Gloucestershire College

PUBLIC MINUTES OF
THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS STRATEGY BOARD MEETING HELD ON
22 MAY 2025

Present:
Mr W Abbott (External Board Member/Board Chair)
Mr M Burgess (Principal)
Ms S Dalby (Staff 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 S McKinlay (External Board Member)
Ms A Nutbrown (Staff Member)
Ms G Read (External Board Member) (up to and including item 42/25)

Apologies:
Ms A Berry (External Board Member)
Mr T Burrell (External Board Member)
Mr A Dover (External Board Member)
Mr N Greenway (Student Member)
Ms S Robertson (External Board Member)
Mr M Williams (External Board Member)

In Attendance:
Mr A Bates - Chief Financial Officer
Ms F Chalk – via Teams (item 41/25)
Ms J Cosson – Head of Governance
Mr S Harvey – Co-opted Member
Mr D Kettlety - Director of Student Employment and Experience
Dr K Morris – Vice-Principal, Curriculum and Quality
Ms H Snelling - Director of People and Culture

Attendance: 62.5%

35/25 Private Business

None.

36/25 Apologies

Were noted as above.

37/25 Declarations of Interest

It was confirmed that the Register of Interests recorded all the current declarations of interests of those present.

38/25 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.

39/25 Minutes of the Meeting of 27 March 2025

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

40/25 Matters Arising from the Minutes and Actions Matrix

Members were provided with an Actions Matrix and noted the status update of each item.

41/25 Board EDI Session (C)

Building Inclusive Boards: Unlocking the Power of Diversity - Fiona Chalk

FC had been invited to present to the Board following a session she delivered an AoC EDI networking event attended by HM and GR in November last year.

FC began with the message that inclusion at board level is not just about representation - it is about how board members interact, make decisions, and value diverse perspectives to enhance governance and outcomes. It is about creating a 'medley of minds' and allowing new voices to be given the opportunity to contribute.

FC explained what inclusion matters but stressed that it must be well managed in order to build high levels of trust.

FC challenged the Board to think beyond Members' professional expertise to their life experiences (e.g., socio-economic background, disability, community ties), which are as valuable as professional skills. She recommended that the Board should track and include lived experiences in its skills matrix.

During her presentation, FC addressed the 'skills vs. diversity myth i.e., the concern that is often expressed that seeking to increase diversity on a board might dilute skills. Instead, she suggested that the question needs to be reframed so that diversity broadens the definition of talent and enriches a board's capabilities.

In addition to increasing the diversity of members, FC encouraged the Board to create a culture of shared enquiry by promoting curiosity and mutual learning, encouraging questions over assertions and shifting from KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) to KPQs (Key Performance Questions).

Some practical tools for inclusion were offered.

FC finished by asking the Board to consider some reflective questions and proposing some actions for enhancing inclusion.

WA thanked FC for her presentation and particularly liked the Board discussion/decision making framework she suggested, which he intended to use immediately to start the strategy discussion. He acknowledged that inclusion is a continuous journey, but the Board is committed to it and aware of its responsibilities.

MB added that the presentation had provided the Executive Team with food for thought regarding the structure of meetings and governor input. HS added that the College is moving away from the terminology of 'EDI' towards a culture of 'belonging' and she would like to get a feel for the Board's comfort level and ambition for the 'belonging' strategy and how this work dovetails with the Board's work on inclusion.

A Member asked if GC had any views on the optimum size of an FE board and was informed that she did not. The size of GC's Board is average in the sector.

Board Diversity Assessment - Scott Harvey

Following on from FC's presentation, SH attended to present the findings from the cognitive assessments of Board Members carried out with a view to understanding the current diversity of thinking on the Board.

SH began by setting out the meaning of neurodiversity. This refers to the natural variation in how human brains are 'wired'. It includes differences in sensory processing, motor skills, social comfort, cognition, and focus. People are generally classified as:

- Neurotypical – within the average range.
- Neurodivergent – outside the average, with different neurological wiring.

He outlined some of the common neurodivergent conditions grouped under 'The Spectrum.

SH explained that neurodiversity is a form of invisible diversity that is not immediately apparent and often undisclosed. It challenges assumptions and requires intentional inclusion in hiring and workplace practices.

Neurodivergent people often bring unique and valuable skills but are often underemployed despite their capabilities. Inclusion requires:

- Adjusting hiring practices.
- Creating supportive environments.
- Recognising and valuing different cognitive styles.

The assessments carried out by SH focused on personality and cognitive preferences in order to understand how the current composition of the Board is impacting discussion and decision-making. The presentation linked neurodiversity to broader personality frameworks.

The key messages were that:

- Neurodiversity is normal and valuable.

- Inclusion benefits everyone - not just neurodivergent individuals.
- Understanding personality and cognitive preferences helps teams work better together.
- Diversity of thought is essential for innovation, empathy, and resilience.

SH took Members through the results of the assessments on a general rather than individual basis. He offered to speak with individual Members about their own results if they would like to.

Members wondered if the results were subjective in that they may differ depending on one's emotional state or the capacity in which one answers e.g., volunteer roles as opposed to work role. SH agreed that they might and assured Members that there are no right or wrong answers to the assessment. They are only indications of preferences. The important thing is that the Board is aware of them and takes steps to address any perceived imbalance/gaps.

Members felt it would be helpful for the same exercise to be carried out on the Executive Team, even though they were aware that the Executive Team may have undergone similar assessments as part of their leadership development.

