Governors **agreed** with the proposed priorities for leaders to develop and implement an agreed Action Plan in response to the findings, particularly the focus on:

- Wellbeing and work-life balance
- Culture of One Team
- Pay and Reward

15 **CQS Committee:**

1. CQS Summary

The committee Chair emphasised the improvement in retention and noted that it was acknowledged by the committee members.

The committee will monitor Ofsted changes and political shifts. Staffing, especially recruitment and retention, remains a key focus.

The pause and review of 14-16 provision at the College was discussed at length and will be revisited at a future time.

2. Curriculum & Quality / Teaching & Learning Report

The Deputy Principal provided highlights from the report, including:

- The College is predicting achievement between of 81-85% for Study Programme, 82-86% Adults and Overall, 82-86% which are comparable to National Averages.
- The College is predicting 60 -63% achievement for apprenticeships. Plumbing and Gas remains an area of concern for apprenticeships.
- Funding is looking strong in apprenticeships, with the provision becoming more bespoke as the college work with employers (BT, Bet365, New Look, DB Cargo). It has been a strategic move and is proving to be highly effective.
- 8 T Level courses commenced in 2024/25 with a total of 71 new starts. 68 learners have been retained (95.7%).
- New T Level delivery of Business Management and Administration, Design and Development for Engineering & Manufacturing and Assistant Teaching are planned for 2025/26.
- Regarding WEX, 85.5% of Study Programme learners have a confirmed work placement (confirmed, ongoing or completed). Areas of concern include Plumbing and Electrical. Alternative virtual work placement opportunities are in place if learners do not secure actual placements.
- 100% (9 learners) of T Level year two learners have a relevant industrial placement ongoing.
- GCSE Exams for maths and English are underway, the increased numbers of learners has meant that the College has had to use an external venue (Stoke Town Hall) as well as the College campuses to accommodate all of the learners.
- Curriculum planning is at the timetabling stage, planning for 2704 learners against an allocation of 2345.
- The College will suspend the provision for 14-16 EHE learners and School links from September 2025, the College aims to resume the provision once a discrete offer can be made available.

A governor **asked** what percentage of Gas, Plumbing and Electrical learners did not have a WEX placement. **Action:** The Deputy Principal to advise what percentage of Gas, Plumbing and Electrical learners did not have a WEX placement.

Deputy
Principal

A governor **enquired** whether the contractors involved in the capital works provided placements for learners. The Chief Financial Officer confirmed that this was a condition of the contracts and that they do.

16 **Accountability Statement**

1. Accountability Statement 2024/25 Progress

The report outlines the progress made towards each objective. Most objectives have either already been achieved or are on track (Green). Objectives rated amber are either partially achieved or due in June. The delivery of HTQs is rated red due to non-delivery and challenges in enrolling learners. The College decided not to apply for OFS status, and currently, the OFS has nationally suspended the application process.

The Accountability Statement, part of the Skills for Jobs reforms, addresses how colleges meet local, regional, and national skills needs according to the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). It is due to be submitted to the DfE by June 2025 and will be published on the College website.

2. Draft Accountability Statement 2025/26

The draft Accountability Statement for 2025/26 outlines the priority areas that the College aims to develop further, in addition to the existing priorities in the College Strategic Plan 2023-2026. The College has also cross-referenced the Labour government manifesto.

Suggested priorities that the 2025/26 Accountability Statement will focus on include:

- to focus on the Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire LSIP priorities via the Skills Hubs.
- to achieve an Ofsted Good with some outstanding features under the new inspection framework.
- Increase apprenticeship starts in LSIP priority sectors.
- Increase L3 provision in LSIP priority areas for Study Programmes and adults.
- Develop an expanded NEETs provision at both campuses.
- Incorporate AI in all curriculum areas as a resource to reduce workload.
- Develop and grow SEND provision to meet the needs of the City and region to support learners and families.
- Develop a Green Technology Centre to augment the Construction department at the Burslem campus with a focus on sustainability and retrofit.
- All curriculum and business support staff to undergo 2 day's industrial updating in relevant vocational area.

The financial aspects associated with implementing changes to the curriculum, as well as introducing new areas of study, will be evaluated during the annual budget planning process.

A governor **enquired** about the College's approach to managing the use of AI for both staff and students, considering AI can sometimes provide inaccurate information. The Deputy Principal responded that students would receive education on effectively utilising AI and conducting independent research to verify AI-generated information. The Principal & CEO further stated that new software is being implemented to detect AI usage. **Action:** Deputy Principal to consider the running of an AI conference for students.

Deputy
Principal

Governors **approved** the Accountability Statement 2025-26 in principle, noting that a final version will be circulated before submission to the DfE.

17 **Policies**

Governors **noted** that the TF&R committee reviewed the policies for approval, with no significant changes.

Governors **approved** the:

- Counter Fraud Policy
- Tuition Fees and Remission Policy
- Subcontracting Policy

The Audit Committee Chair stated that an internal fraud audit will be planned for the 2027-28 academic year due to new legislation.

18 Any Other Business

There were no matters of other business.

19 Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting is 10/07/2025 at 09:30.

There being no further business, the meeting finished at 11:55.