



WEST NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COLLEGE
CORPORATION BOARD

Minutes of the Corporation Board meeting held on Thursday 27th February 2025 at 17:00

GOVERNORS

PRESENT:

Kate Truscott, Chair
Andrew Copley, Principal and Chief Executive Officer
Nick Butler
Alison Griffiths
Charles Heaton (from 17:25)
Theresa Hodgkinson
Neil McDonald
Kudzai Muzangaza
Jane Peacock
Edward Rawson
Kit Salt
Rob Simcox
Keith Spiers
Paul Wheeler
Scott Smith, Staff Governor: Academic
Andrew Spencer, Staff Governor: Business Support
Flynn Bainbridge, Student Governor
Arina Borscakova, Student Governor

ALSO IN

ATTENDANCE:

Louise Knott, Vice Principal: Communications, Engagement & Student Experience
Diane Booth, Vice Principal: Curriculum & Quality
Jon Fearon, Finance Director
Gavin Peake, Director: IT, Estates & Learning Resources
Sian Geeson, Director: Human Resources & Organisational Development
Eloise Hopkinson, Head of Governance

		ACTION by whom	DATE by when
1	<u>WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</u> Apologies for absence were received from Ben Owen and David Gillies.		
2	<u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</u> The chair reminded everyone present to declare any interests that they may have on matters to be discussed. Alison Griffiths noted an interest in the principal's report, specifically the item relating to East Midlands Chamber.		

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3 **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19TH DECEMBER 2024**

The minutes were reviewed, and it was pointed out that Alison Griffiths had been omitted from the list of governors present. This was rectified, and it was agreed that the minutes were otherwise an accurate record of discussions.

AGREED: to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 19th December 2024.

There were no matters arising.

4 **ACTION PROGRESS REPORT**

The board were happy to note the content of the update provided.

5 **SCENE SETTING**

The chair briefly set the scene for the meeting. Governors were reminded that papers would be taken as read by Executive report-writers in order to enable the focus to be on the emerging discussions.

The chair indicated that not everyone was able to join the Friends of the College meal scheduled for later in the evening, but she asked those who can attend to do their best to make the Friends welcome.

Governors were informed that the college was mentioned very positively in the House of Commons by Steve Yemm MP. Governors were encouraged to listen to the recording of this, a link to which had been shared with the board. The chair also extended congratulations on behalf of the board to the principal, following his being awarded an MBE.

Governors were made aware that a key partner who has worked closely with the college had recently passed away. The college has sent condolences to the partner organisation and the gentleman's family, and it was agreed that it would be appreciated if something positive could be done to mark the very good relationship which the gentleman fostered with the college.

Finally, governors were invited to express interest in the learning company visits, further to the information provided within the papers. One governor expressed how beneficial these are and how positive it is to see the development of the students over time. He heavily encouraged governors to get involved, if they can. Governors were asked to contact the head of governance for more information or to arrange a visit.

6 **BALANCED SCORECARD AND ANNUAL KPIS – 2024/25 IN-YEAR**

The principal presented his report. He indicated that most of the issues revolved around maths and English, as has now become the norm when reporting on this matter. He indicated that driving improvement is a

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challenge and a matter of continual focus for the senior team. He invited governors to put forward any new ideas which the college may be able to trial.

The other red measure within the balanced scorecard related to staff cost, and this was described as being indicative of the growth and the current 'unknowns' in relation to income. This risk has been heavily discussed by the Audit and Finance and Estates Committees.

Finally, the principal asked the board to note that four sites now have projects in progress, all of which need to be finished in time to enable the college to grow further and assure the student experience is of a high quality. He gave assurance that the risk was being managed, and he expressed confidence that the college will be able to provide its students with an even better learning environment as a result of these works. He indicated that governors would be kept informed on an ongoing basis about the various projects.

One governor raised a question in relation to maths and English attendance, particularly with reference to the changes referred to within the principal's report in respect of it now being possible for adult apprentices to opt to discontinue their English and maths study. She asked whether any of these changes would impact the college's statistics. In response, the principal advised that these changes will have a very modest impact. He explained that only a small number of the college's adult apprentices will be removed from maths and English, and the very high number of 16-18-year-olds will make any impact negligible.

