

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CORPORATION BOARD
THURSDAY 20 MARCH 2025**

Location: Boardroom 2, Cauldon Campus / Microsoft Teams

Time: 09:30

Present:	Jeremy Cartwright, Chair	In person
	Hassan Rizvi, Principal & CEO	In person
	David Boughey	In person
	Sally Garratt	Remote
	Rob Fisher	Remote
	Hannah Molloy	Remote
	Tom Nadin	Remote
	Raheel Nawaz	In person
	Ben Richards	Remote
	Steve Sawbridge	In person
	Chrissy Pawliszyn, Staff Governor	In person
	Mekdes Mideksa, Student Governor	In person
	In Attendance:	Cath Brierley, Deputy Principal
Antoinette Lythgoe, Chief Financial Officer		In person
Nova Abela, Chief People Officer		Remote
Kay Kavanagh, Director of Governance		In person
Dave Hopley, Assistant Principal Student Experience (Item 10 only)		In person

No.	Action
1-5	See Confidential Minutes
6	<p>Welcome & Apologies Apologies for absence were received from Bernard Kumeta, David Shufflebottom, Jenny Scrivens and Farhad Arian.</p> <p>The Chair welcomed Prof Raheel Nawaz to the meeting, as a new governor.</p>
7	<p>Declaration of Interest in any of the items on the agenda The Chair reminded everyone present to declare any interests that they may have on agenda items to be discussed. No specific declarations, other than for paid positions, were made, and standing declarations were noted.</p>
8	<p>Minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2024 Governors approved the minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2024 as an accurate record.</p>
9	<p>Action Progress Report Governors received the action process report, noting that the 1 action was complete.</p>
10	<p>Student Voice <u>Talking Heads (Video)</u> Governors watched the latest 'Talking Heads' video during the meeting, noting the student views.</p>

The Assistant Principal Student Experience explained that students are included from both campuses and no students had expressed any concerns regarding the building works at either campus. **Action:** Assistant Principal Student Experience to hold a focus group of students who are/have studied at both campuses, to provide an insight into any difference in student experience between campuses.

Assistant
Principal
Student
Experience

The Assistant Principal Student Experience confirmed that the focus for the next Talking Heads video will be Learner progression.

A governor **asked** what other mechanisms are in place for governors to hear the student voice. The Assistant Principal Student Experience explained that the following are some of the methods/processes in place:

- Course Reps and Course Rep meetings
- Student Council
- Suggestions boxes
- Learner Voice Forum

A governor **asked** how feedback from the Talking Heads video is fed back. The Assistant Principal Student Experience explained that the feedback is via Course Reps. **Action:** The Director of Governance to obtain dates/details of Course Rep meetings for governors, should they wish to attend any.

Director of
Governance

Challenge South Africa

Several students who had attended this year's Challenge South Africa gave personal accounts of their experiences during their trip. Governors thanked the students and asked further questions, noting that it was a highly positive and impactful experience for each of the students.

Learner Voice and Enrichment Report

The Assistant Principal Student Experience provided key highlights from the report, including:

- Participation rates to date are 43% of Study Programme learners currently participating in extra-curricular enrichment, this increases to 68% with recorded curricular enrichment.
- Retention for learners participating in extra-curricular enrichment is 3% higher than those not participating.
- The Students' Union Executive Committee have been meeting regularly, leading on the AoC and Pears Foundation Youth Social Action Ambassadors programme 'Challenge Stoke on Trent College' 2024/25. Most recently, the ambassadors worked in partnership with Stoke City Community Trust as they took part in the Big Sleep Out 2025. On the night, 40 learners attended the event and they raised an amazing, £2,231.22.
- All visits relating to the Challenge Programme have been scheduled or completed:
 - Challenge Manchester 4th December 2024
 - Challenge South Africa 9th – 20th February 2025
 - Challenge Liverpool 30th April 2025
 - Challenge Wales 21st May 2025
 - Challenge Erlangen 23rd – 27th June 2025

A governor **asked** what percentage of students had completed the Student Survey. **Action:** Assistant Principal Student Experience to confirm what percentage of students had completed the Student Survey.

