

## MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 24<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2025 AT 4.30PM AT THE KINGSWAY CAMPUS

<b>Present:</b>	Karen Banks	External Governor
	Millie Hargate	Student Governor
	Paul Leatherbarrow	External Governor
	Andrew MacManus	External Governor
	Neil McGrath	External Governor, Chair
	Tom McInerney	External Governor
	Mary Murphy	Ex-Officio, Principal/CEO
	Steph Power	Staff Governor
	Rachael Owen	External Governor
	Chris Sikorski	Staff Governor
	Susan Smith	External Governor
	Sarah Worsley	Student Governor

<b>In Attendance:</b>	Dan Adams	Assistant Principal (Curriculum, Cronton)
	Ben Barton	Vice Principal (Head at Riverside)
	Leeann Bellfield	Vice Principal (Head at Cronton)
	Alan Brown	Deputy Principal (Curriculum & Quality)
	Jayne Edwards	Co-Opted Governor
	Julie Holland	Deputy Principal (Finance & Resources)
	Catherine Shaw	Head of Governance

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting.

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received and accepted for Michele Bacon (External Governor), Stephen Young (External Governor) and Helen Smith (Assistant Principal, Marketing & School Liaison).

### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

These were **noted** as follows:

- Steph Power – staff governor appointment at agenda item 5
- Karen Banks, Jayne Edwards, Neil McGrath, Chris Sikorski, Susan Smith – governor re-appointments at agenda item 9.2

### 3. CHAIR'S UPDATE

#### 3.1 Chair's Action

The Board considered the reasons for the request via Chair's Action which were due to inflation costs and the unforeseen delay in commencement of the building works resulting from the required changes that had to be made to the design team.

**Resolved:** The Board **ratified** the Chair's action taken on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2025 and approved the additional expenditure of upto £500k relating to (i) cladding building works at the Kingsway campus and (ii) Music/Teaching block building works at Cronton campus

### 3.2 **To receive an activity report**

The Chair provided a summary of his activity since the last Board meeting in December 2024 which included:

- Continued regular meetings with the Principal and Head of Governance
- Attendance at the Strategic Planning event along with fellow governors in February 2025 and the training session on artificial intelligence (AI) which preceded it
- Attendance at the 1stuesday network meeting during Apprenticeship week
- Attendance at the AoC Chairs and Vice-Chairs network meeting

**Resolved:** The Board **noted** the contents of the Chair's activity report.

### 4. **WRITTEN RESOLUTION** *(previously circulated)*

**Resolved:** The Board **ratified** the written resolution circulated on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2024 to appoint Steph Power as the teaching staff governor for a tenure of two years and be assigned to the Quality & Standards Committee.

### 5. **PRINCIPAL'S STRATEGIC REPORT** *(previously circulated)*

The Principal delivered a presentation which included updates relating to (i) numerous external factors in the sector influencing the College, (ii) College priorities progress against the Strategic Plan in terms of quality, efficiency and growth (QEG) and (iii) College activities and achievements. The following aspects were highlighted from the comprehensive report:

- Funding – very recently the government had made several headline announcements, though to date more detailed information was awaited as referenced at agenda item 6.2
- Growth – 16-18 allocation stood at 4000 students and this demonstrated excellent growth. The College had reached the £40m income bracket which placed it as the second largest college within the Liverpool City Region (LCR)
- Ofsted – the College had responded to the 'Big Listen' and an overview of the outcomes was provided.
- Apprenticeships – Ben Barton (Vice Principal, Riverside) had represented the College as a member of the Expert Provider Pilot and it was very pleasing to report that suggestions put forward for improvement were to be implemented. These included (i) requirements relating to English and maths for 19+, (ii) shorter apprenticeship options, (iii) assessment principles and the removal of duplication and (iv) a simplified payment process
- Overview of the outcomes from the government's Curriculum and Assessment Review (CAR) with the final report expected in Autumn 2025
- 'Have Your Say' Student Survey – 3228 students had engaged in this survey and represented the highest response rate to date
- Safeguarding – cases continued to increase in respect of both quantity and complexity. Within the borough there was a rising concern of ketamine use among young people and the College was proactively working with the Local Authority in anticipation of its potential impact in the next academic year
- Adults Skills Fund – it was anticipated that the shortfall in recruitment would equate to approximately £250k and this had been accounted for in the financial plan. This represented a growth request that was submitted to the Liverpool City Region to predominantly accommodate the demand for ESOL

(English as a second language) provision, though given its transitory nature the demand was no longer required

- Foundation Studies Department – a development review had recently taken place and an action plan implemented for close monitoring purposes

During discussions several questions Governors asked several questions which were responded to by the Senior Management Team (SMT). These related to certain aspects of the findings from the 'Have Your Say' student survey in a minority of subject areas, the extent of the misuse of ketamine amongst an increasing number of young people in the local community, room capacity in light of continued growth and a query regarding the RAG rating of retention contained within the QEG.