At a question from the business support staff governor, the vice principal: curriculum and quality confirmed that the text messages to drive attendance will continue and, in future, it may be possible to use a function in Teams to send these, which will reduce cost.

One governor questioned whether any students have been excluded as a result of low attendance. The vice principal: communications, engagement and student experience advised that the college divorced the management of attendance from the disciplinary process two years ago. Instead, heads of department have been empowered to withdraw students who do not attend and cannot be brought back on board, with the caveat that parents must be involved in the process before any such withdrawal is carried out. This was done to speed up attendance management, as the bureaucratic disciplinary process meant that non-attendance could not be dealt with in a suitably timely manner.

The finance director indicated that the East Midlands Combined County Authority has issued a challenge in respect of the area's high number of NEET young people. The college is being given access to some funding via the Youth Guarantee to work with young people on improving their

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attendance and getting them ready for work. The challenge is how to approach this and how to restructure the provision to meet their needs – for example, to enable courses to be completed over two years instead of one. The main focus of this is the 18-21 age group, but the finance director feels that it will be key to also include 16-18-year-olds. If a course is not right for a specific young person, it needs to be ensured that they can then be assisted into employment or other learning opportunities. It was agreed, however, that there would need to be a cut-off beyond which it must be acknowledged that the college cannot do any more, and it is also important not to have students disrupting others and having a detrimental impact on their learning.

The student governor indicated that students in the sixth form centre can sometimes hand work in online when they are unable to attend in person, and allowing this could be a way of keeping formerly NEET young people more engaged.

To summarise the discussion in relation to attendance, governors were assured that the college strives to do everything it can, and learners are only withdrawn when it is really not possible to do any more to retain them. The senior team and governors were hopeful that the new facilities will bring in and retain yet more young people.

AGREED: to note the content of the report.

7

ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT / COMMUNITY PLEDGE

The principal reminded governors that the deadline to publish this is 30th June 2025. He advised that the strategy day in March will allow governors to reflect upon how well the college is meeting local skills needs. He indicated that the use of accountability statements in Further Education is growing stronger, and Department for Education will ask the college how it has responded to local skills needs. This will involve looking at last year's accountability statement (Community Pledge). He informed governors that the Community Pledge will be brought to the board for approval in May 2025.

AGREED: to note the content of the update provided.

8

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The committee chair had not been able to join the meeting at the point of this item being raised, so a committee member delivered the chair's report. He indicated that the committee enjoyed a well-balanced meeting focused on the equality, diversity and inclusion agenda, and significant assurance was provided to members. He informed the board that the HR director's updates are always very thorough, and the work in relation to recruitment of staff is paying dividends. He informed the board that the way in which this is reported does not always show the full extent of the impact, but it is possible to note improvement.

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AGREED:

- to note the content of the summary report
- to note the content of the minutes of the meeting.

(The finance director left the meeting at 17:25.)

(Charles Heaton joined the meeting at 17:25.)

9

QUALITY AND STANDARDS

The committee vice-chair presented this report in the committee chair's absence. She indicated that the vice principals each presented in-depth reports which led to robust discussion. She assured the board that the committee provides both stretch and support in its questioning.

Governors were invited to discuss whether there are any particular topics which they would like to see in future talking heads videos. Suggestions included a T Levels focus, careers, and tutorials – in short, governors agreed that they would like to see an overarching topic which does not fall into a specific curriculum area.

The vice principal: curriculum and quality invited governors to raise any questions or challenge in respect of her reports. She explained that the college is still performing strongly, albeit English is tracking at half a grade behind the previous year. Maths grades are currently two tenths better than at the same point last academic year. In A Levels, Year 13 grades are around the same point as they were at this point last year, and there is a lot of intervention taking place. The vice principal assured governors that she has visited the sixth form and witnessed a lot of activity, and revision sessions have been planned. The results from the mock exams are awaited so that the college can then adapt its approach appropriately.