Assistant
Principal

Action: Assistant Principal Student Experience to add to the data, data to show what percentage of each type of student were participating in enrichment activities (for example, BAME)

The Assistant Principal Student Experience left the meeting.

11 Principal/CEO Report

The Principal & CEO thanked the governors for their welcome and support since they had joined the college, and acknowledged the smooth and professional recruitment process.

The College continues to be in a strong position. The past eight weeks have provided a good insight into various aspects in line with the College's mission and values. The College continues its focus on being an anchor institution in the community while delivering technical/vocational programme pathways to meet the Skills Needs.

Study programme enrolment has remained strong at 2274, an 11% increase on the previous year. The allocation for 2024/25 has also come through and is 2347, an increase of 15% from the previous year. The DfE has announced that, due to the national surge in 16-18 numbers to an average of 6%, the allocation will be two-thirds against the formula entitlement, circa £300k less than originally expected.

Adult courses delivery under the Adult Skills Fund (ASF) is on track (predicted at 97-100%), with an initial subcontracting of £300k to three subcontractors.

The college is in a strong position financially, between Good and Outstanding Financial Health.

Since January, within C&Q and TLA, the College has identified three key priorities and put actions in place to address them, these being:

1. Learner Progress Monitoring/Performance Monitoring Boards
2. Reinvigorated TLA Strategy
3. Redesigning the planning and delivery of Study Programme Tutorials and Adult Enrichment

Progress is being made on key action plan priorities for the People Strategy, and the most recent Staff Survey is about to conclude, with the results being able to be benchmarked against previous surveys. **Action:** The Chief People Officer is to provide the outcome of the Staff Survey to be presented at the next TF&R Committee and Corporation meeting, to include benchmarking against previous surveys and other colleges.

The college stands well in the community with a strong reputation with stakeholders and employers. Meetings with stakeholders have been fruitful and positive.

The policy landscape is fluid, with key areas including:

- Curriculum reforms
- Ofsted consultation

- Apprenticeships – Skills England review
- Future financial challenges with funding
- Local landscape

FE Colleges are adaptable, but there are many changes in a short timescale. Times will be more challenging financially, and critical for the college – curriculum planning is needed to be ambitious, flexible, realistic, and adaptable, including in-year. If subcontracting is required, this will be known as early as possible.

Areas of ongoing actions and focus include:

- Addressing inconsistencies, as identified in TLA.
- Reinvigorated TLA Strategy and its implementation
- Dual Professionalism – staff industry updating (Rolling out a program that will enable all teaching staff to spend at least 1 day in their respective industry, increasing to 2-3 days next year, to share good practice)

A governor **asked** if the college is seeing an increase in internal progression. The Principal & CEO explained that staff are being asked to know their students, to know what they are likely to do next. Internal progression is 72-75% - we have an aim to increase this to 80%.

A governor **asked** the Principal & CEO how the role compared to their previous role. The Principal & CEO confirmed that it is comparable, with the key difference being the different stages and priorities of the colleges. One strength of Stoke on Trent College is the culture of staff, with all staff wanting to do the best they can.

12 Management Accounts & TF&R Summary

The Chief Financial Officer provided the highlights from the paper, including;

- The College expects the financial health for the year to be good or outstanding.
- The College expects to meet all bank covenants in 2024/25 based on the current information.
- There are no agreed PMO KPIs for 2024/25, and we can now formally request a waiver of the RF deal of monitoring the outcomes.
- In-year growth funding is not yet included in the outturn, but we expect circa £600k, this will continue to be excluded until it is confirmed.
- Advanced learner loans and HE Courses are expected to be a combined £125k below budget for the year due to poor recruitment to HE provision. Full cost income has been revised down by a further £70k this month to reflect lower full commercial activity in the year. The combined effect of changes is a reduction of £435k in tuition fees and education contracts.
- Forecast staff costs are at 65.01% of income before income is increased for 16-18 growth.
- The College's cash position remains strong with £4,175k in the bank as of 31st January 2025. The College returned to the bank's local network team control in October 2024.