**Resolved:** The Board

- (i) **Noted** the Principal's update on strategic issues and commended the College on its impressive growth
- (ii) **Noted** the outcomes from the Strategic Planning Day on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2025 (Appendix 1)
- (iii) **Approved** the QEG update on College performance against the Strategic Plan and three key priorities (Appendix 2)

## **6. FINANCE & RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

### **6.1 To receive for information a report on the Finance & Resources Committee Meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2025 highlighting key areas for the Board's attention (previously circulated)**

The Chair of the Finance & Resources Committee highlighted the following key elements from this report:

- Health & Safety KPIs – the number of reported accidents and near misses had reduced, compared to data in the previous year. No reported accidents had been reported since the commencement of building projects at either the Kingsway or Cronton campuses. No RIDDOR reportable accidents had occurred
- Partnership/Sub-Contracting Update – close monitoring continued to take place and findings were positive in terms of quality assurance and progress made
- Strategic risks to be monitored – these included (i) local Post 16 Alternative Provision and the rising rates of young people classified as not being in education, employment or training, and (ii) the potential increase in private training providers

**Resolved:** The Board **noted** the contents of the report detailing matters for escalation and assurance from the Committee to Board.

### **6.2 Financial Forecast Update 2022/2024 including In-Year Financial Monitoring Update (previously circulated)**

The Board was advised that the comprehensive report had been provided to the committee, however in the intervening period between its circulation and the committee meeting the government had made funding announcements which would affect the financial forecast and in-year monitoring update. There remained some uncertainty in respect of the headline funding announcement and until clarification was received, this report could not be updated and approval sought from the Board. A discussion took place and it was anticipated that an updated report would be presented for scrutiny at the next Finance & Resources Committee meeting. Whilst the funding announcements created some uncertainty, the Board was assured that the College remained in a very strong financial position.

The Deputy Principal (Finance & Resources) responded to a query raised by a Governor regarding the cashflow position and number of cash days, with the latter being 159 and well within the limit.

**Resolved:** The Board **noted** the report.

### 6.3 **HR Updates including the Gender Pay Gap Report** *(previously circulated)*

The Board considered the following key elements from this report:

- The Board's responsibilities following the introduction of the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act
- Key performance indicators relating to staff absence levels which confirmed a decrease in absence levels of 0.64% comparative to the previous year.
- Following on from the successful Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Wellbeing Day in November 2024, a staff wellbeing week took place in January 2025. For evaluation purposes, the feedback from the Wellbeing Day in November was extremely positive.
- Gender Pay Gap Report March 2024 – the mean pay gap had increased slightly compared to the position in 2023 and the median pay gap had increased by 7.2%. It was clear from the associated analysis that the increased gap was predominantly due to the increase in the number of support staff, particularly in areas such as invigilation and learning support roles.

**Resolved:** The Board **noted** the contents of the report, together with its reporting duty in respect of the Equality Act 2010 and Gender Pay Gap Information Regulations.

### 6.4 **Property Strategy** *(previously circulated)*

In addition to the updates regarding the current building projects, the Board was advised that the College had appointed consultants to undertake an in-depth review of accommodation on each site. This included a student number analysis, the current space/room utilisation, curriculum changes and a full condition survey. A discussion took place. In response to a question raised, the Board was advised that it was anticipated that the outcomes report from the 'visioning project' would be available for the Board's consideration at its July meeting.

**Resolved:** The Board accepted the recommendations made by the Finance & Resources Committee and

- **approved** the summer works programme, as detailed in the report
- **approved** additional expenditure of £3m in total, consisting of
  - £1.5m in respect of the request lists associated with the new builds and increased costs, namely Cronton Music Hub and Teaching Block at Cronton, the Green Technology Build at Kingsway and the cladding project
  - £1.5m in respect of upgrades to accommodation and curriculum resources required to enable the College to continue in its delivery of outstanding teaching and learning

### 6.5 **Policies**

Recommendations made by the Finance & Resources Committee for Board approval.

#### 6.5.1 **Environmental Sustainability** *(previously circulated)*

6.5.2 **Fees 2025/2026** *(previously circulated)*

6.5.3 **Apprenticeship Fees and Charges** *(previously circulated)*

6.5.4 **Higher Education Fees and Compensation 2025/2026** *(previously circulated)*

The Committee Chair advised that policies 6.5.1 to 6.5.4 (inc) had been reviewed by the Finance & Resources Committee at its meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2025 and were recommended for Board approval.