Members wondered whether it would be more meaningful, if everyone agrees, to share individual results with each other as part of a getting to know each other exercise with the aim of using each Member's strengths to best effect. GRS will reflect on this, and on the next steps in relation to the findings, at its next meeting.

RESOLVED: The Board Diversity Assessment Presentation was noted and SH thanked for his time and efforts in enabling it.

SH to carry out assessments on Executive Team.

GRS to reflect on whether to share individual Members' results, and on the next steps in relation to the findings, at its next meeting.

42/25 Strategic Context Update (C)

Using the framework for discussion suggested by FC, WA asked each Member what they would like to say and hear about this item and what they would like to get out of the discussion.

Members indicated they would like:

- To understand the thought processes that have gone into the Accountability Statement and the next strategic plan and who has contributed to them.
- To be clear what is required of the Board.
- To understand how realistic/workable the Accountability Statement and the College's new strategic plans are.
- To better understand the challenges in meeting the Accountability Statement.

MB reported that the College's current Strategic Plan runs out in 2026. The plan addressed various challenges faced during the pandemic and was formulated with a focus on recovering from COVID-19. The next strategic plan will be prepared in the autumn. This plan will focus on the direction of the College and the work plan for the upcoming year, with an emphasis on stability and strategic growth.

MB emphasised the important role staff will play in shaping the new strategic plan, particularly in terms of providing input on the direction and priorities of the College.

The work plan (Operating Plan) for the next year will be presented to the Board in July, allowing for reflection and input on whether the proposed business items align with the current needs and challenges faced by the College.

Political Context and Government Missions

MB set out the current political context, including the five public missions of the government and their impact on the College. He highlighted the importance of skills and education in achieving these missions. These missions are expected to influence the College's strategic direction. The College's contribution to these areas will be a key focus in the upcoming strategic plan.

MB noted the current political uncertainty and its potential impact on the College, particularly in terms of funding and policy changes. This context will be considered in the strategic planning process.

Local Government Reform and Devolution

MB explained the ongoing local government reform and devolution, including the different models being proposed and the potential impact on the College.

Skills Needs and Recruitment

MB talked about the local skills improvement plans, the focus on housing and infrastructure, and the priority sectors identified by the government. These plans aim to address the skills needs in the county and support economic growth. He also discussed the challenges in recruitment and the projected demographics for the future.

Higher Education Sector Challenges

MB discussed the ongoing challenges in the higher education sector. He invited HM and SM to share their thoughts on the matter.

Apprenticeships and Employer Confidence

MB reported on the state of apprenticeships, mentioning the impact of the budget on National Insurance, the challenges in the hair and beauty sector, and the potential changes to the Apprenticeship Levy.

Adult Education Budget Cuts

MB advised that there has been a recent announcement of a cut in the adult education budget. He emphasised the importance of this provision and the financial challenges presented by the reduced funding.

High Needs Funding and County Council Deficit

MB reported that there is a significant deficit in high needs funding at the County Council, which has spent £76m more than it has received. This deficit poses a major challenge for the College. The number of learners requiring support has increased significantly, with 22% of learners in the county now receiving some form of EHC plan support.

Curriculum and Assessment Review

MB updated Members on the ongoing Curriculum and Assessment Review, including the defunding of Level 3 qualifications and the introduction of T levels.

Staffing Gaps and Quality Provision

MB addressed the issue of staffing gaps and their impact on the quality of provision.

Learner Engagement and Attendance

MB presented the challenges in learner engagement and attendance post-COVID, emphasising the importance of parental engagement and its impact on attainment.

Technology and Innovation Fund

MB provided an update on the College's progress in AI and technology.

FE Funding and Capital

The government's plans for FE funding and capital were discussed, including the creation of a board for improving education and the push for nationally binding agreements on pay and workload.

Members were asked to consider the presentation in their groups and respond to the issues raised from their own perspectives.

RESOLVED: The Strategic Context Update was noted.

GR left the meeting.

43/25 Accountability Statement (C)

MB set out the context and purpose of the Accountability Statement. The Accountability Statement is a contractual requirement tied to the College's funding agreement with the Department for Education (DfE). Its submission is required to align with Part 1 of the accountability framework and is a contractual obligation for all FE colleges, sixth-form colleges, and designated institutions under the Local Needs Duty.

The Accountability Statement is a subset of the College's broader strategic and operational planning and outlines how the College's curriculum and provision align with national and local skills priorities, particularly the 8+2 priority sectors identified by the government.

MB explained how staff are involved contributing to the statement, which was developed collaboratively by the senior leadership team, curriculum leads and staff with employer engagement roles. It draws on employer feedback, Local Skills

Improvement Plans (LSIPs), internal curriculum planning and self-assessment targets.

Once submitted by the 30 June deadline, the statement will be formally approved by DfE and published on the College's website. It will be submitted as part of the College's funding agreement.

Members reviewed the proposed Accountability Statement for this year and noted its importance in the funding agreement.

Members noted the key themes and reflected on them.

RESOLVED: The Board approved the College's Accountability Statement for submission to the DfE. The Board will revisit the broader strategic implications at its July meeting and again in the autumn, when the next strategic plan is developed.

44/25 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Business Board Meeting – 10 July 2025, 4.00pm, Gloucester C128a/b, Gloucester.

Signed: W Abbott

Dated: 10/7/25.