

College of West Anglia
Minutes of Finance & General Purposes Committee
Wednesday, 18 June 2025
8:30am – 11.00am
Remote meeting via TEAMS

Present	Hein Van Den Wildenberg	Governor (Chair)
	Cally Rand	Governor (Vice Chair)
	David Pomfret	Governor (Principal)
	Donna Woodruff	Governor (Staff)
	Joe Yexley	Governor
Attending	Paul Harrison	Vice Principal Corporate Services
	Jenny Quaif	Head of Finance
	Paul Smith	Head of Employer Liaison, Partnerships & Commercial Training
	Michelle Blake	Marketing Manager
	Raza Tahir	Head of IT
	Jules Bridges	Head of Governance

No.		Action
1	Apologies There were no apologies for absence from committee members, but apologies were received from Kerry Heathcote, DCEO/Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality and Rob Petto, Assistant Principal, Funding and Performance.	
2	Declarations of Interests There were no items of interest declared.	
3	Minutes of the Previous Meeting on 12 March 2025 The minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2025 were reviewed and agreed as being an accurate record.	
4	Matters Arising The progress arising from the previous meeting were 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. Treasury Management specialists who work in the sector had been contacted however the potential CWA sums on deposit are much smaller than other investors that they deal with, so we are unlikely to be of interest to them. We however await to receive their proposition. A governor with treasury management expertise offered to spend time with the Head of Finance to share knowledge, rules of engagement and management skills so that the college could look to manage its deposits/investment itself. The appointment of directors to the subsidiary companies will take place this month. It was confirmed that specialist VAT advisors have been appointed, and we await their advice concerning the closure of CWA Developments. All completed items will be removed from the report.	HoF VPCS
5	Management Accounts – April 2025 The April management accounts show a forecast year-end surplus of £273k and EBITDA of £1.142m (3.1%). The financial health is 'good' at 220 points with high cash balances due to holding large capital grant monies. The main year end forecast variances on income	

relate to additional learning support which is £100k up however commercial activities are behind budget year-to-date and the forecast adjusted and reduced by £220k. On expenditure staff costs are £361k behind budget but are anticipated to be spent by the year end. Partnership payments are also behind budget year-to-date. These are difficult to predict so payments have been accrued to the period based on an estimate of 20% of earned income for all partners.

Governors were disappointed that the forecast adjustment for commercial activities was not positive given that previously it had been reported that campus refectories had improved financial performance. It was confirmed that the budget on reflection was optimistic and therefore the forecast adjusted to a more realistic outturn. The Nursery however is ahead of budget year-to-date and is performing well. The Chair asked for the commercial activities position in the previous year to be provided to make a comparison of the performance this year.

HoF

Non-pay costs are below budget year-to-date with underspend reported in subcontractors, photocopying, INSET (staff training) and subscriptions. The committee queried if these were areas where savings could continue to be achieved. Both subcontractors and INSET have been reduced in the forecast and staff are to be reminded to spend budgets in year and not in advance of next year. The committee noted that interest receivable was ahead of budget year to date.

6 Contribution Analysis

Previously it had been identified that there were three issues causing errors in contribution figures reported in the management accounts and inconsistencies between financial and curriculum planning data. Some progress has been made on income allocation and alignment but there is still some work to do to ally financial planning with curriculum planning. Contribution overall comes in at 40% noting that the underlying issues are complex (such as attributing maths and English contribution appropriately) and will take some time to resolve. Contribution data, in future, will be included in the management accounts rather than as a separate agenda item.

7 Budget 2025/26 and Medium-Term Financial Plan

This is the first time that the college can report a likely turnover of over £40m and the budget prepared is considered pessimistic resulting in a £307k surplus outturn. It was noted that this includes a provision for a 4% pay increase across the college which matches the 2025/26 recommendation of the School Teacher Review body. This is an assumption in the budget only and would be subject to approval by the Corporation. The Principal/CEO commented that the AoC would typically make their pay recommendation around now, but this was pushed back to the end of the calendar year this year so it is unknown when the AoC may announce a pay recommendation to the sector. The UCU however are looking for a 10% pay increase and will encourage a national ballot for strike action.

The committee was informed that the budget omits an estimate of the college's share of the £160m that the government has announced will be allocated to FE colleges in the 2025/26 academic year. This will be shared out to colleges based on the number of study programme learners (16-18s) which has been estimated at £1.21m for CWA which would improve the bottom line significantly.

The budget has been used to inform a revised iteration of the college's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). This shows that the college generates a surplus in each of the years to 2029/30, increasing cash balances to 'good' or better financial health.

Governors were mindful of the colleges strategic goals and plans particularly around the increasing number of high needs students but queried the value in terms of increased income against disproportionate costs of the additional learning support for the learners. This is a valuable provision for the college not just in terms of income but offering inclusion for all learners. The support costs are significant, but the income line is viable.

The committee was assured that the budgeted staffing costs are taken from curriculum planning and are compared with the staffing plan needed for the predicted increased student numbers for the next academic year. The committee concluded that the budget had been drafted conservatively but showed some areas of optimism around apprenticeship income and costs adjusted down where appropriate.

