

College of West Anglia
Minutes of Finance and General Purposes Committee
Wednesday 19 November 2025
8:30am – 11.00am
Remote meeting, via TEAMS

Present	Hein Van Den Wildenberg Cally Rand Paul Gibson Joe Yexley Joe Solomon	Governor (Chair) Governor (Vice Chair) Governor (Staff) Governor Governor
Attending	Kerry Heathcote Paul Harrison Rob Petto Jenny Quaif Paul Smith Michelle Blake Fatima Bensihem Jules Bridges	Deputy Principal/Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality Vice Principal Corporate Services Assistant Principal, Funding, Performance and Projects Head of Finance Head of Employer Liaison, Partnerships & Commercial Training Marketing Manager Procurement Officer Head of Governance

No.	Action
<p>1 Apologies for absence Apologies for absence were received from David Pomfret. Raza Tahir, Head of IT also passed on his apologies for absence.</p> <p>Recently appointed governor, Joe Solomon, was welcomed to the membership of the committee.</p>	
<p>2 Declarations of Interests There were no items of interest declared.</p>	
<p>3 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 1 October 2025 The minutes of the meeting held on 1 October 2025 were reviewed and agreed as being an accurate record.</p>	
<p>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.</p> <p>The Head of Finance will take up the offer from the governor with treasury management expertise and will investigate the opportunity to invest overnight in the new year once the external audit work is complete.</p> <p>The Tower Block impairment has been processed in the financial statements. The value was calculated at £150k which was easily accommodated against the preliminary financial results presented at the last meeting.</p> <p>The suggestion made at the last meeting to detail how much of the positive difference versus the last update was due to true surprises or due to unexpected income received or prudent estimates was included in the report to the Corporation in October and will be included in future reports.</p>	HoF

Work with the Assistant Principal Funding and Performance has begun to reconcile the budget with the contribution table but external audit work has taken priority.

HoF

All other completed items are to be removed from the report.

HoG

M Blake joined the meeting at 8.35am

5 Annual Marketing Plan – Review of Progress 2025/26

The report detailed the activity of the marketing team for the autumn term up to the end of October 2025.

All year 11 presentations to feeder schools have been completed by 20 October 2025, which is the earliest date this has been achieved, enabling early notification of open events which consequently were up by 28% compared to last year.

Applications are up 142% with earlier applications received to ensure placement on first choice courses. Social media and the website are functioning well for this market.

Employer engagement is up. Case studies and positive press pieces are improving with the help and support of the employer engagement team to reach out to positive contacts.

HE statistics through the website are good. There was a slight blip last year with the UcWA media channel, but this has been recreated and the engagement rate is now doing well with a higher following. There has been a growth in the number of sixth form presentations and taster days organised to promote the higher education UcWA offer.

The team has built up a library of adult part-time courses enabling improved recruitment campaigns that will support curriculum planning processes in year.

The internal newsletter (CWA Connect) has been active every week for over a year now with an average of 423 individual viewers each week.

Governors were interested in the Chatbot that the team had developed but noted the high abandonment rate and wondered what could be done to reduce the fallout. The Chatbot is now within HubSpot enabling customisation and it is intuitive as it tells college what isn't on the website and what can't be answered which is invaluable. The Chatbot can also be AI enabled, building on intelligence and continually learning. There is room for improvement on abandonment, but this should improve over time as the knowledge base grows.

Acknowledging the power of AI governors asked if there was a way of tracking AI (ChatGPT) search statistics as opposed to search engines such as google. The college knows that ChatGPT is predicted to outstrip google so an optimisation shift from search engines (SEO) to AI (AEO) will be the future. Through HubSpot personas to communication channels are being added which will give a fuller picture of where contact is coming from, i.e., website, AI, search engines, social media etc so this will be able to be measured in the future.

The Chair highlighted the importance of conversion from application to enrolment and wondered what the next steps for CWA would be. Noting that on average people make more than one application (2.4), the important parts of their journey is helping them to make the right choice, the information sessions they are invited to, working with the admissions team to get the right communications out to them to ensure that the learner gets the best experience and the right course for them.

M Blake left the meeting, and R Petto and P Smith joined the meeting at 8.55am

6 Subcontractor/Partnership Activities Update

The report summarised the performance of partnership working for the 2024/25 academic year and the Head of Employer Liaison, Partnerships and Commercial Training confirmed the full year income (column P) at £1.44m, against £1.52m (column O) indicative DfE income.