One governor raised a question in relation to T Levels still experiencing challenges in obtaining work placements, as the report seemed to imply that students who cannot find placements will be guided into alternative provision. The vice principal explained that, in digital, it is now possible for students to undertake some virtual placement work. There are three routes in building services but, because the first year is core learning, the first-year placement can be broader as long as it is in construction. Thereafter, the placement will need to be in the specific area of study. The vice principal gave assurance that the college is doing quite well in respect of placements across the board, although there are still challenges in digital, electrical and plumbing. The head of department for building services has been very creative in designing a project-based approach, and this has been commended by the external moderator. The governor asked for further clarity and assurance that students would never be moved to a different course simply because they were unable to secure a placement. The vice principal advised that having a placement is a mandatory part of a T Level, and all students

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must be able to complete this element in order to pass. It is challenging to find placements, but the college is working and doing everything possible to ensure placements are available for all T-Level students. For example, in design and planning, it is hoped that employers who have offered placements will take a first-year student to replace those second-years who have finished. There have been no issues in health and social care, early years or animal care. The governor raised a further question in respect of whether, if the college is unable to obtain placements in a certain curriculum area, would leaders approach other colleges who could possibly negotiate placements among their stakeholders. He also asked what the college does if it cannot obtain a placement and thereby support a student to pass. The vice principal confirmed that there is potential to work with another college to support with digital placements and, although it has been challenging, she was confident that it will be possible to get placements in other areas. For example, now that the college has reintroduced its own delivery of electrical apprenticeships, this has strengthened the network of electrical employers. The Employer Engagement team has good links with employers and continues to work with them to secure placements. The vice principal was able to assure governors that, at the present time, the only students for whom a placement has not been obtained were some in plumbing, electrical and digital. The vice principal advised that there is plenty of time left to obtain these and ensure the students can achieve their qualification. However, providing clarity around the point in the paper in respect of potentially needing to signpost students to other courses, she explained that the growth will create further challenge in obtaining placements for all T-Level students. Therefore, the college may need to consider capping numbers on some T Levels in future academic years. Governors suggested that, at this point, it will be necessary to think of what can be done in the best interests of students, even if this means transferring them to another college.

The vice principal: communications, engagement and student experience signposted the board to the online safety report, explaining a requirement of Keeping Children Safe in Education is that the college must provide governors with assurance in relation to the mechanisms in place to keep systems secure and ensure that students are safe online. The Standards Committee were content to accept this as presented, but it was noted to be key for all governors to be aware and to have read this update.

Talking Heads – Maths

Students who took part in this video were asked what it is like to study maths at West Nottinghamshire College. Positive comments were as follows:

- It is completely different to secondary school – students reported that they learn more at college.
- There is better support to obtain diagnoses of learning disabilities such as dyscalculia. This allows students to identify

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different ways of learning which work better for them as individuals.

- Maths teachers are really supportive, nice, and helpful. They elaborate on things if students are struggling to understand.
- Teachers take on board how students prefer to learn and do not try to force them to learn in a prescribed way.
- Students enjoy being taught by interactive and engaging teachers.
- Some students who have different teachers per lesson find this positive as it enables them to experience a range of different teaching and learning methods.
- Some classes contain only a small number of students, enabling more effective learning for those students who feel more confident and comfortable within a smaller group setting.
- Smaller groups also allow teachers to spend time with each student in the class, and there is not so much distraction from others. Students can get more done and have more time to practise their maths skills. This has helped some students to build their confidence and increase their 'working at' grade.
- Lessons are more relaxed than in school. Students feel calmer and under less pressure, which enables them to make better progress.
- Students who had previously attended other colleges fed back that learning maths was better at WNC.
- One lesson per week enables students to use Century Tech – they feel that this is a beneficial tool which has helped them to improve their skills and knowledge.
- Lessons are engaging and fun.
- Students learn about more topics than at school and feel this drives them to study harder than they used to.