A governor **asked** how far away from outstanding the college is. The Chief Financial Officer confirmed that we are circa £500k short. If the in-year funding amounts to the expected £600k, we will be outstanding.

13 Capital Update

The Cauldon Capital Project is broadly on budget, with a contingency of £271k and is currently 3-4 weeks behind schedule, due to a change in the roof design. The works should still be completed in July, with the interior being on track to be complete in September.

The Burslem Capital Project is 10 weeks behind schedule, with additional costs of 170k, mainly due to the delay. The mitigation for this risk is likely to be delaying the demolition of B Block which is subject to DfE approval. Pravin Parmar, from the DfE, has agreed to seek formal approval for the demolition delay until summer 2026 and for the associated funding to remain earmarked for that purpose.

A governor **asked** the reason for the delay and increased costs. The Chief Financial Officer explained that the increase to £170k from £90k was inevitable due to the time delays (due to the overground works).

A governor acknowledged the estate plans and **asked** if there was also a digital plan/strategy. **Action:** The Chief Financial Officer to share the Digital Strategy with committee members.

The proposal for the Advance Green Skills Centre is to appoint Sterling Services Limited at a cost of £1,318,972 inc. VAT to complete the main works. This is c.£150k lower than the budget cost of £1,469,600 to date. The College still anticipates spending the full grant allocation of £2.3m. Sterling's programme is 20 weeks long so contracts need to be agreed upon and signed soon with a start date on site before Easter. The College will use the JCT Consultancy Agreement Public Sector 2024 to formally appoint the design consultants as follows:

- C2C Structural engineers £17,280 inc VAT
- EWA Architects £56,932 inc VAT
- Russell Bolton Project management and cost consultants £54,660 inc VAT
- KOK Principal designers (CDM and building regs) £20,611 inc VAT

The governors **approved:**

- the appointment of Sterling Services Limited as contractors for the Advanced Green Skills Centre at a cost of £1,319k including VAT
- the use of JCT consultancy agreements public sector 2024
- use of the seal and signatories (Chair/Vice Chair and the principal & CEO), for these contracts.

Governors **noted:**

- the issue of a letter of intent for a value of £50k plus VAT for the design element of the Advanced Green Skills project

A governor **asked** if there were any likely concerns regarding staffing the Green Skills Centre. The Principal & CEO explained that some staff will need to be upskilled on the new technologies, which could be a challenge.

A governor **asked** when the space survey would be completed. The Chief Financial Officer explained that it is complete, and the data is available, however, a summary of the data is being requested. **Action:** The Chief Financial Officer to provide an overview of the output of the Space Utilisation Survey, and its impacts/next steps.

Chief
Financial
Officer

Chief
Financial
Officer

14 Curriculum & Quality / Teaching & Learning & CQS Summary

The Deputy Principal highlighted the following from the report:

