



## West Thames College Further Education Corporation

### Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporation

held at 6.00pm on Wednesday 11 October 2023  
at the College

<b>Present:</b>	Mr S McGeoch (SM)	Chair
	Ms T Aust (TA)	Principal
	Mr A Barke (AB)	
	Mr S Taylor (ST)	
	Ms R Turner (RT)	
	Mr P Sullivan (PS)	
	Mr A Rides (AR)	
	Ms A Cornish (AC)	
	Mr A Alimohamed (AA)	
	Ms T Kaur (TK)	
	Mr T Hayhoe (TH)	
<b>Apologies:</b>	Mr G Casley (GC)	
	Mr A Smith (AS)	
<b>In Attendance:</b>	Mr J Bolt (JB)	Associate Member
	Ms C Ajit Singh (CS)	Associate Member
	Mr B Armstrong (BA)	Associate Member
	Ms K Frost (KF)	Head of Governance
	Mr K Evans (KE)	Interim Executive Director
	Mr M Cooper (MC)	Executive Director
	Ms M Gajewska-Kopczyk (MGK)	Vice Principal
	Ms F Chalk (FC)	External Governance Reviewer

#### 44/23 **Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest**

PS took the Chair for the meeting and introductions were made. AA, CS, AB, TK and MC were attending the meeting virtually. Apologies for absence were received and accepted from GC and AS.

There were no declarations of interest concerning items on the agenda.

#### 45/23 **Report from External Review of Governance**

FC was in attendance to present the findings from the recent External Review of Governance. The report from the review had been received in advance of the meeting. (Paper 1). FC thanked members of the Corporation for their contributions during the external review process. Overall, the review had shown there was very strong governance in the College.

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One area that could be developed for even greater effectiveness was in challenge, support and impactful decision making. Consideration could be given to how the College could make more use of the knowledge and experience governors brought and how they could add further value by stretching thinking and bringing in new perspectives.

Governors tended to ask two types of questions in meetings, the first was asking questions for more information and the second for clarification. Questions for clarification made use of the considerable knowledge of the Board, testing management's assumptions and identifying where a governor could contribute value.

The Executive Team could ask governors questions to stimulate conversation in meetings and these could be added to reports. Questions might include how complete assumptions were, whether anything had been missed and whether there were any different points of view. This would generate more of a knowledge exchange in meetings.

Governors said they thought more communication should be taking place outside of the meeting rather than just focusing on what was taking place in the meeting as only so much richness could be achieved in the meeting itself. FC suggested governor information questions could be asked before meetings which would create extra time during meetings for strategic discussions. Another way to create more discussion time would be by making use of a Board Portal which could be used to sign/vote for documents outside of the meeting, just recording the decision made in the meeting.

Governors said a lot of discussion should happen at committee level. It was important to make effective use of the committee structure and ensure there were well structured committee agendas and communication of what had taken place at the committees.

FC said a second area that could be further developed was the governor ambassadorial role. Governors could use their spheres of influence to make the work of the College visible externally. They could also consider the resources and talents of people within their networks and think about how that could be used to enable the work of the College. This would then feed into the strategic planning in the Board room.

*SM entered the meeting and took the Chair*

Governors went through the full list of recommendations from the external review in small groups, identifying priority areas which included:

- Board reporting: revising reports to provide greater detail on strategic implications of data, detailing impact not activity, providing management insights and assumptions to generate questions in meetings. Governors should let the Executive Team know what they would like to see in reports.
- Meeting room culture: framing meetings as a place for collaborative oversight and shared inquiry where Board and Executive think and reflect together and there is discussion and dialogue. Moving away from presentation and tell to collaborative oversight.
- Ambassadorial role: greater clarity on this element of the governors' role and external stakeholder engagement. It would be important to ensure governors were giving a consistent message and felt confident representing the College. It would be important for governors to get to know each other and the strengths each brought.
- Generative governance: engaging the Board early in strategic thinking.
- Internal informal stakeholder engagement.
- Committee functions: facilitating opportunities for chair peer support/planning.
- Re-ordering Board agendas.

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It was suggested a different way of working would impact on the organisation and arrangements for meetings. A further discussion about how to move forward could be held at the Corporation Strategy Day in the spring term.

The following immediate actions were agreed:

SM would work with KF, PS and the Executive Team to look at how meetings could be made more effective:

**Action: SM**

TA would work with KF and SM to define how governors could best fulfil the ambassadorial role for the College.

**Action: TA**

Governors thanked FC for all her time spent on the External Review which had been really useful.

#### 46/23 **Minutes of the Last Meeting**

a) **Minutes from the Last Meeting**

Minutes from the meeting of the Corporation held on 5 July 2023 (Paper 2) were received in advance of the meeting. IT WAS DECIDED they were a true record of the meeting and they were approved.

b) **Matters Arising**

The 'Summary Action List' was received in advance of the meeting (Paper 3) and progress made towards the actions agreed was noted.