Less positive comments made were as follows:

- Other students in class can be disruptive and loud, exhibiting poor behaviour – some teachers need to be stricter and better at classroom management. Where some disruptive students have withdrawn from the college or changed groups, others felt that their learning ability has improved since these individuals were no longer in their group.
- More 1:1 time with teachers would be beneficial.
- Some groups are quite large, which some students feel is less positive.
- Some students have found that teachers change too often, and they do not just have one consistent teacher. Some students find that this impacts their learning experience.
- Some students feel that 90 minutes is a long time to maintain focus and concentration, which means that they are then more easily distracted. They would prefer a shorter lesson duration or a break to enable them to bring their thoughts back to the task.

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Governors agreed that it was positive to hear so many students talk positively about the college's approach and the impact. One governor felt it was interesting to hear of the variability on class size. She also commented on the comments about others' behaviour, a topic which also emerged from the student panel. A comment of concern was around teachers not being consistent, and it was indicated that this was due to agency cover when teachers were off sick, which resulted in students having a less positive experience.

One governor observed that there is clearly an intolerance in the student community for 'distracting' and 'disruptive' behaviour, and a challenge to the college was how to get ahead and prevent this. The vice principal: curriculum and quality advised that, for next academic year, there is a desire to implement a streaming system by grade for English and maths. If this is successful, English and maths classes will have a mix of students from different curriculum areas, and the delivery can be aligned more closely to students' abilities. For example, there could be a focus on exam techniques at the higher level, whereas lower levels will focus on specific areas of challenge at the lower. This model will be challenging to implement at the smaller campuses, but it is hoped it will work well at Derby Road. It was agreed that gaps in knowledge between students at different grade points can be significant.

One governor expressed that it was heartening to hear some of the feedback within the video. She understood the challenges in respect of behaviour, but she questioned whether any students miss lessons because their peers' poor behaviour prevents them from seeing the benefit of attending. Senior leaders acknowledged that there is some element of this, but some of those students who misbehave do so because they are frustrated and disengaged due to struggling with the subject. They often do not want to admit that they are finding the work difficult, and this is why the preference is to change to a streamed model by grade.

The principal observed that some students felt that they were bad at the subject while at school, sometimes due to comments made by their teachers, and they do not see the relevance to their chosen career. The college needs to overcome all of this. The senior team has been discussing ideas such as not starting maths and English immediately at the start of the academic year, giving students time to settle in and enabling the college to ensure that the first maths and English lessons are strong enough to encourage students to return and attend consistently.

The vice principal: curriculum and quality highlighted that larger numbers of students have enrolled to more inclusive programmes than in past years. Some of these students' attendance is far below the college's expectation but is still 20-30% better than they demonstrated

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at school. Furthermore, the college is seeing larger numbers of students from alternative provision or who were electively home educated, sometimes with a very low starting point for maths and English. The number of these applicants has already almost doubled for 2025/26. The chair indicated that this raises the question of the future direction of the college and how this should be addressed. The college needs to balance its focus between those students who really struggle and the remainder of the students. It was observed that there was also a question of funding: the college needs to be able to afford to support learners' needs properly, employing staff with the required skills and experience. The vice principals were able to assure governors that they were exploring a suite of qualifications designed to build resilience and employability skills before moving students onto the main college provision. The college was also looking into implementing a transition programme using community venues.

One governor indicated that there was a feeling of inconsistency in maths, as reported by the student panel and the talking heads video. He emphasised the need for the college to be consistent in its approach in order to appropriately support its students. It is imperative that those who want to learn are being empowered to achieve, while still maintaining focus on those who are struggling or do not want to learn and thereby ensure that their position can be improved. He challenged senior leaders to consider how the college can be supported in turn to provide this support.

AGREED:

- to note the content of the summary report
- to note the content of the minutes of the meeting
- to note the content of the QIAP report
- to note the content of the combined safeguarding/Prevent, EDI, and priority groups report.

10

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The vice principal: communications, engagement and student experience and the HR director presented two reports for approval. These must be published by the college with a deadline of 31st March 2025. These reports were both recommended for approval by the Standards and Workforce Development Committees at their most recent meetings.