Action Community Enterprise are delivering new programmes and Pilot expanded into Great Yarmouth with 9 cohort programmes planned for 2025/26. Subcontracted work must be no greater than 25% of income. 2024/25 was 14.89% of income and the contract value for 2025/26 is 15.35%.

Partners have got off to a good start this academic year with further enrolments to come throughout the year. Income (based on R03 data) is £545k against £1.01m indicative DfE income for the year.

The transition of S4PL apprentices continues with 14 apprentices at various stages of completing their apprenticeship with CWA, 4 have withdrawn from their programme, 9 transferred to S4PL and the remaining 27 are to transfer by the end of this month. The 2024/25 contract agreement was extended to 31 December 2025, but completion of transition is likely to extend into the New Year (February 2026).

Governors were interested to know more about the King's Trust programme which is now operating in Norwich, King's Lynn and Great Yarmouth. The King's Trust programme reaches out to re-engage learners back into education. The programme is for 16–24-year-olds with typically 15 learners per cohort. This is a nationally recognised programme involving young people with community projects, residential and a huge range of activities for them to get involved in that will enable some to go onto employment or get back into learning.

Recognising that the partnership with Norwich School of Beauty has ended, governors asked where aspiring learners go now. This was a commercial entity before the college engaged in a partnership arrangement so unfortunately many will no longer be able to participate as they would need to self-fund the programme.

P Smith left the meeting at 9.10am

7 HE Financial Performance

Student recruitment for 2025/26 has settled but shows a continuation of declining HE numbers apparent over the last few years. This inevitably has an impact on HE finances. The forecast income for the current year compared to the 2024/25 outturn is a 27% reduction and forecast contribution for this year is 50% compared to 54% in the prior year.

The HE Strategy and Growth Plan, developed to address the decline in learner numbers at level 4 and above has been revised to account for the delay in the roll out of LLE (Lifelong Learning Entitlement) and several other HE partner related issues. The review demonstrated that the planned approach to increasing HE numbers is not financially viable moving forward, so the provision will proceed on a course-by-course basis for this academic year. It was noted however that the data presented a positive picture in relation to the Initial Teacher Education programme and associated Level 3 and 4 pathways.

Modular delivery will be dependent on the Lifelong Learning Entitlement and partner validation. Singular modules had been agreed with ARU, but these have had to be rationalised and other HEIs are now competing as they deliver apprenticeships. The new partnership with the UoS has stalled and is unlikely to gain pace in time for September 2026 delivery but UcWA continues to pursue a validated model with ARU, and in the meantime is teaching out the franchised model. In addition, the college is planning to implement changes in A Level provision to enable pathways into higher education (Psychosocial for example).

Governors recognised the turbulent landscape and asked management what was needed from them. The team needs belief and the support to continue with HE as an important future strategic direction. Governors are hopeful that the future will be bright and once the sands have stopped shifting there will be a clearer path but, in the meantime, it was agreed that every element of delivery must be kept in focus in terms of quality and financial impact. Governors stressed the importance of working closely with the marketing team to promote the HE offer and keep the engagement with sixth forms. Additionally, the Deputy CEO/Vice

Principal Curriculum and Quality mentioned their interest in reinstating an HND and HNC model to widen participation and broaden the HE offer.

8 Management Accounts – September 2025

Overall, the accounts show a surplus against a budgeted deficit in the year to date, represented by income which is behind budget, a slight overspend in pay and an underspend on non-pay. It was noted that the forecast surplus of £307k remains unchanged.

The accounts support the financial health rating of 'outstanding' (250 points) and an EBITDA of 5.8%. The college's cash position is £12.9m including both cash at bank and short-term deposits.

Study programme recruitment is encouraging and should lead to in-year growth funding although this remains 'subject to affordability'. Increased student numbers will also impact on the college's cost base so any changes will be reflected in future versions of the management accounts which will improve the overall position. As agreed, by the Corporation at the meeting held on 15 October 2025 a pay award of 4.5% has been awarded to staff which will be paid in November 2025, back dated to August 2025. The budget had assumed a 4% pay increase and therefore this change will also be reflected in future management accounts and any reforecast of the budget.