It was noted that a provision has not been provided for in the budget for the impairment of the Tower Roof repairs as there will be costs associated with some focussed restructures that may occur in the year, so the college is looking to push this out into the 2025/26 financial year rather than take it in the current year.

Further to discussion and scrutiny the committee accepted the budget and medium-term financial plan and will recommend to the Corporation for approval at the meeting to be held on 9 July 2025.

Chair

8 DfE Financial Health Assessment

The DfE has assessed the Financial Health for the 2023/24 financial year as outstanding. The committee was reminded that the college tried to moderate this to 'good' based on the overage transaction that was a one-off, but the DfE has declined the appeal.

9 Focus Area – Higher Education

It was noted that this report is to be shared with the Corporation at the meeting to be held on 9 July 2025. It was written in response to governor concerns about the deliverability of the college's HE strategy and growth plan which has suffered several recent setbacks such as the Office for Students (OfS) suspending new applications.

In summary the report takes a longer-term outlook and shows that both student numbers and revenues have been haemorrhaging for several years. This is not unique to CWA and appears to be consistent across most FE colleges that run HE provision. However, the report confirms a tough market but suggests that HE at CWA is currently 'washing its face' based on the contribution analysis.

Governors wondered if the cost of HE delivery was more/less than the cost of FE delivery but this would be difficult to compare as the income for HE is not government funded. Governors also questioned the college's ability to work with other HEI partners rather than rely on the current relationship. The OfS application will enable the college to direct deliver its programmes rather than seek validation from other partners which will give UcWA more freedom as an HEI provider but is also seeking alternative third-party arrangements.

10 Funding Position and Data Control

The report shows a pattern of growing study programme numbers generating lagged and in-year funding. Adult growth is also strong in the current year but is subject to capping, so some provision is to switch to direct delivery rather than partner delivery.

The forecast income for apprenticeships has been reduced in the current year reflecting recruitment and, partially the impact of the delay in the transition of S4PL learners.

It was reported that the DfE has confirmed a 5% funding uplift for T-Levels, which would be worth an additional £120k. Whilst an allocation has not been received to confirm this, there is a high degree of confidence that this would be received so the T-Level uplift has been accounted for in the budget. The estimated increase of the share of the £160m based on the number of study programme learners would attract an additional £1.33m in 2025/26, inclusive of the £120k for T-Levels, so would reflect a £1.21m improvement on the current budget position. The report also details the growth in high needs funding despite local authorities reporting SEN deficits.

P Smith joined the meeting at 9.45am

11 Subcontractor/Partnership Activities Update – approval of Activities for 2025/26

This years' activity is positive overall with an increase of contract value for the Norwich School of Beauty which is to be fully utilised.

The transition of S4PL continues with all learners either completed or transitioned out by September 2025. The setup process was somewhat underestimated, so the timeframe has unfortunately slipped.

The plan for the 2025/26 academic year shows a substantial reduction in subcontracting brought about by government cuts to the Adult Skills Fund resulting in the cessation of two established partners. The King's Trust programme (formally the Princes Trust) is planned to expand into the Great Yarmouth area for the first time, and this will see the cessation of delivery in East Dereham due to low learner engagement. The committee **approved** the planned subcontractor activities for the 2025/26 academic year.

12 **Contracts £100k-£500k and Single Payments >£1m**

The report confirmed that there are three contracts with a value of £100k to £500k. The details of which were included in the report. It was noted that single payments more than £1m is a nil return.

13 **Policy Reviews**

1 **Treasury Management Policy**

Subject to replacing the reference to the ESFA with the DfE on page 2 the committee **approved** the reviewed policy as presented.

VPCS

2 **Fees Policy**

The policy has been reviewed and a copy with tracked changes was considered by the committee. References to the ESFA have been replaced with the DfE and references to the Open University removed. The correction under the Refunds of Fees section was accepted and the committee **approved** the policy as presented.

3 **Supply Chain and Fees Policy**

The policy has been reviewed with minor changes in terminology made and references to next years' funding rules inserted. There were no substantive changes made. The committee **approved** the policy as presented.

4 **Annual Insurance Policies/Cover 2025/26**

The tender was conducted through the CPC (Crescent Purchasing Consortium) Framework although only one bid was received. A three-year contract with the possibility to extend to five years, subject to satisfactory performance, is proposed to be awarded on 7 July 2025.

The committee was interested to receive the excess details relating to property damage and the Head of Finance will circulate this to members.

HoF

As only one bid was received governors queried if the college was in breach of procurement rules but as the CPC framework had been used the process was compliant and the contract could be awarded. The committee **approved** the award of the contract.

R Tahir joined the meeting at 10.15am

14 **Strategies and Plans:**

1 **Biannual IT Update**

The Head of IT summarised that the data loss prevention project was underway and the Windows 11 upgrade was ready for implementation with several PCs already reimaged. The impact of the IT strategy on the IT team is positive and a team restructure is planned to reduce the number of second line technicians and increase with more first line respondents.

