

**PUBLIC MINUTES OF
THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS BUSINESS BOARD MEETING HELD ON
2 OCTOBER 2025**

Present:

Mr W Abbott (External Board Member/Board Chair)
Ms A Berry (External Board Member)
Mr M Burgess (Principal)
Mr T Burrell (External Board Member)
Mr R Cousins (Staff Member)
Ms S Dalby (Staff Member)
Mr A Dover (External Board Member)
Mr M Fabian (External Board Member)
Ms M James (External Board Member/Board Vice-Chair)
Mr P Lachecki (External Board Member)
Dr H Moyes (External Board Member) – MS Teams
Ms S McKinlay (External Board Member)
Ms G Read (External Board Member)
Mr M Williams (External Board Member)

Apologies:

Ms S Robertson (External Board Member)

In Attendance:

Mr A Bates - Chief Financial Officer
Ms J Cosson – Head of Governance
Dr K Morris – Vice-Principal, Curriculum and Quality
Ms H Snelling - Director of People, Facilities and Infrastructure

Attendance: 93.3%

70/25 Private Business

None.

71/25 Apologies

None.

72/25 Declarations of Interest

It was confirmed that the Register of Interests recorded all the current declarations of interests of those present. PL noted his interest in item 88/25. Members agreed that he would be allowed to remain for the discussion but would abstain from voting.

73/25 Confidentiality of Items

As marked (C) for a period of two years. All the marked items were declared confidential on the grounds of commercial sensitivity.

74/25 Minutes of the Meeting of 10 July 2025

The minutes of the meeting were approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

75/25 Matters Arising from the Minutes and Actions Matrix

None.

76/25 Principal's Update

MB highlighted the items of note from his paper.

- The College has filled the main managerial vacancies and generally made a good start to the year.
- Enrolment continues to be strong.
- The financial position remains robust.
- The College has self-assessed as "Good", and learner results for 2024/25 look strong.
- There are several emerging issues to consider including:
 - The economic situation affecting the UK.
 - Political uncertainty and the increasing likelihood of a government being formed from outside of the traditional parties.
 - Breakdowns in community and what this means for learners.
 - Uncertainties around HNS funding.
 - The College's positioning in terms of devolution of 16-19 training.

MB reported that, despite the challenges, the College remains in a good place across all aspects: Curriculum, Staffing, Estates, Finance.

Members reviewed the KPIs and Scorecard. It was noted that, given the new Ofsted Toolkit, the categories within 3 (student outcomes and curriculum) will need to be updated and evaluated. It is intended that this work will be complete by October half-term.

Members debated the community cohesion issues emerging within society in the context of the College's values. They agreed on the importance of teaching critical thinking and that the College must maintain a neutral position whilst being clear about where it stands in relation to its values.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead Governor reported that she had attended an online DfE Prevent training this week and had followed up, via JC, with some questions for the interim DSL. JC will provide the questions and responses to the next C&Q meeting. She noted that there is also a high level of anxiety in schools about divisions within society and the need to balance the development of critical thinking with managing conversations and free speech.

Members heard from those Members from HE as to how their organisations are approaching the tensions between protecting freedom of speech/expression and preventing extremism.

It was agreed that there is work to do to support staff to manage difficult conversations in the classroom and online and to challenge thinking. This is particularly tricky for staff in certain areas who are dealing with a range of students. The College will be devoting part of the October Professional Development Day to giving staff confidence in this area. A Member recommended the MOD 'active bystander' training. KM advised that academic staff have had this training but would benefit from refresher training. SD suggested professional services staff should be included too.

The Chair concluded that it appeared to have been a good start to the year with some short-term challenges and other strategic issues emerging but the College is in a good position to face them.

RESOLVED: The Principal's Update was noted.

77/25 Update on Start of Term and Ofsted Toolkit Presentation (C)

KM provided an update on the start of term and gave a presentation on the new Ofsted Toolkit.

She reported that enrolment for full time September starts closes today. It has been a busy start to the year with courses quickly filling to capacity. The College has managed to accommodate all applicants but some have been given careers advice and guidance to help steer them towards different courses.

There have been some issues with students not wearing lanyards but the College is on top of it and not giving students any leeway.

Academic staff are working on initial assessments to determine learners' starting points.

Moving on to the Ofsted Toolkit, KM explained that, following the consultation, there have been some key changes to the framework since she first presented it.

KM took Members through the three documents in the framework, the timescale and principles of its implementation and the logistics for inspections. Inspections will start from 10 November 2025 with phone calls beginning on 3 November.

