

**College of West Anglia  
Minutes of  
The Corporation Board Meeting  
26 March 2025  
8.30am – 11:30am  
U125, University Centre, King's Lynn Campus**

<b>Present</b>	Gill Rejzl	Governor (Chair)	In person
	Chris Ashman	Governor (Vice Chair)	Remote
	Dave Clark	Governor	In Person
	Jan Feeney	Governor	In Person
	Paul Gibson	Governor (Staff)	In Person
	Ray Harding	Governor	In Person
	Seb Ivanov	Governor	Remote
	Russel Liddington	Governor	Remote
	Sally Mitton	Governor	In Person
	David Pomfret	Governor (Principal/CEO)	In Person
	Carolyn Rand	Governor	Remote
	Eva Remeikaite	Governor (Student)	In Person
	Chloe Rothwell	Governor (Student)	In Person
	Gemma Standen	Governor	Remote
	Hein van den Wildenberg	Governor	Remote
	Donna Woodruff	Governor (Staff)	Remote
Joe Yexley	Governor	Remote	
<b>In Attendance</b>	Kerry Heathcote	Deputy CEO/Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality	In Person
	Paul Harrison	Vice Principal Corporate Services	In Person
	Rob Petto	Assistant Principal Funding and Performance	In Person
	Paul O'Shea	Assistant Principal Student Services	In Person
	Clare Pelling	Head of Learner Experience	In Person
	Jules Bridges	Head of Governance	In Person

No.		Action
1	<p><b>Apologies</b> Apologies for absence were received from Fliss Miller.</p>	
2	<p><b>Declarations of Interests</b> Interests were declared by staff members, senior post holders, Seb Ivanov and Russel Liddington in relation to item 8 of the agenda. Hein van den Wildenberg, Sally Mitton and Carolyn Rand all shared an interest in relation to item 16.1 of the agenda.</p>	
3	<p><b>Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 18 December 2024</b> The minutes of the meeting held on 18 December 2024 were reviewed and <b>agreed</b> as being an accurate record.</p>	
4	<p><b>Matters Arising</b> The progress arising from the previous meeting was summarised in the progress report and all actions reported had either been resolved or, where appropriate, an update had been provided on progress elsewhere on the agenda.</p> <p>The Chair noted that item 2 of the matters arising remains outstanding particularly as withdrawal and retention was a key line of enquiry at the recent Ofsted inspection. The withdrawal analysis report and the internal audit of attendance and retention are to be shared with governors (Performance Review and Quality committee).</p> <p>All other completed items are to be removed from the report.</p>	<p>DCEO/VPC&amp;Q</p> <p>HoG</p>

## **5 Committee Chairs Briefing Items:**

### **1 Search and Governance**

The Chair of the committee commented that the reappointments of Sally Mitton, Carolyn Rand, and Hein van den Wildenberg are to be recommended to the Corporation for approval under agenda item 16.1 below. It is to be recommended that they are all to serve a second term of office.

Good progress has been made against the action plans emerging from the 'Check-in' meetings with the Chair, Code of Good Governance Assessment, and the External Governance Review. All are predicted to be completed by the end of the academic year.

The committee has developed a new governance annual self-assessment which is expected to be launched in the summer, reflecting on and evaluating governance performance over the 2024/25 academic year.

The committee is currently succession planning for Sam Fletcher whose term of office has come to an end and for Chris Ashman whose term will expire in December 2025.

Agenda items 5.3, and 5.4, preceded item 5.2

### **2 Audit and Risk**

The Chair of the committee confirmed that the internal audit of the Green Skills/Capital Projects will take place at the beginning of July 2025. The internal audit of the New Finance System will be conducted on a phased basis, both pre and post implementation. The internal audits of Additional Learner Support/HNL, and Learner Recruitment, classroom based, both received significant assurance (green status).

The college has made good progress against the 156 recommendations arising from the GDPR compliance audit. Progress is currently at 70% and there is confidence that a 'good' level (80%+) of compliance will be achieved by the end of the academic year.

The committee has reviewed and approved the CWA Publication Scheme (FOI) and Guidelines. The Schedule of Matters Reserved and Scheme of Delegation is recommended by the committee, under agenda item 16.3 of the meeting, to be approved by the Corporation. The annual review of governor and SMT expenses was received by the committee with no material transactions to report.