**Resolved:** The Board **approved**

- (i) Environmental Sustainability Policy
- (ii) Fees 2025/2026 Policy
- (iii) Apprenticeship Fees and Charges Policy
- (iv) Higher Education Fees and Compensation 2025/2026 Policy

## 7. **QUALITY & STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING**

7.1 **To receive for information a report on the Quality & Standards Committee Meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2025 highlighting key areas for the Board's attention** *(previously circulated)*

In the absence of the Chair of the Quality & Standards Committee, the Head of Governance highlighted the following key elements from the report:

- Foundation Studies (FS) – the Committee had received a very informative curriculum presentation from the interim Head of FS; an area which continued to be closely monitored in line with the College's Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). The Committee was advised of some of the challenges in its journey to outstanding and alignment with all other areas of College provision
- KPIs relating to attendance and retention – in particular, the College was commended on the current attendance levels which had increased by 2%.
- The small minority of curriculum areas subject to closer monitoring were all making varying levels of progress
- Risks – uncertainty regarding external factors such as curriculum reform and changes to the Ofsted Inspection Framework

**Resolved:** The Board **noted** the contents of the report detailing matters for escalation and assurance from the Committee.

7.2 **Safeguarding Update** *(previously circulated)*

Within this report the Board was advised of:

- The significant increase in safeguarding cases. Areas of most concern included suicide ideation/attempts, domestic abuse, neglect and sexual abuse.
- Increased involvement in multi-agency meetings with participation at 19 strategy meetings that had taken place to date in this academic year
- The College had received an increased number of referrals from the police in respect of Operation Encompass notifications
- The increased reports of ketamine use in the borough was concerning and the College was working closely with the Local Authority in its attempts to support young people with substance misuse.

**Resolved:** The Board **noted** the contents of the report.

7.3 **Accountability Agreement 2025/2026 and Duty to Review** *(previously circulated)*

The Board discussed its statutory responsibility under the Local Needs Duty to determine how the review was undertaken.

**Resolved:** The Board **approved** the recommendation made by the Quality & Standards Committee to establish a working group. This was to comprise of a selection of cross-committee governors for the purposes of undertaking the review for onward reporting to the Quality & Standards Committee at its meeting in June 2025.

## 7.5 Policies

Recommendations made by the Quality & Standards Committee for Board approval.

### 7.5.1 Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy *(previously circulated)*

**Resolved:** The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Quality & Standards Committee and **approved** the amendments to the Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy.

## 8. AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING

### 8.1 To receive for information a report on the Audit Committee Meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2025 highlighting key areas for the Board's attention *(previously circulated)*

The Chair of the Audit Committee highlighted the following key elements from this report:

- The Committee received a very informative presentation relating to Strategic Risk 1 of the College's Risk Register and the challenges in achieving adult education funding targets. Governors were directed to the resources used in the presentation for information purposes
- Internal Audit Reports – reports had been presented by the Internal Auditor in respect of (i) Strategic Business Planning, and (ii) IT Data Security, Infrastructure & Disaster Recovery. In respect of both reports the Audit Committee was provided with substantial assurance that the areas tested during the audit were designed and operated effectively with no significant weaknesses. The Internal Auditor also advised the Committee on several emerging risks within the FE sector, as referenced in the report
- Internal Audit Tender Process – the current contract with ICCA was due to expire on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2025 and the required tender process was approved with the Committee inviting three firms to tender for the contract from 2025/2026 to 2027/2028. It was anticipated that the Audit Committee would be in a position to make a recommendation for the approval of internal audit provision at the next Board meeting

**Resolved:** The Board **noted** the contents of the report detailing matters for escalation and assurance from the Committee.

## 9. SEARCH AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING

### 9.1 To receive for information a report on the Search and Governance Committee Meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2025 highlighting key areas for the Board's attention *(previously circulated)*

In addition to agenda items 9.2 to 9.6.2 the Chair of the Search and Governance Committee highlighted the following key elements of the report:

- Board skills analysis – the committee had considered the findings from the recently completed audit. This demonstrated a highly skilled Board with no significant weaknesses across any of the key areas. The Committee continued to maintain its focus on increasing the diversity profile of board membership

- Training Schedule 2024/2025 – a number of Governors had engaged with the various on-line training opportunities predominantly offered by the Association of Colleges (AoC) and Education Training Foundation (ETF)

**Resolved:** The Board **noted** the contents of the report.

## 9.2 **Board Membership and Succession Planning** *(previously circulated)*

The Committee Chair drew the Board's attention to the importance of effective succession planning and the risks associated with this, should a robust plan not be in place. This was supported by a Governor who highlighted that governors should not normally serve more than eight consecutive years, in accordance with the AoC Code of Governance. All Board members were encouraged to speak informally with the Head of Governance or existing office holders should they wish to further explore the roles of Board Chair, Board Vice-Chair(s) or becoming committee chairs with a view to potential expressions of interest being made.