There is a stronger emphasis on leadership as a driver of sustained improvement, and on Inclusion. Inspectors will consider what leaders and managers are aiming to achieve, how well they are doing it and how they know it is working. Their starting point is the 'expected' standard in each of the evaluation areas in the Toolkit.

KM ran through the elements of the 'Report Card' and how each evaluation area will be graded. Members heard how the previous 'deep dives' have moved to 'case sampling' of inspection focus areas and learnt how 'Inclusion' will be assessed as a judgement in its own right but also interwoven into each judgement. KM advised

that the College should not be unduly nervous about the Inclusion evaluation because this is strong but it does need to be consistent.

KM went on to focus on Safeguarding and Leadership and Governance in the new framework, including the expectations of governors. The presentation covered Meeting Skills Needs; Curriculum, Teaching and Training; Achievement; Participation and Development and concluded with the actions the College is taking to ensure it is inspection ready.

RC joined the meeting.

Members debated the implications for the College of the need to hit every criterion within an evaluation area in order to meet the 'expected standard' rather than the previous 'best fit' approach. They also queried what the new intervention triggers will be under the new inspection regime.

A Member asked what the 'duty desk' is and was informed that this is how Ofsted monitors quality at a distance during the inspection.

Members discussed arrangements for governor involvement during inspection and the need for further preparation in the coming weeks.

RESOLVED: The Update on the Start of Term and Ofsted Toolkit Presentation were noted.

78/25 People Update (C)

HS provided an update on staff recruitment, retention challenges, and the effectiveness of recent initiatives, highlighting the collaborative efforts of the People Team and College Managers, and discussing data-driven approaches, creative solutions, and compliance with safe recruitment standards.

HS explained that, while recruitment remains challenging in certain areas, the team has developed robust data tracking over the past year, allowing for targeted campaigns in critical sectors such as SEND and Construction. It is important to recognise that, despite the challenges in certain areas, the College's employer brand is good with a good offer that is attractive. The College is recruiting well outside of these 'pocket' areas, and turnover remains consistent, with efforts focused on maintaining positions and addressing retention issues.

A Member queried the recruitment statistics showing 15 shortlisted applicants for a library vacancy, which appeared high. HS explained that there may have been more than one vacancy. Also, applicants are telephone screened first so that may have been the longlisted number. Another Member wondered why there were no shortlisted candidates in some areas and was informed that this could be due to poor job specification or positioning or poor quality of applicants.

The People Team is working closely with Managers to identify creative recruitment solutions, such as considering applicants for alternative roles if they are not suitable for the original position, and adapting job specifications when necessary. For example, a recent role was re-advertised to capture candidates with partial

suitability, and a formal talent pipeline process was introduced in September to redirect promising applicants.

The team has observed an increase in AI-generated applications, making screening more challenging. A Member commented that software is available to detect this. HS is comfortable that measures such as early-stage Teams interviews and robust checks are in place to ensure candidates can perform the job, and the College is considering further technical solutions to address the issue. MB added that the Audit Committee is monitoring the governance of AI and staff are very alive to the risks. A Member confirmed that a similar approach is being taken in their own workplace.

HS reported that safe recruitment compliance is being maintained, with regular monitoring and reporting to governors. The process is robust and Ofsted-related safe recruitment monitoring occurs six times a year. The Board's Designated Safeguarding Lead Governor is invited to attend.

HS detailed the progress of the Aspire leadership programme, the introduction of the Lead Together forum for all people managers, and the overhaul of the appraisal process, with support from senior managers and a focus on cross-College communication. The Aspire programme is aimed at developing leadership skills. A new cohort has just been launched with a focus on inclusive College communication.

A Member congratulated HS on the progress made with the People Team and commented that this is a reflection of the leadership of the team. They wondered how candidates are selected for the Aspire programme. HS replied that applicants submit an expression of interest. They require managerial support and undergo a mini-interview with the Executive Team. Numbers for the programme are restricted so that groups are not too big. The next cohort will start in January. The programme includes collaborative projects, with last year's cohort successfully overhauling the appraisal process.

The appraisal process, redesigned by the Aspire cohort, is moving away from ratings and tick-box forms towards meaningful conversations. The pilot received positive feedback from staff and Managers, and a full rollout is planned for January, with ongoing feedback and adjustments anticipated.

A new forum, Lead Together, has been established for all people managers to provide briefings, workshops, and a support network. The forum aims to address gaps in managerial training and improve cross-College communication, a key area identified in staff surveys. Senior managers play an active role in supporting the Aspire cohort, acting as links between participants and the wider management team. This approach has encouraged more senior managers to engage with the programme, enhancing its impact and integration. Members praised this initiative, acknowledging that enhancing the employee offer through training, benefits and reducing sickness absence are basics which will enable the College to become an employer of choice.