The Head of Finance highlighted line 3.11 (capital grant release) that is £20k above budget. This income is partially offset with depreciation (line 3.29) which is currently showing an £18k overspend year to date. Governors wondered if the depreciation budget was incorrectly calculated or is there something that has caused the change in depreciation. In the main this is due to large capital grants, and timing variations. The Vice Principal Corporate Services explained that capital grants are held in the balance sheet as a capital grant deferred and then as the item is depreciated, that is funded through the capital grant, the depreciation that is charged for that item is matched by dripping the deferred amount into the income and expenditure accounts.

9 Funding Position and Data Control

The report detailed some small income variances against the 2024/25 budget for adult (ASF/FCFJ), apprenticeships and loans.

Study programme recruitment for this academic year is 3,653 learners (193 up on the 2024/25 R04 position). The current estimation is that this will fall to around 3,595 by the R04 submission point this year. Although less than the +300 planned, 130 learners would still attract in-year growth funding of c.£250k if no reductions to the in-year growth calculations are applied. However, it was noted that any in-year growth funding received is expected to be offset by around £178k associated with under-recruitment of T-Level learners. It was noted that no assumption has been made in the budget for in year growth funding.

Adult recruitment was reported to be strong and is on course to achieve budget. This income line will be subject to close monitoring to manage provision within allocation maximums, particularly with CPCA.

Apprenticeship recruitment is also strong, with a current position of £80k ahead of the same point last year against a full-year budgeted reduction of £200k.

Finally, it was confirmed that the previously advised c£27k exposure in relation to vulnerable learner bursaries has manifested but governors were assured that this remains the only funding adjustment of significance.

10 CWA Accounts for the year ended 31 July 2025

The financial statements continue to be in draft but in terms of the numbers the surplus remains the same at £1.1m as previously reported with a few adjustments made including

the impairment of the Tower Roof of £149k and impairment of investment (£418K) concerning CWA Enterprises (eliminated at consolidation level) plus holiday accrual and smaller adjustments in deferred income.

The Head of Finance highlighted the proposed loan waiver, intercompany balance with CWA Developments subsidiary of £50k which cannot be written off but will be written back to CWA financial statements due to it being a post balance sheet adjustment. A letter of comfort will not be necessary this year as confirmation in writing from the DfE has been received that the loan can be waived and written off.

The draft findings report from RSM has been received with a few areas to be completed before the final financial statements can be completed. Many of their findings relate to the Sun accounts system that will be resolved once the new finance system (BluQube) has been deployed. The other area highlighted is that CWA has held learner support funds for a few years (not treated as income) and some of the historic balances potentially should have been returned to the department and this is yet to be resolved.

The Head of Finance was thanked for her work and dedication of the team to finalise the accounts. The accounts will be subject to scrutiny and comment by the Audit and Risk committee at the meeting to be held on 3 December 2025 before presenting and recommending to the Corporation for approval at the meeting to be held on 17 December 2025.

1 Draft members report and financial statements

It was noted that the report from RSM UK Audit LLP will be shared with the committee once received.

VPCS/HoF

2 Draft letter of representation

Likewise, the letters of representation once received from RSM UK Audit LLP will be shared with the committee.

VPCS/HoF

11 Contracts £100k-£500k and Single Payments £1m

The report confirmed that there are four contracts with a value of £100k to £500k. The details of which were included in the report. It was noted that GDS Limited are a new tender provider as the Council have ceased student transport services. It was noted that single payments more than £1m is a nil return, within the reporting period (13 September to 31 October 2025).

F Bensihem joined the meeting at 10.00am

12 Energy Procurement

Annual expenditure on gas and electricity is a significant cost to the college. CWA has used a contracting authority to search the market and procure energy since 2012. The market has been tested several times during this appointment, but the college has not changed supplier.

Based on the information provided in the report the committee was asked to consider three options; 1) maintain the current relationship with the contracting authority, 2) move to an alternative supplier through the CPC procurement framework, or 3) consider other public sector routes to procure energy such as through Crown Commercial Services, or ESPO.

It was noted that based on analysis, there was no pressing case to change supplier at this time. There are some new suppliers joining the market and it was proposed to allow these to become established and test the market again in 12 months' time. The committee agreed with this approach, and this will be picked up in November 2026.