**Resolved:** The Board **noted** the report and accepted the recommendations made by the Search and Governance Committee and **approved**:

- An extension to the current terms of office to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2025 in respect of the following external governors: Neil McGrath, Karen Banks and Susan Smith.
- To allow the incumbent Board Chair and Board Vice-Chairs to exceed the maximum four consecutive terms of office should they wish to express an interest in being re-appointed to the afore-mentioned roles, subject to the usual Board approval process.
- To re-appoint Neil McGath as External Governor for 12 months from 1<sup>st</sup> August 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2026
- To re-appoint Karen Banks as External Governor for 12 months from 1<sup>st</sup> August 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2026
- To appoint Susan Smith as a Co-Opted Member to the Finance and Resources Committee for 12 months from 1<sup>st</sup> August 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2026
- To appoint Jayne Edwards as an External Governor for 4 years from 1<sup>st</sup> August 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2029
- Following the outcome of the recent staff governor election process, to re-appoint Chris Sikorski as the non-teaching staff governor from 24<sup>th</sup> March 2025 to 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2027
- Adopt the informal procedure in respect of the appointment of Board Chair and Board Vice-Chair(s) for 2025/2026. This would be an agenda item at the next Board meeting alongside the approval of the committee membership 2025/2026.

## 9.3 **External Board Review (EBR) Action Plan** *(previously circulated)*

The Committee Chair advised that progress was monitored against the agreed plan by the Search & Governance committee. A discussion took place regarding the amber RAG rating of recommendation 12 on the report. There was a consensus that this ought to be green signifying its completed status.

**Resolved:** The Board

- **Noted** that the EBR action plan in its entirety had been successfully completed
- **Approved** for the updated action plan to be published on the College's website

## 9.4 **Review of the Instrument and Articles of Government** *(previously circulated)*

The estimated cost of legal fees had been obtained from the College's legal advisors

for a full review to be undertaken of the Instrument and Articles of Government and were considered by the Board.

**Resolved:** The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Search & Governance Committee and **approved** for a full review of the Instrument and Articles of Government to be undertaken by Burnetts Solicitors.

- 9.5 **Meeting Schedule 2025/2026** (*previously circulated*)  
The Board considered the proposed meeting schedule.

**Resolved:** The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Search & Governance Committee and **approved** the annual meeting schedule 2025/2026.

- 9.6 **Policies**  
Recommendations made by the Search and Governance Committee for Board approval.

- 9.6.1 **Conflict of Interests Policy** (*previously circulated*)

- 9.6.2 **Link Governor Policy** (*previously circulated*)

The Committee Chair advised that policies 9.6.1 and 9.6.2 had been reviewed by the Search & Governance Committee at its meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2025 and were recommended for Board approval.

**Resolved:** The Board **approved**

- (i) Conflict of Interests Policy
- (ii) Link Governor Policy

## 10. MINUTES

- 10.1 **To approve the draft minutes (Part One) of the Board Meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2024** (*previously circulated*)

The Board reviewed the minutes from the previous meeting.

**Resolved** – The Board **approved** the minutes as a correct record of the meeting.

- 10.2 **To review the action log and to consider any matters arising from the previous meeting**

Governors reviewed the action log from the previous meeting and noted that all matters had been either completed or were in progress for completion.

**Resolved** – The Board **noted** the report.

## 11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

In line with the College's AI Strategy the Head of Governance requested permission from Board members for all meetings in the summer term to be recorded using Microsoft CoPilot to trial the drafting of minutes.

**Resolved:** The Board **approved** the request to use AI for the purposes outlined.

## 12. MEETING REVIEW

In accordance with the approved action plan resulting from the external board review in 2023/2024 Board Members were asked to review the effectiveness of the meeting with any comments to be forwarded directly to the Head of Governance by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

**Resolved:** The Board **noted** the request.



**13. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

**Noted** as follows:

- Board – 7<sup>th</sup> July 2025 at 4:30pm at the Kingsway Campus

The Chair thanked all attendees for their participation and he closed the meeting at 5:55pm.

**Signed:** Office copy signed by Neil McGrath

**Chair**

**Date:** 7<sup>th</sup> July 2025