- Predicted achievement rates range for 2024/25 are 81-85% for Study Programmes, 83-87% for Adults (including tailored learning) and overall, 83-87%, which are comparable to National Averages. Last year the college achieved an 82% achievement overall, and was below the national average.
- Retention is at 94.7% and is improved compared to the same time last year by 3.5% SP, 1.9% 19+ and Overall, +1.7%. This is due to higher scrutiny and ensuring that the right learners are on the right courses.
- Apprenticeship achievement range is 59% - 63% (National Average is 57.4%). Gas and Plumbing remains an at-risk area due to staffing issues.
- Overall attendance is 83.2% vs KPI 88%.
- 50% of Stoke on Trent College Study Programme learners do not have maths and English at grade 4 or above, compared to 30% of other GFE Colleges.
- The College is updating its Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA) Strategy, led by the new Assistant Principal Curriculum and Quality. The aim is to revise the strategy underpinned by established scientific research (Resonshine Principles) and implemented through Education and Training Foundation (ETF) professional standards. The purpose is to support quality improvement in relation to pedagogical practice combined with vocational excellence and Dual Professionalism. The approach also incorporates the use of AI. **Action:** Deputy Principal to share the TLA Strategy with the Corporation Board, when available.
- As of March 2025, 84 learning visits have taken place so far, this academic year, against the planned number of 90 (93%). 22% Excellent, 64% Effective, 9% Requires Coaching Support, 4% Support to Improve.
- For 2024/25, the College is subcontracting a proportion of its adult provision with three new subcontractors after a tender process, these being Kier Training & Recruitment, The Construction Skills People, and The Skills Network.
- Curriculum planning for 2025/26 is underway, with planning including class sizes, staffing ratios and support for learnings being considered.
- 94% of learners have gone to positive destinations.

Deputy
Principal

A governor **asked** for clarification concerning the number of learners resitting English and maths in November 2024. The Deputy Principal explained that the lower numbers of learners allowed to resit was a strategic decision to target only those very close to the grade 3 boundary (3 marks) and who had committed to a booster extra session in maths and/or English every week. This then allowed lower-ability learners to focus on the summer series resit and build their skills accordingly.

15 Audit Summary & Risk Register

The Chair of the Audit Committee explained that 2 internal audit reports had been received by the committee, highlighting the substantial assurance given around GDPR. Governors noted the benefits of the college having a qualified Data protection officer.

The main risk that had been discussed by the committee was concerning the Burslem Capital Project (as discussed above).

A governor **asked** if AI should be added as a risk. The Principal & CEO explained that it was covered under the digital risk and forms part of the new TLA Strategy and also the Digital Strategy.

16 Governance Summary

The Chair of the Governance Committee provided an overview of the meeting.

Governor 1-2-1 have taken place, overall being positive, with some concern regarding some governor attendance. Meetings are found to be controlled and timely, but governors felt that they could be more strategic.

The Skills Audit was completed and aided the rationale for the recruitment campaign by AoC, which is underway and is proving fruitful with strong candidates for interview.

The first Strategy day has taken place, with the second day due to be held in April.

The Chair of the committee asked governors to note that all chairs will be joining the governance committee, to enable cross-committee conversation.

There were no questions.

17 Update ahead of Strategy Day

The Chair explained that following the recent strategy day, and there being no major changes mid-strategic plan, the next strategy day due to be held on 3rd April, will now be half a day (13:00-16:30). A further half-day will be planned if needed.

18 Annual DPO/GDPR Report

The Data Protection Officer (Director of Governance), presented the Annual GDPR report, highlighting:

- FOI requests remain steady, with a noted increase however, of requests from FE Week.
- SAR requests continue to be monitored and recorded
- Data Breaches have increased, largely due to staff training, awareness and following of policies. It is expected to increase further due to ongoing staff training before it reduces.
- A Staff GDPR Training offer is now underway, including a GDPR Staff Booklet, Staff Poster (displayed at various notice boards across the college), Mandatory Training, Walkarounds and CPD training sessions
- An internal Audit on GDPR Compliance was carried out by ICCA in February 2025. As a result of the work carried out, ICCA provided management and the Audit Committee with Substantial Assurance that the areas of the control environment tested during the audit are designed and operating effectively with no significant weaknesses.

The Chief Financial Officer added that a previous GDPR audit took place in 2019, with many recommendations and many areas in 'red'. The difference from the latest audit where substantial assurance was given, was noted.

19 Policies

Governors noted the updates and **approved**:

- Whistleblowing Policy

- Conflict of Interest Policy
- Health & Safety Policy
- Compliments & Complaints Policy
- Statement of Arrangements for obtaining views of staff and students

20 Any Other Business

There were no matters of other business.

23 Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting is 22/05/2025 at 09:30.

There being no further business, the meeting finished at 12:15.