Public Sector Equality Duty Report

The vice principal indicated that this document simply contains a summary of data which had already been presented to the board, via its committees. Governors were informed that the actual destinations data was not available at the date of the meeting but that it would be included by the deadline date for the document to be published. The board were happy to approve this report as presented.

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Gender Pay Gap Report

Governors were pleased to note that the gender pay gap has reduced to 14.4%. The principal pointed out that the college's assistant principals were female and the head of sixth form were all female, and the Executive team was split equally with three male and three female members. It was agreed to be very telling to see the number of females recently applying, and being successful, for roles in traditionally male-dominated curriculum areas. Many of these are progressing through to become teachers, which was noted as even more positive.

One governor asked what the college does to communicate this positivity to staff and suggested that it would be interesting to obtain a view of the staff reaction to this update. The HR director explained that the report is discussed with the trade unions, and the upcoming Friday briefing will include an update in respect of the progress made and how the college plans to move this forward even further. Considering that this was set against a very challenging funding landscape over the years, as well as the fact that pay always emerges as an issue from the staff survey, it was agreed that this would be a really good message to promote.

Governors were happy to approve the report as presented.

(The finance director returned to the meeting at 18:00)

AGREED:

- to approve the Public Sector Equality Duty Report (both staff and students) as presented
- to approve the Gender Pay Gap Report as presented.

11

PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

The principal presented his in-depth report, and key matters particularly highlighted for governors were as follows:

- The demolition work at the Old Brewery was underway and had already progressed well. It was hoped that this, once cleared, would provide outdoor space for students and parking for staff.
- Nottingham Trent University has opened a new laboratory at its Mansfield hub on the Derby Road campus. The finance director attended the opening event on behalf of the college. Furthermore, Professor Edward Peck has been nominated by the Secretary of State as the preferred candidate to chair the Office for Students.
- Ofsted was planning 240 trial inspections of schools and colleges, and the principal and vice principal: curriculum and quality were in discussion as to whether to volunteer. Governors were encouraged to look at the consultation and make a direct response or contact the Executive team to contribute to their response. The principal made it clear that he

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was not planning any governor development around the new inspection process until it had been finalised.

- The college recently hosted the new director of skills and employment and the new chief executive officer of Mansfield District Council. Both were impressed by what they saw.
- The partnership with East Midlands Chamber was to be announced at the Friends of the College meal following the board meeting.
- The focus on accountability statements is being increased, with these now being used to inform discussions during colleges' 'annual strategic conversations' with regional Department for Education colleagues. The principal felt that the college's own strategic conversation would be interesting, and he assured governors that he intends to make it clear that it is difficult for colleges to plan when they have not yet been given funding information.

One governor raised a question as to whether the impending retirement of the vice chancellor and reports that a lot of universities are having to take their finances in hand is likely to impact the strategic relationship between Nottingham Trent University and the college. The principal indicated that there has been a modest impact so far. However, because some of the university's other income streams may be under threat, it has been possible to see more attempts to emphasise the university's Mansfield facilities and offer. He assured governors that it felt as though the partnership had perhaps moved slightly higher in the university's list of priorities. He was confident that there would not be a huge risk to the relationship. He acknowledged that the change of vice chancellor could present a slight risk, but conversations were already being held in relation to this. The university's board was confirmed to be very supportive of what the college is trying to do, so the risk was agreed to be minimal. It may just be that the character of the partnership and the nature of conversations may change.

AGREED:

- to note the content of the update and attachments provided.

12

FINANCE AND ESTATES

The committee chair presented his in-depth report, and the finance director provided some supplementary updates:

- The funding allocation was expected by 13th February, but the college received only a letter postponing this announcement until March 2025. This was because the Treasury is carrying out a line-by-line review of the DfE's budget. The college was keen to understand what the growth guarantee would be for next year as another large growth in student numbers is expected and certainty around funding is imperative to manage this.
- It had been announced that the adult education budget would be cut by 2%. The college is having conversations with EMCCA,

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and there was optimism that the authority would try to prioritise grant-aided providers, meaning that the reduction for the college could be lower. Adult education is growing in the local area and yet, in general terms, the funding will be lower than it was before.