The internet line at the King's Lynn campus is planned to be upgraded from 1gbit to 10gbits. The line at Downham Market will be upgraded to 500mbits and connectivity at Cambridge is planned to be improved.

R Tahir left the meeting and M Blake joined the meeting at 10.20am

2 **Marketing Plan 2025/26 & Progress Report on 2024/25 Targets**

Ahead of the meeting the Chair had commented that CWA has made significant investment in marketing people and software and asked that this report gave a reflection on what these strategic decisions have enabled the team to achieve. The Head of Marketing and Communications commented that it has enabled more research and MI specific reporting to align curriculum planning with marketing. School liaison has reached out to HE and targeted sixth form establishments and onsite HE taster days have been offered and delivered. Internal communications have developed in line with the internal comms strategy. A weekly newsletter (CWA Connect) has been active since September 2024 with willing participants providing material for content upload and sharing. Increased team capacity has enabled an enhanced digital role and the procurement of HubSpot which will further develop and improve the college website which is the most important marketing tool for the college. The full license starts in August to go live with HubSpot. This system will significantly enable the college to reach out to audiences it has not been able to captivate before such as adults, employers, and parents.

Governors asked if it were possible to analyse the conversion rates from offer, application and enrolment and look at these for 16-18s, adults and HE. Is it possible to follow the student journey from offer to the student being on course. This is being investigated and incorporated into the deployment of HubSpot so there is confidence that more data in this respect will be reportable.

The interest gathered from the UCAS discovery event (235 datasets) will be plugged into HubSpot. The UcWA digital prospectus was launched at this event enabling visitors to scan a QR code to personalise their prospectus. They can select by course interest or career aspiration, providing them with filtered information from our website in a downloadable and sharable format. The event achieved a small application rate from stand visitors, but this is the beginning of something that has the potential to grow.

The Chair asked that marketing is a featured agenda item for the Corporation in the new academic year. This is a strategic item that should be reported to governors.

HoG

M Blake left the meeting at 10.35am

3 **Strategic Targets 2024/25 Progress Review**

Good progress has been made against the strategic plan with only one target behind relating to achieving 4% net carbon reduction and one target that will not be achieved relating to the collapse of the Norfolk devolution deal.

It was noted that in relation to strategic target 4.5, a meeting of the new finance system task and finish group would be convened before the year end to agree the supplier.

HoG/HoF

15 **Review of Committee's Performance, Terms of Reference & Annual Business Cycle**

The committee considered the prepared review and concluded that it provides a fair and accurate summary of the committee's performance during the year. The assessment (page 4) is to confirm that the committee has approved the Treasury Management policy and that the membership of the Board of Directors to CWA subsidiary companies is to be increased.

HoG

The Terms of Reference were considered and the committee concluded that the terms of reference remain fit for purpose. Similarly, governors confirmed that the annual business cycle would enable the committee to fulfil its responsibilities. Both documents would be recommended to the Corporation for approval at the meeting to be held on 9 July 2025.

Chair

15 **Any Other Business**

Staff Governor, Donna Woodruff was thanked for her membership of the committee. She is to move onto the Performance Review and Quality committee in the new academic year.

Members asked if more of the strategic items such as Marketing could be higher up the agenda in future meetings.

HoG

16 Chair's Items for Briefing to Corporation

Chair

- The April management accounts show a forecast year-end surplus of £273k and EBITDA of £1.142m (3.1%). The financial health is 'good' at 220 points with high cash balances due to holding large capital grant monies.
- The committee considers that the budget had been drafted conservatively, shows some areas of optimism and is recommended to the Corporation for approval at the meeting to be held on 9 July 2025.
- The DfE has assessed the Financial Health for the 2023/24 financial year as outstanding. The college did try to moderate this to 'good' based on the overage transaction that was a one-off, but the DfE has declined the appeal.
- An update on funding was received by the committee with positive income projected for 16-18 study programme learners, adult growth, an uplift to T-Level provision and growth of High Needs funding.
- The subcontracting plan for the 2025/26 academic year shows a substantial reduction in delivery brought about by government cuts to the Adult Skills Fund resulting in the cessation of two established partners. The plan for the 2025/26 was approved by the committee.
- The committee approved revised and updated versions of the Treasury Management, Fees, and Supply Chain and Fees policies. The contract for the college's insurance arrangements/cover was also approved.
- An update on the progress of the IT strategy was received and considered by the committee with no issues to report.
- The committee received an update on the Marketing activities in the 2024/25 academic year and the plan for the 2025/26 academic year. The committee has asked for marketing to be added as an agenda item for the Corporation as a key strategic item to be reported.
- The terms of reference and annual business cycle for the committee have been reviewed and are considered appropriate. They are to be recommended to the Corporation for approval at the meeting to be held on 9 July 2025.

17 Date and time of next meeting:

Wednesday 1 October 2025 at 8:30am (Remote meeting, via TEAMS)

Meeting ended at 10.40am