### **3 Performance Review and Quality**

The Chair of the committee reported that apprenticeships remain a focus area for the committee and good progress has been made with the number of apprentices past their end date, which has reduced from 18% (July 2023) and is now at 8%. The target for the team has been set to below 5% by the summer. However, the plumbing provision remains a concern, due to staff recruitment issues that the team are trying to resolve. The end of year 'best case' overall success is 74.3% which is a significant improvement on previous years.

Attendance and retention (16-18s) is a key focus area for the committee and assurance has been sought by governors that strategies are in place to maintain higher levels of retention up to the year end.

The financial viability of UcWA is a concern, as is the ability to fulfil the ambitious 2024-35 HE strategy. The committee asks the Finance and General Purposes committee to set this as a priority area on their agenda.

The Quality Improvement Plan has been reformatted and aligned to the college SAR and other key documents. The Chair mentioned that Sam Fletcher's term of office has come to an end and wished to acknowledge her significant contribution to the Corporation and the work of the Performance Review and Quality committee.

F&GP

Finally, the Chair mentioned that the college is planning a 'one college walking' event on 22 October 2025 further to the 3 dads walking informative talk held recently to promote awareness of suicide amongst young people.

R Harding joined the meeting at 8.40am

#### **4 Finance and General Purposes**

The Chair mentioned that the last meeting of the committee had been delayed due to key funding decisions coming out late from government. Items 6, 7, and 8 of this agenda are intrinsically linked and will be reported by the Vice Principal Corporate Services (Items 6 and 7) and the Principal/CEO (item 8).

The finance team is working on enhancing and resolving the issues with reporting on contribution analysis. The committee received an update on funding and in-year growth has been confirmed at 2/3rds of eligibility (c£811k) and 2025/26 study programme funding will be an increase of c£2.9m. The Assistant Principal Funding and Performance provided a comprehensive update under agenda item 10 of the meeting.

The Head of Marketing and Communications presented an update on the management developments, hosting and security of the college website to the committee. The introduction of new tools (AI) is planned, to aid easier navigation and communication with visitors to the website.

Under agenda item 11 of the meeting the Chair of the committee highlighted that strategic target 4.5 (new finance system to replace Sun accounts) is to be downgraded to amber (reasonable progress) not green (good progress). Finally, the Chair of the committee confirmed that the Company Secretary of the CWA subsidiary companies is to arrange for the appointment of more directors to join the Board and a Property Steering Group meeting is to be convened.

HoG

The Chair of the committee acknowledged the request of the Performance Review and Quality committee to establish HE as a focus area and asked the Head of Governance to put this on the agenda going forward.

HoG

S Ivanov joined the meeting at 8.45am

Governors questioned the significance of the AI enhancements planned for the college website. Most significantly the new system will allow data links from the website to social media platforms and other internal systems so visitors searching a topic related to the college will receive an AI generated response and direct link to the college website for the information they have searched for. A governor offered to share an AI generated conversation that demonstrated how searches and/or social media content is handled by an AI chatbot with no human intervention.

CRand

Item 5.2 preceded item 6

#### **6 Management Accounts – January 2025**

The Vice Principal Corporate Services confirmed that the report has been received and scrutinised by the Finance and General Purposes committee last week. This is an unprecedented period of uncertainty carried into the financial year, mainly because of late government notifications of in-year funding.

The significant number of factors affecting the financial performance in the current year (highlighted in item 7 below), follows the year-to-date position presented in the management accounts, which is of limited value. The forecast in the Income and Expenditure has the reforecast budget as the forecast year end and the variances reported reflect the adjustments to the revised budget identified below. In summary the management accounts demonstrate high cash balances and sums on deposit that are helping the positive financial health position.

A governor queried why tuition fees remains the largest adverse income variance with the main contributor being full cost recovery across many departments. This is due to the nature of the provision rather than falling short of recovering full cost.

## 7 **Recast Budget and Revised Mid Term Financial Plan**

The key issues affecting the 2024/25 position were itemised in the report and in broad terms relate to several funding issues, National Living Wage (NLW) announcement, employers' National Insurance increases and the present issue concerning making a pay award to staff.