RESOLVED: The People Update was noted.

Year End Initial Forecast 2024/25

AB presented an update on the College's financial performance, reporting higher-than-expected income from Apprenticeships and Adult funding, the impact of new HE partnerships, and the implications for future funding and budget planning.

The College finished the year with income higher than forecast, primarily due to a cautious budget and an increase in Apprenticeship funding, strong ESOL exam results, and maximised Adult funding claims. However, the College reached the 110% funding cap, resulting in a reduction in Adult funding for the following year.

A new income stream from HE partnerships, which had been de-risked, contributed positively to the financial results, mitigating some risks identified in the financial plan. It was noted that these were largely one-off gains and do not significantly alter long-term forecasts.

AB will prepare a full reforecast for the December Board meeting and is not envisaging a significant increase. Early indications suggest an increase in 16–18-year-old enrolments, which may lead to higher, lagged funding next year but may result in some additional, in-year funding in February. The College remains cautious due to potential government funding constraints and the non-recurring nature of some income sources.

Members emphasised the need to prepare for future challenges as growth rates in key learner demographics are not expected to continue.

A Member asked if the College uses demographic and marketing data to forecast and was informed that the College has good data and uses it to model six years ahead. MB added that previous research shows that the College's market share is predictable based on GCSE results.

Members were delighted to learn that the College's Financial Health grade is expected to be "Outstanding" for 2024-25 but wondered if this could be sustained. AB responded that, in the short term, the financial position looks strong but in the longer term the public finances and reducing demographics mean it is more concerning. The College is unlikely to see the same rate increase as it has seen this year or the same level of growth in learner numbers that have contributed to the positive figures. MB added that these factors have provided some resilience for the moment allowing the College to share its success, but the College must prepare for difficult years ahead.

The Chair concluded that, whilst there are some risks ahead, the College is moving into a more difficult position from a good position.

RESOLVED: The Year End Initial Forecast 2024/25 was noted.

80/25 Audit and Compliance (C)

Health and Safety Annual Report

Members reviewed the Health and Safety Annual Report.

As Health and Safety Link Governor, AD reported that the College had received a Gold Award for health and safety, which was highlighted as a significant achievement. Only three colleges and universities in the country received this award, reflecting substantial improvements and a strong, organisation-wide safety culture and commitment to health and safety. AD reported that the College can be considered a safe place, with everyone in the organisation taking health and safety seriously.

RESOLVED: The Health and Safety Annual Report was noted. Members congratulated the College on the achievement of the Gold Award.

Risk Management Update, Risk Management Annual Report and Board Assurance Framework

Members reviewed the above papers which had been presented to the last Audit Committee meeting.

The Risk Register had been reviewed and updated. There still exists significant policy uncertainty for the sector and the College.

The Annual Risk Management Report for 2024/25 provided an overview of the focus and key areas of risk in the last academic year. It reflects on the key threats identified during the period which was characterised by significant uncertainty as the newly elected government looked to implement changes in policy, in an economically challenging period of public finances.

The Board Assurance Framework (BAF) had been reviewed and updated specifically to include changes to the lines of assurance. All risk themes remain green, and it was proposed that the BAF would not be presented to the Board again this academic year, unless the Executive Team judges that any RAG ratings have fallen short of 'green'.

The Chair summarised by saying that it feels that there is even more uncertainty. There are some short-term risks that the College must continue to manage. In terms of longer term and more strategic risks, the main risk area for the College continues to be the economic health of the country, rather than operational or compliance-related risks. In addition, the political uncertainty and increasing likelihood of a government being formed from outside of the traditional parties as well as breakdowns in community cohesion and potential changes to HNS funding and devolution of 16-19 funding could have significant consequences for the College.

RESOLVED: Members noted the Risk Management Update, the changes to the Principal Risk Register, the Risk Management Annual Report and the Board Assurance Framework.

It was agreed that, going forward, the BAF will be presented in the first term of the academic year, and only presented again if the Executive Team

assesses that assurance levels, based on existing lines of assurance, fall below green for any of the themes.

Subcontracting Update

AB provided an update on the College's current two subcontracting partners:

- University of the West of England (UWE) for the degree apprenticeship programmes.
- Global ATS for the Air Traffic Controller Apprenticeship.

Additionally, AB reported that the College is working towards a new subcontracting arrangement with Young Gloucestershire to deliver a Prince's Trust (King's Trust) programme, which will require DfE approval for 16-19 / ASF funding, for which there are extra rules.