The following matters arising were discussed:

39/23: The contribution level for T Levels was low because the courses were running with fewer students than would be optimal.

41/23: The updated strategic risk register was almost ready and would be shared with the Corporation.

#### 47/23 **Finance, Human Resources and Audit**

a) **Dashboard Review**

The Corporation reviewed progress towards the KPIs in the Data Dashboard:

Performance against allocations: The College had exceeded the target for 16-19 students, 1720 compared to the target of 1711. Adult student numbers were 1% below target. Provision for any funding claw back had been factored into the accounts.

The operating result for 2022-23 was a surplus of £260k which was better than expected. The Financial Health Score had improved to 230. Governors asked whether the College was fully compliant with the Barclays loan covenant. MC said it was fully compliant and there were no concerns.

Sickness absence had reduced but was still higher than the target of 4.6%. Long term sickness absence was 2.7%. Staff Turnover was 17.8% compared to a target of

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19%. The turnover for support staff was slightly higher than other areas but this was consistent with other years. Staff ethnicity remained broadly representative of the student body.

**b) Draft Year End Management Accounts**

The 'Draft Year End Management Accounts' (Papers 4a and 4b) were received in advance of the meeting.

Governors said they were disappointed to see that there had been underutilisation of funding for industry placements and free meals, particularly in the cost of living crisis. They asked what the College was doing to try to use the funding more effectively. The CEO/Principal said the College was doing a lot of work with students to encourage them to take up the opportunity of free meals. This included student focus groups, amendments to the amount that could be claimed and bringing it up in tutorials. It was a similar position in other colleges. Governors asked whether the College required parental contribution for the application process and noted that parents might be required to supply evidence. The College supported students to complete forms and provide the necessary evidence. As it was a national issue it was agreed MC would make enquiries with other Colleges to discuss lobbying, via the Association of Colleges, for a change in thresholds or to make it easier to claim.

**Action:** MC

Governors asked what action was being taken to increase the number of apprentices. The CEO/Principal said the College was working with various organisations, focusing particularly on local priority areas and targeting specific events and employers. Apprentice numbers, particularly for younger students, were down nationally. AR said he had invited the College to a Business Awards event to discuss apprenticeships with 300 local businesses.

Governors noted there had been a large saving on vacant posts not filled and asked how the College managed without the posts being filled. The CEO/Principal said it varied. Whenever a post became vacant, consideration would be given to see if it was still necessary. Interim cover would be arranged if needed. Recruitment and retention of staff was a massive issue across the sector.

**c) Staff Pay Award**

'Financial Background to the Pay Award Recommendation' (Paper 4b) was received in advance of the meeting.

The Corporation discussed the recommendation made by the Executive Team to pay a 7% pay award. The discussion included the potential risks to the College's financial position and the possible mitigating actions that could be taken if the risks crystallised.

IT WAS DECIDED to approve a staff pay award of 7%

**d) Chair's Action**

At the last meeting of the Corporation it had been decided to delegate the decision about approval of energy contracts to the Chair. The Chair reported that he had approved spend on the new energy contracts of approx. £780k.

*MC left the meeting.*

**48/23 Curriculum and Quality**

**a) Dashboard Review**

The Corporation reviewed the final year end position in the Data Dashboard:

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- Teaching Learning and Assessment and Deep Dives: There had been no changes since the last meeting of the Corporation. The Development Plan targets for last academic year had been met.
- Attendance was 85% at the end of last academic year, which was below target. The Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience Committee had agreed a target of 87% for this academic year.
- Achievement was largely in line with predictions. The final position would be known in the next few weeks.

b) **Report from Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience (CQSE) Committee**  
Minutes from the meeting of the CQSE Committee held on 4 October 2023 (Paper 5) had been received in advance of the meeting.

Governors said the achievement rates were incredibly good and hadn't been impacted by the issues with staff sickness, recruitment and retention.

c) **Annual Safeguarding Report**

The 'Annual Safeguarding Report 2023' (Paper 6) was received in advance of the meeting. The report had been considered in detail by the Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience Committee.

Governors asked who would replace MM as Chair of the operational safeguarding team and noted it would be Sam Louisy who was the new Director of Student Experience and the safeguarding lead for the College.

Governors asked whether the safeguarding audit had been completed in 2023. The CEO/Principal said it had been completed in September 2023. The timings for the audit had changed this year.

Governors said they were surprised to read that supervision for DSLs needed to be formalised. The CEO/Principal said supervision took place but the College needed to formalise how it happened.

Governors asked whether the College knew why 8% students said they didn't feel safe. It was agreed this would be looked into.