In relation to pay, a provision for a 2% backdated pay increase had been assumed in the original budget for the year but the proposal is to make a 2½% award with some targeted increases at the bottom end of the support pay scale to differentiate spine points in the light of NLW increases (which compresses the bottom ten spine points). The detail of the pay award is covered under agenda item 8 of the meeting.

Overall, the revised budget shows a significant growth in pay costs (£800k), increased numbers of staff to cover an increase in ALS and Study Programme numbers, increase in Employers' National Insurance Contributions, NLW, NLW differentials, additional 0.5% on the pay award, and other increases such as creating new posts.

These additional pay costs are offset to an extent, by a grant provided by government to support the additional NI costs which it was originally thought would be funded at 100% but 50% has been assumed in the revised budget. This may be slightly pessimistic, as the AoC have suggested this may be as much as 80%, but this is yet to be confirmed. The college will also benefit from reduced pension contributions because of the DfE providing a guarantee to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) in relation to FE colleges (c.£300k), backdated to December 2024.

The other major changes in the budget relate to the in-year funding for the increase in 16-18 student numbers which will total £811k and there has been an increase in high needs learners generating a further £600k, although associated delivery costs are significant. The Vice Principal Corporate Services highlighted that commercial income from Nursery and Catering activities is up, improving income by over £350k.

There are still some areas of uncertainty in the budget. The government has promised £50m in year for the sector but no assumption has been made in the revised budget as to how much CWA will get. The uncertainty around the NI support grant mentioned above has been assumed at 50% but could be 80%, although an announcement on this is not expected until May 2025.

The upsides highlighted to the Corporation that will help the bottom line, once announced, include the proportion of the £50m unallocated Government grant, potential National Insurance support grant (from 50% to 80%), additional ALS funding for High Needs learners, interest receivable on deposits and partnership payments. There may be further savings to make relating to the recent ETIO benchmarking exercise.

In summary, staff costs are largely unallocated to cost centres until the revised budget is approved, the budget generates a surplus of £213k compared to £237k in the original budget, it returns a 'good' financial health rating and even if the budget were reduced to £40k a 'good' financial health rating could be maintained.

The budget drives the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and shows consistent surpluses of 'good' or 'outstanding' financial health across the forecast four years. The Finance and General Purposes committee had raised some concern that the forecast surplus next year was slim (£116k) but since the plan was developed, notification has been received that the Teachers' Pension Support Grant (TPSG) will

be extended through the whole of 2025/26 (forecast had assumed it would only run to March 2026) which will add £300k to the bottom line for next year.

It was noted that the MTFP shows a drop in the year-end cash balance of just over £2m because this follows the capital works planned for the Tower Block roof repairs and other capital works.

The Chair commented how perverse and ironic it is that more student number puts so much pressure on the college, in terms of staffing, materials, accommodation etc. In summary, governors were supportive of the prudent approach and **approved** the revised budget unanimously by a show of hands.

**8 Pay Award Proposal**

**Confidential item under Article 17(2) of the Instrument and Articles of Government**

This item is deemed to be confidential.

**9 Student Union Closure Accounts to 31 December 2024**

Further to the Corporation approving the dissolution of the Student Union at the meeting held in December 2024, the Board **approved** the closure accounts to 31 December 2024.

**10 Funding Position and Data Control**

The college has been notified that in-year growth funding will be awarded at 2/3rds of allocation due to affordability which equates to c.£811k additional income with a small subtraction for T Level under delivery in year which has been baked into the revised budget. Clarification on the 2025/26 funding allocation has also been received, and the college can expect to receive a 3.78% increase to base rates and other factors that drive allocation for next year and student growth that drives the lagged funding model is predicted to provide a £3.5m increase on the 2024/25 allocation (pre-in-year-growth).

The press often reports on local authorities overspend on SEND provision and governors questioned if this posed a risk to this budget line for the college. This funding is in two elements that is allocated by the local authority for each learner; there is no sense of uncertainty around this funding considering it is an area of growth for the college and the MTFP assumes a modest uplift year on year.