HoG

F Bensihem left the meeting at 10.05am

13 IT Strategy Update

The Assistant Principal Funding, Performance and Projects highlighted a number of important updates/activity;

- A small restructure of the IT Team was completed over the summer in line with ETIO benchmarking findings which resulted in some modest cost savings, simplifying responsibilities and improving flexibility within the team.
- MFA (Multi Factor Authentication) is intended to be applied to student accounts from September 2026. A working party is exploring the challenges/risks this may present for students to easily access college systems.
- The Data Loss Prevention Project is underway. This will ensure that CWA data is secure, tracked and properly labelled with classification and sensitivity labels. The college will have more control of who has access to data, enabling data to be tracked and prevent data leaks.

Many colleges are implementing MFA, and this is becoming a feature and requirement of CyberEssentials and is certainly more common practice to aid data security and protection. This has identified that every user will need to have their own email address, eradicating users sharing email addresses with siblings or parents for example. Governors expressed interest to participate in any cyber security training/workshops available. The college is about to launch training for all staff in addition to regular 'phishing' and cyber awareness campaigns.

HoG

14 Treasury Management Policy

The college's treasury management policy was approved last year but has been subject to review. The copy highlighted amendments using tracked changes. The main updates are references (in para 3.2) to the DfE's 'College Financial Handbook' rather than 'Treasury's Managing Public Money' and changes to the level of 'adequate cash reserves' (in para 3.7) to match those in the revised college Reserves Policy agreed at the last meeting of the committee. The committee had reviewed the document and **approved** the policy as presented subject to amending the date on the first page from 2024, to 2025.

VPCS

15 Financial Regulations – Annual Review

The college's financial regulations were subject to major update last year following the reclassification of FE Colleges into the central government sector and the introduction of a range of new regulations to meet the requirements of 'Treasury's Managing Public Money'.

It was noted that the changes this year are relatively minor, and these were highlighted in the document using tracked changes. The committee considered the amendments and will recommend the Financial Regulations to the Corporation for approval at the meeting to be held on 17 December 2025

Chair

16 Strategic Targets 2025/26 Progress Review

A review of the 2025/26 seven strategic targets monitored by the committee has been completed. In summary 1 target has been achieved, 1 has made good progress, 4 have made reasonable progress and 1 (target 4.10) is behind target. This relates to the use of Power BI and more work is needed to overcome barriers before it can be fully utilised.

The Chair suggested that the committee also receives updates on the progress with strategic targets concerning the implementation of the New Finance System and the Property Strategy update. It was noted that a meeting of the Property Steering Group will be convened for the new year.

HoG

J Solomon left the meeting at 10.20am

17 Any Other Business

The Chair asked to call a meeting of the new Finance System Task and Finish Group, and this will be convened in the new year. The implementation date has moved to 1 April 2026 for go live and additional resource has been added to the Finance Team to support effective progress of the implementation plan.

HoG

18 Chair's Items for Briefing to Corporation

- The committee received a Marketing Plan progress report with many KPIs achieved early on in the academic year.

Chair

- Subcontractor/partnership activity for this academic year is off to a good start with further enrolments to come in year.
- The committee took a focused look at HE financial performance acknowledging declining numbers and income but supports the continuation of UcWA as an important future strategic direction.
- The committee received the September Management Accounts. In summary the accounts support the financial health rating of 'outstanding' (250 points) and an EBITDA of 5.8%. The college's cash position is £12.9m including both cash at bank and short-term deposits.
- A revised forecast will be developed in the New Year once in year growth funding and other assumptions are known.
- At the time of the meeting the college had recruited 3,653 study programme learners (193 up on last year). Additional learners will attract in year growth funding (subject to affordability).
- Adult recruitment was reported to be strong and is on course to achieve budget.
- Apprenticeship recruitment is also strong, with a current position of £80k ahead of the same point last year.
- The committee received and considered the draft financial statements for the year ended 31 July 2025. The Audit and Risk Committee are to recommend the approval to the Board.
- The committee received an update against the IT Strategy and has expressed interest to receive cyber security training.
- The committee approved the update Treasury Management Policy.
- The committee recommends that the Corporation approves the college's Financial Regulations.
- Meetings of the Property Steering Group, and the New Finance System Task and Finish Group are to be convened for the New Year.

19 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Wednesday 11 March 2026 at 8:30am (Remote, via TEAMS)

Meeting ended at 10.25am