

**PUBLIC MINUTES OF  
THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS BUSINESS BOARD MEETING HELD ON  
13 NOVEMBER 2025**

**Present:**

Mr W Abbott (External Board Member/Board Chair)  
Ms A Berry (External Board Member)  
Mr M Burgess (Principal/CEO)  
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)  
Ms S McKinlay (External Board Member)  
Ms S Robertson (External Board Member)  
Mr M Williams (External Board Member)

**Apologies:**

Dr H Moyes (External Board Member)  
Ms G Read (External Board Member)

**In Attendance:**

Mr D Barrett - Observing  
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  
Ms Jo Watson – AoC SW Area Director except item 96/25

**Attendance: 86.7%**

**89/25 Private Business**

None.

**90/25 Apologies**

Received as above.

**91/25 Declarations of Interest**

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

**92/25 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.

### **93/25 Minutes of the Meeting of 2 October 2025**

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

### **94/25 Matters Arising from the Minutes and Actions Matrix**

None.

### **95/25 Sector Update**

JW, AoC SW Area Director, attended to provide an update on the political, policy, and financial landscape affecting the FE sector. Key topics included government priorities, major reforms in skills and SEND, changes to the Ofsted framework, funding pressures, and the evolving role of governors.

JW reported that colleges are positioned as central to delivering government ambitions, with opportunities and challenges ahead. The Prime Minister's speech at the Labour Party Conference emphasised economic growth from the grassroots and highlighted further education as a key priority, with a new ambition for two-thirds of young people to go to university or take a gold-standard apprenticeship.

However, the government, despite a large majority, is facing challenges: trailing in polls, weak finances, and pressure on public services. Reform is rising in popularity, with significant local influence.

JW set out the Key Policy Developments affecting the sector:

- **Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper:** Sets out a vision for a joined-up skills system, a prestigious FE sector, and a world-leading higher education sector. Challenges include skills shortages, reduced employer investment in training, and high numbers of NEETs (young people not in education, employment, or training).
- **White Paper Commitments:** Focus on employer investment, adult skills pathways, reducing NEETs, guaranteed college places at 16, funding increases, qualification reform, and capital investment. Colleges are central to delivering government priorities.

In terms of the changes in the machinery of government, Skills England has moved under the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), with cross-departmental working on skills education. Technical Excellence Colleges (TECs) are being developed in partnership with employers and local providers.

JW outlined the changes to the Ofsted inspection framework

- Introduction of a new report card, five-point grading scale, inclusion focus, new toolkits, and inspection methodology.
- 'Needs Attention' judgements will trigger monitoring inspections, with increased frequency expected.

- DfE oversight and intervention policy has shifted to a basket of measures rather than single triggers for intervention.

Members discussed how the intervention regime may work under the new framework and noted that the triggers appear to be more ambiguous, leaving the door open for the DfE to decide to intervene more easily with no clear criteria. Resource within the FEC team was queried and it was noted that a risk-based approach is likely.

JW updated Members on Skills England's priorities: publishing data, supporting regional skills approaches, and implementing the Industrial Strategy, which covers key sectors such as advanced manufacturing, clean energy, defence, digital, and health/social care.

She reported that Construction Technical Excellence Colleges have been announced, with further TECs planned in high-growth areas. These will act as hubs for excellence and specialisation.

Members heard that the transfer of powers from central to local government is ongoing, with strategic authorities gaining influence over transport, skills, employment support, housing, and public services. Devolution deals are bespoke, with mayors encouraged for greater influence.

With regard to disadvantage and SEND Reform, this is a major challenge, with rising demand and budget pressures. The direction is towards more inclusive mainstream provision, with new qualifications and improved support for learners with SEND.

Nearly 14% of 16–24-year-olds are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), with higher proportions among males and those with SEND or mental health conditions. Regional disparities exist, and pilots are underway in mayoral areas.

Finally, JW reported that funding for 16–18 learners is increasing, but adult skills funding is down and largely devolved. College sector pay remains below schools, with high vacancy rates and retention challenges. MB queried whether the DfE promise of 6.5% was over three years in total and was informed that it is. It is likely that any investment in FE will be routed through the FT 16-18 programme. A Member asked if the pay gap was linked to retention. JW believes it is more fundamental. It was noted that it is not just an issue at entry level but at higher levels as well.

JW continued to explain that the financial health of the sector is mixed, with oversight and intervention policies evolving. However, only a small number of colleges have notices to improve, which is an improvement compared to previous years. AB explained that the College will not know the funding rates until Easter next year, which makes planning difficult. He noted that the apprenticeship funding rate has not increased for 5 or 6 years and asked JW if there was any indication that it might increase this year. JW did not have any information but noted that contribution levels are becoming tighter and the Apprenticeship Levy appears to have backfired in terms of social mobility.

In terms of governing body priorities, JW concluded by urging governors to use their time wisely, focus on solvency, stakeholders, and strategy, and support high-quality education and training to help people develop skills for good jobs and productivity.