The college is expecting to meet and exceed the adult devolved (CPCA) and non-devolved allocation. The latest prediction on CPCA is that the college will achieve 109% of allocation. CPC will fund 110% and this is the same on non-devolved. In 2025/26 there are cuts on adult funding although CPCA funding will be subject to a modest increase but will only be funded up to 103%, not 110%. A 3% cut on non-devolved is also anticipated which will somewhat limit the college's ability to grow in an area where the college has recently seen some success. One of the consequences of this will result in the college rationalising its offer and prioritise what will run and what won't. Rationalising sub-contract partner activity looks highly probable.

Governors noted that the number of apprenticeship starts is short of target although this is against roll on/roll off provision which can improve by the year end. Gas and Oil provision is a good example of this and recruits well across the academic year. Rationalising and consolidating standards has impacted starts.

It was also noted by governors that HE recruitment is in decline and questioned if the budget had been affected by the removal of the partnership with the OU. This has been factored into the budget and modest assumptions made in the MTFP. The Deputy CEO/Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality confirmed that the higher technical qualification project was not financially viable after remodelling the provision and the OU introduced an upfront fee and expectation to enrol on every module. The Office for Students (OfS) will support new registrations in June 2025

and UcWA is ready to apply. The single registrable modular approach to learning has also been paused as government has stalled the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) until January 2027, so the college will look to introduce a level 4 funded course project (loan funded) to move the HE strategy forward positively. The quality of HE provision is robust, but viability of offer and financial viability is strategically questionable.

## 11 **Strategic Targets 2024/25 – Progress Review**

The Principal/CEO confirmed that many of the strategic targets didn't specifically feature Ofsted but there are some targets that are intrinsically linked such as in-year retention, apprenticeship improvement, and 16-19 outcomes etc. The Ofsted draft report is expected this week and publication a couple of weeks thereafter. The report is thought to be likely to make specific mention that the college was found to be inclusive and notably students told the lead inspector in a student focus group that for the first time in their life they felt that they 'belonged' in an educational institution. To achieve a better grade the main contributor holding the college back is low retention and some pockets of inconsistency. Apprenticeships was an area that the college could demonstrate had improved and this was validated by Ofsted at inspection. The Board congratulated the college, and all staff involved in a calm, well-organised and positive inspection.

H van den Wildenberg left the meeting at 10.00am

A governor noted that strategic target 3.5 (succession planning and talent management) remains behind target and given that recruitment and retention, and staff pay are focus areas that link to this target it was questioned if this target needed more focus. The Principal/CEO mentioned that the college runs a series of talent management programmes but accepted that this may need to be refreshed and a focus area for the HR team.

Noting the impetus placed by Ofsted on retention, governors highlighted that strategic target 1.1 specified that apprenticeship retention in year is 76% and questioned what this looked like against benchmark. It was confirmed that if apprentices are retained, they tend to achieve, so this indicator is broadly strong as sector achievement average benchmark is 67%.

The Chair commented that the property strategy target (4.13) is behind target and questioned why this was the case. The Vice Principal Corporate Services confirmed that this is in the main due to internal capacity to progress, but this will now be given more attention.

Strategic target 1.2, maintain effective BRAGP rating for all learners, and specifically that at least 95% of study programme learners will have had their BRAGP status reviewed within 20 teaching days and at least 90% of Purple BRAGP rated learners are to be supported to a resolution within 30 days. The commentary against this notes that 72.15% of BRAGP status are reviewed within 20 days and those resolved within 30 teaching days is 93.17%, so governors were concerned about the former metric. The Deputy CEO/Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality explained that the indicator currently includes BRAGP English and maths learners as currently they fall out of step with the current milestone achievements, hence the disparity in the figure. The issue is known and will be resolved in future reporting and calculations.

Finally, regarding strategic target 4.3 (carbon reduction) a governor commented that this target continually remains behind target. This has been achievable in previous years but now tends to need continual and substantial capital investment to impact. This will be reviewed for the next iteration of the strategic plan and governors were supportive of rephrasing the target perhaps with more of an emphasis on sustainability rather than a KPI specific to carbon reduction.

The Chair adjourned for a break at 10.15am. C Ashman left the meeting and C Rothwell and C Pelling joined the meeting.