**Action:** MGK

IT WAS DECIDED to receive the Annual Safeguarding Report.

d) **Safeguarding Policy 2023-24**

The 'Safeguarding Policy 2023-24' (Paper 7) was received in advance of the meeting. The Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience Committee had reviewed the policy at their meeting on 3 October 2023 and were recommending it to the Corporation for approval.

Governors asked for the wording on section 4, to be changed to read 'The Corporation' and for the first sentence to refer to the Corporation rather than 'College Governors'. They also asked for a reference to carers to be added to section 11.

**Action:** MGK/SL

Governors asked for future Annual Safeguarding Reports to include reference to the items listed in section 4 of the Safeguarding Policy.

**Action:** MGK/SL

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Governors discussed whether reading the Safeguarding Policy should be a requirement for governors and whether checks should be undertaken to ensure it had been completed. It was felt there were sufficient expectations in place. Governors were required to complete annual Safeguarding Training which included reference to the College Safeguarding Policy. Training records were kept which identified whether this had been completed. Governors were also asked to approve the Safeguarding Policy annually at the first Corporation meeting of every academic year.

Governors asked how they gained assurance that the College was contributing towards interagency working in line with Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018. It was agreed this would be provided in future safeguarding reports.

Subject to the suggested amendments, IT WAS DECIDED to approve the Safeguarding Policy 2023-24.

## 49/23 Resources and Student Experience

### a) Dashboard Review

The Corporation reviewed progress towards the KPIs in the Data Dashboard. There had been no change in terms of Health and Safety data. Work was underway on analysing the number of accidents to see if any mitigations could be put in place to reduce numbers in future years.

The tender process for the solar panel project was underway, with award now expected in November and project completion in April 2024. The de-carbonisation plan was on track, as was work towards the sustainability roadmap.

## 50/23 Strategic Report

### a) Executive Report

The 'Executive Report' (Paper 8) was received in advance of the meeting. The CEO/Principal drew attention to key points in the report:

- Following on from publication of the LSIP, the College was working with partner colleges on a new LSIF project. The College would lead on Creative and Media and Logistics.
- The College had been shortlisted for an award with the West London Chamber as training provider of the year and had nominated an apprentice for a national award with the Institute of Couriers.

Governors thanked the team for the report which was useful and contained the right level of content.

Governors asked how it benefited the College to work with other local colleges. The CEO/Principal explained that the College was required to demonstrate it was working in collaboration with other organisations to meet local and regional needs. Funding opportunities increasingly required a collaborative bid with other institutions.

### b) Development Plan 2022-23 Final Position

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The 'Development Plan 2022-23 Final Position' (Paper 9) was received in advance of the meeting. The CEO/Principal said that the final position was positive overall with the majority of targets achieved.

c) **Development Plan 2023-24**

The 'Draft Development Plan 2023-24' (Paper 10) was received in advance of the meeting.

The CEO/Principal asked governors to send any specific feedback about targets by 13 October 2023.

Governors asked about the process that had been undertaken for deciding on the targets in the Development Plan. The CEO/Principal said the Development Plan targets had been developed from the 3 year Strategic Plan and the Accountability Statement.

Governors asked how committed the College was to starting new T Level courses next year following the low take up for courses for this year and the recent Government statement about merging T Levels with A Levels into a new qualification. The CEO/Principal said the College was taking a cautious approach to T Levels. T Levels in Construction and Childcare would start next year to ensure the College had an appropriate Level 3 option but the digital T Level wouldn't go ahead.

IT WAS DECIDED to approve the Development Plan 2023-24.

51/23 **Governance**

a) **Membership of the Remuneration Committee**

IT WAS DECIDED that AC and AR would become members of the Remuneration Committee.

b) **Remuneration Committee Terms of Reference**

The 'Remuneration Committee Terms of Reference' (Paper 11) was received in advance of the meeting with some proposed amendments.

IT WAS DECIDED to approve the Remuneration Committee terms of reference.

c) **Action Update: Actions from Curriculum Link Visits.**

A report on the actions taken following recommendations from Governor Curriculum Link Visits (Paper 12) was received in advance of the meeting and was noted.

52/23 **Date of the Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting of the Corporation was Wednesday 13 December 2023.

**Summary of Actions**

No.	Action	Lead	Target Date
45/23a	Work with KF, PS and the Executive Team to look at how meetings could be made more effective.	SM	Dec 23

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45/23a	TA to work with KF and SM to define how governors could best fulfil the ambassadorial role for the College.	TA/KF/SM	Dec 23
47/23	Make enquiries with other Colleges regarding lobbying via the Association of Colleges to change thresholds for Free Meals or make it easier to claim.	MC	Dec 23
48/23	Look into why 8% students said they didn't feel safe in the College in the survey referred to in the Annual Safeguarding Report.	MGK	Dec 23

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