AB requested the Board's approval to the 2025/25 Subcontracting (Fees and Charges) Policy later in the papers. This needs to be signed off and available on the College's website by 31 October 2025.

RESOLVED: The Board noted the Subcontracting Update and approved the continuing subcontracting arrangements with UWE and Global ATS and the proposed subcontracting arrangements with Young Gloucestershire.

81/25 Approval of Policies (C)

- **Child Protection and Safeguarding**
- **DBS**
- **Sexual Misconduct (Students)**
- **Communication and Acceptable Use**
- **Health and Safety**
- **Code of Conduct (Staff)**
- **Flexible Working**
- **Bullying and Harassment**
- **Disciplinary**
- **Recruitment and Selection**
- **Redundancy**
- **Subcontracting (Fees and Charges)**
- **Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy and Strategy**

Members reviewed the above policies.

HS explained that a thorough review of staffing policies had been conducted, with changes summarised on the cover sheets. The aim was to shorten and clarify policies, making them more user-friendly, removing outdated or redundant content and ensuring all staff, including Senior Post Holders, are covered by the same processes.

The current Senior Post Holder Disciplinary Policy has therefore been replaced by the all-staff Disciplinary Policy which incorporates new wording to cover Senior Post

Holders. This wording has also been included in the other updated staffing policies presented.

The all-staff Grievance and Capability Policies are due to be reviewed but have not yet been reviewed and therefore the current Senior Post Holder Grievance and Capability Policies still apply for the time being. The Sickness Absence Policy created earlier in the year does not yet have the wording to cover Senior Post Holders but this will be amended and presented for approval in due course.

The intention is that every staffing policy will apply to every employee equally.

With regard to the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, KM explained that this was reviewed by DK before he left the College and will be updated again now that the new DSL has started.

JC advised that the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy and Strategy has been updated to take into account the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023 in force from September 2025. A new section has been added to the policy, setting out the College's obligations.

The Financial Controller has assessed the implication of the Act for the College and concluded that, in terms of risk management, the College has a comprehensive policy and strategy that are reviewed regularly. A strong control framework is in place to identify, prevent, monitor, and report fraud. These measures are supported by the Fraud Checklist, which has been reviewed and updated to ensure that the key principles of the Act are embedded across the College's operations.

RESOLVED: The policies were approved.

82/25 Committee, Subsidiary Company and Link Governor Reports (C)

- **EWG – 23 September**
- **C&Q – 24 September**
- **Audit – 25 September**
- **Link Governor Reports**

MF provided an update on the first meeting of the newly re-formed EWG overseeing progress with the 125 Business Park project.

EWG reviewed the lessons from previous projects and agreed the group's terms of reference for recommendation to the Board.

RESOLVED: Members reviewed the proposed EWG Terms of Reference included in the meeting papers and approved them.

MJ reported that the C&Q meeting in September had considered the SAR and QIP and approved them. Both documents were included in the meeting papers for notification.

AD reported on the last Audit Committee meeting. IT staffing is now complete, and the College's internal auditors have provided their annual assurance opinion – reasonable assurance – based on their work during the last academic year. AD was pleased to report that the College is one of only three institutions to receive the Gold

Award for health and safety, reflecting significant improvements and organisation-wide commitment. AD requested Members to increase their completion of the Boxphish courses sent to them.

MW reported on his latest meeting with DK, EH, ST and FC in his capacity as Careers and Skills Link Governor. Staff had discussed with him the challenges of finding work experience for students within SMEs and had requested funding for some specialist software. Members discussed the opportunities for construction work experience locally with the new cyber park contract having recently been awarded. The social value element was mentioned. The College is holding the first social value event relating to the cyber park in the next few weeks.

GR provided feedback from her Mental Health Link Governor role. She commended the recent Safeguarding training for governors, particularly the link with mental health. GR will arrange a meeting with HS to review the Mental Health Action Plan in view of the pressures on staff.

Members discussed the value of external awards in recognising and celebrating staff achievements and the College's successes, and the potential for further award submissions in order to boost staff morale and promote the College as a great place to work.

As HE Link Governor, HM raised the upcoming regulatory changes in HE, including safeguarding requirements and the potential impact of the successor to the TEF, noting that it is the first time the College will be brought into scope for the successor the TEF. MB confirmed that the College is following developments.

HM also noted that new freedom of speech regulation will present challenges for colleges with higher education provision.

She considered that the College is considered well placed to navigate these changes.

SD reported that, from a staff perspective, it had been a good start to the year. The changes to lanyards are still embedding but are an improvement.