## 12 **Learner Voice Presentation**

Student governors gave a PowerPoint presentation to the Corporation detailing the learner voice and engagement activities undertaken by students since the last meeting of the Board. The presentation included an update on student activities such as Road Safety Week, Holocaust Memorial Day, 3 Dads Walking talk on young suicide prevention, International Women's Day, and work of the Student Council on topics such as raising awareness of radicalisation and extremism, use of AI by students and staff, and the need for more study spaces and places to sit at lunchtime.

Governors commended the work of the student governors and suggested including more detail and activities around student satisfaction. This is reported to the Performance Review and Quality committee together with reports and remedies for complaints. Student governors will include a slide in their next presentation to the Board and include some of the things that students ask of them.

CRothwell /  
ERemeikaite

C Pelling left the meeting at 10.35am

## 13 **Current Performance Data and KPIs 2024/25**

The Deputy CEO/Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality updated that there are 144 HE enrolments, not 119 against the target of 154.

Ofsted inspectors had fed back that one of the good practice activities they had observed was the attendance posters and competitive spirit that these are having across all curriculum areas. Attendance across the college is not where it needs to be and whilst other regional colleges have lower attendance rates than CWA it remains a struggle to get back to pre-pandemic levels of attendance. The AoC is soon to publish sector attendance rates so comparisons can be completed and reported.

Another element of good practice observed by inspectors was the college's approach to self-assessment and quality improvement. Notably the curriculum quality improvement plans and how these interlink with self-assessments and data, so there was confidence around the robust approach taken.

A governor asked if there was a process of non-engagement of learners that feeds into later retention issues with students. The BRAGP Perilous, Purple indicator, is integral to retention and a systematic analysis of withdrawal data is being undertaken. In terms of preventing a withdrawal, there are 3 lines of action, and no learner is withdrawn without the final determination made by the Student Welfare Manager. Governors queried what the relationship is between attendance and attrition. If attendance drops, does this increase the likelihood that learners will leave? For adults this is negligible but in terms of 16-18s although they may not engage, they are motivated to achieve. At the Downham Market provision, attendance is around 50%, which for 'high needs' learners with complex needs is relatively good, as typically these learners would not otherwise attend. The Chair suggested a strategic discussion is held about the future of the CWA offer, as the student profile is changing, and therefore the approach to marketing, engagement, and where/how funding is secured may need further discussion and exploration.

Finally, the Chair commented that the dataset tables in the report showed the actual to date for the current year and total for the previous year which was difficult to make relative comparisons. It was noted that 'like for like' data comparisons will not be available until October 2025 as the new datasets were developed in October 2024. In terms of retention, it was confirmed that this is 1.5% better than the same point last year. The Principal/CEO commented that the government has launched a new dataset benchmark tool, FE Provider Dashboard, which is currently being piloted. Data held is currently historic so may not necessarily be particularly useful at this time.

## 14 **HR KPIs and Legal Update**

The Vice Principal Corporate Services highlighted that the college is forecasting a sickness absence rate per employee of less than 5 days which is an improvement on

last year's outturn of 5.4 days lost. For comparison, the most recent Civil Service sickness figures are just less than 8 days lost per person, per year.

The predicted cost of sickness absence is forecast this year to be c.£550k in sick pay versus £413k last year so, whilst the number of days absent is falling, the cost is increasing. This is in the main due to the HR team targeting long term absence cases that cost less (due to SSP and/or no sick pay) compared to short term absence cases which are on full pay terms.

A governor commented on the number of applicants shortlisted and the number of those interviewed as the statistics showed that a quarter of candidates are interviewed in general but only one in sixteen of the candidates with a disability were interviewed, so did this mean that fifteen disabled candidates did not meet the criteria? The Vice Principal Corporate Services will take this back to the Head of HR for investigation.

VPCS

A staff governor queried if the cost of sickness absence had increased since paying sickness for those staff on probation. It has not been analysed at this level, but it was acknowledged that this recent change could have impacted, and probation periods have been extended due to absence so a firmer approach could be taken in this regard. Following up on this point, governors noted in the report (item 3.5) that it was commented that 'staff do abuse the college's generous scheme' so how 'generous' is the scheme and is this something that will be adjusted. Dependent upon length of service, staff who have been employed for less than five years are paid in full for 60 days absence and if employed over five years full pay is given for 120 days absence, which is more generous than the sector norms, and discussions with the trade unions has been considered to negotiate to reduce the generosity of the scheme and turn some of the savings into enhanced parental leave entitlements and/or offer other HR benefits.