A Member asked how governors can best engage with the AoC. JW answered that there are regular conversations between the AoC and Chairs and Principals/CEOs and with the National Chairs' Council. A Chairs' network has recently been established in the Southwest. Beyond that, there are wider opportunities to engage with the current developments in the sector through the various management team networks and consultations. Governors should ensure they are signed up to the AoC briefings and attend governor networks. MB encouraged Members to continue to lobby and educate local politicians and stakeholders in relation to the impact of curriculum reform and the need to backfill higher level skills.

Members talked about the need for an education eco-system and opportunities to prepare learners for life and work, reduce economic inactivity and reduce unemployment. They debated the difficulties in finding work placements for learners as a result of a reduction in employer investment in training. It was agreed that a lot is being asked of employers. A Member noted that the tax package and employee protections in the UK are not conducive to hiring staff compared to other countries.

Another Member asked how much influence the AoC has had in the Skills White Paper and what the College needs to do to align itself with the ambitions set out in it. JW reported that, although not perfect, there are many positives in the Skills White Paper that reflect the AoC's lobbying. The main omission is adult funding to achieve economic growth through the Industrial Strategy.

A Member asked about the impact of the Skills White Paper on schools. It was noted that there is a lot in the Curriculum Assessment Review that will impact on schools. Relationships with local schools will be pivotal to support learner transition and progression. However, it is early days and there is some disagreement about the length of V Levels. JW advised that the AoC is represented on strategic education bodies, and more information may emerge from those conversations. It is hoped that there will be more cross-government collaboration on the role of skills in delivering the government's plan for jobs.

WA concluded that, overall, there are more positive opportunities than negative changes on the horizon, but there will be challenges around them. The College's deep knowledge and understanding of the changes is reassuring.

**RESOLVED: The Sector Update was noted.**

## **96/25 Strategic Planning Process**

MB led a discussion regarding the process for governor involvement in formulating the College's next strategic plan, due next year.

The Board plans to spend a day in early February reviewing the College's strategic plan.

In advance of that meeting MB asked Members to think about:

- What is strategy? What is it not?
- Does strategic planning make any difference?
- In FE, what makes and what breaks impactful strategic planning?
- Based on all of this, what does greater involvement of governors look like?

Members debated the above questions.

MB encouraged governors to consider how their engagement could be enhanced to ensure the strategic plan is both ambitious and achievable, and that it drives continuous improvement across the organisation. He explained that the process will be an iterative one. The next step will be to discuss the plan at the next Heads of School meeting. It is hoped to finalise the strategic plan by the end of the 2025/26 academic year. However, the College will not stop doing what it needs to do in the meantime.

## **97/25 Ofsted Preparation Update**

KM gave a presentation on the Ofsted Further Education and Skills (FES) inspection toolkit, which has been updated for 2025.

The presentation provided an overview of the toolkit, explained the new grading structure, highlighted the shift from deep dives to inspection focus areas, and emphasised the importance of data-driven improvement. There is a focus on a 'secure fit' approach. Providers must now meet all criteria for each judgement, rather than aiming for a 'best fit'.

KM reported that the College has aligned its 2024/25 SAR with the new toolkit, using its best judgement until new Ofsted reports are available (expected from January onwards) with ongoing work to clarify areas of uncertainty.

Members noted that one of the motivations behind the development of the new framework was to ease the pressure on staff following the high-profile case of Ruth Perry by moving away from one word overarching judgements. They wondered how staff were feeling about the new framework with so many more evaluation areas and grading standards. MB replied that an inspection is still a high stakes review with consequences. KM added that the central message is about looking after the wellbeing of staff with more opportunities to get things right. However, an inspection will always be a snapshot in time, and we will need to wait and see how the framework is interpreted in practice.

A Member asked how the framework had been rolled out to staff. KM answered that staff have been asked to continue to do what they do well. Good teaching and learning have not changed and there is no need to panic or over-prepare staff. The Teaching and Learning Team and Heads of School are clear on the new toolkit and have been using it in their coaching and assessment work. The framework has been introduced into internal review templates and School SARs so that staff get used to the language used. The October Professional Development Day included sessions on the new framework.

Another Member questioned whether or not the concepts of 'intent, implementation and impact' are still relevant under the new framework. KM replied that they are

embedded in it in terms of teaching and learning and achievement, although not explicitly stated.

Members asked what will happen if an area is judged to 'need attention' and were informed that the judgement can be changed but colleges will have to undergo a monitoring inspection within 12 months. Members were keen to reassure staff that they appreciate that the changes to the inspection may mean that more areas are judged to require attention and that this may not be uncommon. Also, the Executive Team have identified and are monitoring any areas of concern.

Members found the papers helpful but requested that acronyms are set out in full to aid understanding.

**RESOLVED: The Ofsted Preparation Update was noted.**

**98/25 Date and Time of Next Meeting**

Business Board Meeting – 11 December 2025, 4.00pm, Cheltenham Campus, S117 followed by Christmas Dinner in No.1 Restaurant.

Signed:



Dated: 11 December 2025