RESOLVED: The Committee, Subsidiary Company and Link Governor Reports were noted and Link Governors thanked for their time in carrying out their Link Governor activities.

83/25 Items for Notification

Members reviewed the following items referred to in the committee reports and presented for by the committees.

- **SAR & QIP (from C&Q)**
- **Annual Internal Audit Report (from Audit)**

RESOLVED: The Items for Notification were received and noted.

84/25 Use of College Seal

RESOLVED: The Board noted and endorsed the use of the Seal as set out in the paper.

65/25 Governance Matters

Governance and Regulatory Developments

JC presented the key governance and regulatory developments governor need to be aware of, highlighting the actions in relation to each of them.

1. Government Responsibility Changes

- **Apprenticeships, adult FE, skills training, and Skills England** now fall under the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Higher education and under-19 provision remain with DfE.
- **Action:** For information only.

2. Safeguarding and Prevent

- **KCSIE 2025** guidance updated: statutory attendance guidance, online safety risks (disinformation, conspiracy theories), AI guidance, alternative provision, and kinship care responsibilities.
- **Action:** Governors will receive KCSIE and annual criminal declaration confirmations soon. Briefing provided at Safeguarding Workshop.

3. Financial Sustainability, Funding, Audit

- **Senior Pay Approval:** Updated guidance and thresholds for pay over £174,000 and bonuses over £25,000.
- **College Financial Handbook 2025:** Refreshed to reflect new pay approval thresholds.
- **FE Transaction Approval:** New form for requesting approval for NCR transactions.
- **New FE Commissioner:** Ellen Thinnesen appointed from January.
- **OfS Registration:** New requirements for governance, fraud, and public funds.
- **Fraud Reporting:** Updated guidance for reporting fraud/financial irregularity.
- **Action:** For information; relevant items passed to Financial Controller.

4. Legislation/Legal

- **Employment Rights Bill:** Major reforms, including day-one paternity leave and removal of unfair dismissal service requirement by 2027.
- **Public Office Accountability Bill:** New ethical duties, candour requirements, and adherence to Nolan principles.
- **Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023:** 'Failure to prevent fraud' offence applies from 1 September 2025.
- **Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023:** New duties for HE providers to protect freedom of speech; review College's Code on Freedom of Speech.
- **EDI:** New guides on disability duties for FE colleges and governors.
- **Action:** Updates noted; some items for future board discussion.

5. Curriculum

- **Awaited:** Curriculum and Assessment Review, Post-16 White Paper, SEND White Paper.

6. Ofsted

- **New Inspection Framework:** 5-point grading scale, up to 16 judgements, focus on inclusion, safeguarding, and leadership. Inspections start 10 November 2025.
 - **DfE Intervention Policy:** To be updated in light of new grading system.
 - **Action:** Board to be briefed on new framework.
- 7. OfS (Office for Students)**
- **Freedom of Speech & Harassment:** New duties from 1 August 2025.
 - **Consultations:** On sub contractual provision and major quality regulation changes.
 - **Action:** For information.
- 8. Sustainability**
- **Energy and Carbon Reporting:** Updated guidance for 2024-25 accounts.
 - **Action:** Passed to Head of Estates.
- 9. Cyber and AI**
- **Critical Issues for Boards:** Guidance passed to Head of IT and Digital Technology Link Governor.
- 10. Governance**
- **DfE FE Governance Guide:** Updated, including executive pay and SEND links.
 - **External Governance Reviews:** New sector report; GC next external review due 2026/27.
 - **AoC Governance Support:** Helpline and resources available.
 - **Action:** Governors to note updates and resources.
- 11. Governor Training and Development**
- **AoC SW Region Key Facts:** Fact sheet available.
 - **Record of Governor Learning and Development Activity:** Please review.
 - **Training Opportunities:** Rolling programme available on Teams.
 - **FEA Governor Development Programme:** Open for sign-up.
 - **Chairs Leadership Programme:** Booking open for 2025-26.
 - **Action:** Governors to sign up for relevant development opportunities.

RESOLVED: The Board noted the Governance and Regulatory Developments since the last meeting and the actions taken as a result.

Governor Learning and Development Activity

RESOLVED: The Board noted the Governor Learning and Development activities, which enrich governors' understanding and oversight of the College.

85/25 Any Other Business

None.

67/25 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Strategy Board Meeting – 13 November 2025, 4.00pm – 7.00pm, Gloucester.

RC and SD left the meeting.

EXTERNAL MEMBERS ONLY

88/25 Staff Pay Award

Confidential External Members Only Minute.

Signed: 

Dated: 13/11/25