Governors noted that the number of repeat recruitment campaigns has reduced which was positive, particularly as this can be a significantly costly exercise and prolonged the process to find the right candidate for the post. The HR team has taken a more professional approach with a dedicated recruitment officer responsible for this area, which is positively impacting. Finally, a question was raised around the number of leavers reported as there was a total of 45 leavers in the period, of which 29 were voluntary so why did the other 16 leave. These would relate to disciplinary proceedings, or other such processes.

## 15 Risk Register Review

The review of the risk register confirms that three risks have increased in score, and two have moved down. Justification was provided in the report to explain the risk movement.

The Chair suggested at the next review that risk owners think about recent changes and activities, Ofsted inspection for example, that may influence a change on the register, e.g., retention. With risk R004, inability to recruit sufficient 16-19 student numbers, which affects funding and financial performance, perhaps this needs to be rephrased particularly as student recruitment has been positive for the college and given the discussion held earlier in the meeting, the risk is more about affordability of in-year growth funding and the college's ability to support and accommodate increased student numbers due to lack of funding and capacity.

HoG

Finally, it was noted that under risk R016 the reference to Lifelong Learning Entitlement in Jan 2025, should read Jan 2027.

HoG

## 16 Governance Items

### 1 Reappointments and Resignations

The Search and Governance Committee recommended the reappointments of Hein van den Wildenberg, Sally Mitton, and Carolyn Rand to serve a second term of office (to March 2029). The Corporation **approved** all three appointments.

## **2 Committee Structure**

The Head of Governance confirmed that there are currently 18 governors in post further to the resignation of Alan Measures at Christmas and Sam Fletcher completing her second term of office this month. The Board therefore carries two vacancies, and the Search and Governance Committee has discussed its approach to recruitment to fill these roles and succession plan for the departure of Chris Ashman, whose term of office completes in December this year.

## **3 Schedule of Matters Reserved and Scheme of Delegation**

The Audit and Risk Committee recommends the revised and updated copy of the Schedule of Matters Reserved and Scheme of Delegation. Tracked changes highlighted the corrections made to align with key documents and references. The Corporation **approved** the documents as amended and presented.

## **4 Draft Schedule of 2025/26 Meetings**

Governors had considered the draft schedule of meetings for the 2025/26 academic year and subject to moving a committee meeting to on-line instead of face to face and the Search and Governance Committee deciding if it is to meet three or four times in the year, the Head of Governance is to send out the calendar invites for the meetings to governors as soon as possible.

## **5 Use of Corporation Seal**

It is a requirement of the CWA Instrument and Articles of Government to maintain a record of all applications of the Corporation Seal. Since the last report to the Corporation in December 2024, the college seal has not been applied. Likewise, the seal of CWA Developments has not been applied in the reporting period.

## **6 Learning Walks - Feedback**

The details of the EDI Link visit were available for governors in the pack of papers and the report confirmed the activities and training events that governors had attended in the spring term.

## **7 Strategy Planning Morning – 11 June 2025**

The next return for the Accountability Agreement will be 30 June 2025. The Strategy Planning morning, hosted at the Cambridge Campus, will be used to develop, agree, and approve the Accountability Agreement, subject to any amendments, for submission to the DfE on/before the deadline date.

## **8 Chair's Dinner – 7 May 2025**

The Chair's Dinner has been moved to a lunchtime event to take place on Wednesday 7 May 2025, in the Novus Restaurant on the King's Lynn Campus, commencing at 12.00pm. The event for next year will be rebranded 'Chair's Lunch' and is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 6 May 2026.

## **17 Any other business**

The Deputy CEO/Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality had seen the former Clerk to the Corporation, Stephen Halls, who passed on his well wishes to the Board.

## **18 Date and time of next meeting**

Wednesday 9 July 2024 at 8.30am, U125 University Centre, KL

HoG

Meeting Ended at 11.15am