- The in-year allocation for growth was expected by the end of March 2025. The finance director continued to take a prudent approach, so this growth may be better than was projected. An extra £50m was confirmed for the sector for the period from April to July to help fund National Insurance increases, but it had not yet been made clear how this would be funded after July. The finance director indicated that he could not provide a recalculated budget until this clarity has been received.

The board had a discussion in relation to a specific subcontractor's proposed allocation for 2025/26, which is likely to be impacted by the funding challenges described by the finance director. Due to the confidential nature of this discussion, it was captured within the confidential (commercial) minutes of the meeting.

In relation to the commentary about adult skills funding, one governor indicated that this was positive but there was a reversal within the budget. He questioned whether this would continue or whether it was a timing issue. The finance director indicated that he had taken a pessimistic viewpoint and was trying to assess whether enrolments were slowing. There tends to be a lag in the data input, and the college does not yet seem to have caught up since the December period. So that the college does not underachieve in-year, negotiation has commenced with White Rose to commence a small amount of delivery. The college can over-deliver by 10%, so there is capacity to do this. This approach will avoid the college having to hand money back. Governors indicated that they were assured by this.

In relation to solar power, the director: IT, estates and learning resources explained that he would be able to provide more information in March, when the outcome of the Salix bid was expected.

Governors were asked to approve the Standing Orders as presented. The Finance and Estates Committee had already agreed to recommend these to the board for approval. Governors were comfortable to approve with no further discussion.

AGREED:

- to note the content of the chair's report
- to note the content of the detailed minutes of the meeting
- to note the Management Accounts for December 2024
- to approve the updated subcontracting allocation for 2024/25
- that subcontracting proposals for 2025/26 will be presented at May's board meeting

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- to approve the Standing Orders as presented.

13

AUDIT AND RISK

The committee chair presented his report, particularly informing the board that the committee appointed a vice chair at its last meeting.

It was confirmed that there was a subcontracting issue to be added to the risk register, but this is not yet present as it has only recently arisen.

One governor questioned whether the matter relating to the banking covenant has progressed. The finance director explained that the college had not been issued with a breach but was in discussion with the bank's credit team. He provided assurance that the ongoing covenant positions were clear, following an interesting conversation between the college and the bank wherein it was suggested that there were some differing opinions on the covenant position. For example, one interpretation is that some of the grants received across the year would cause the college to be non-compliant when this funding was spent during the following year. The finance director indicated that he may write to the bank to request some relaxation on this position once this particular matter has been resolved. He assured governors that there was no indication at present that the college would receive a breach notice, but he advised that the bank may send a letter to warn the college.

The finance director indicated that he had conducted some cashflow modelling which indicated that the college could repay the outstanding loan at any point. However, as colleges can no longer borrow money, having debt that can be used is now beneficial. Therefore, the preference and recommendation would be to keep this debt in place unless the loan were to become a millstone for the college.

AGREED:

- to note the content of the chair's report
- to note the content of the minutes of the meeting
- to note the 2024/25 risk register.

14

GOVERNANCE UPDATE

The head of governance presented this report and its appendices, indicating that she was requesting Corporation Board approval for two appointments:

- Joanna Poon, member of the Corporation Board and Standards Committee
- Jonathan Mills, special advisor to the board in relation to employer engagement.

Governors were informed that the interview panel consisted of the chair of the Corporation Board, the chair of the Standards Committee, the principal, and the head of governance. While there was only one role to

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be filled – that of a full board member – and Joanna Poon was the successful candidate for this appointment, the panel unanimously felt that the board could also benefit from Jonathan’s expert input. He was a student at the college some years ago and now works closely with the college as an employer. He has had a mixed experience, both positive and negative, and it was felt that this would really strengthen his ability to provide expert input and advice to governors in respect of the college’s employer engagement practices.

It was agreed that the new special advisor would benefit from having a mentor, and governors were invited to step forward to volunteer for this role.

AGREED:

- to approve the appointment of Joanna Poon to the Corporation Board for a term of four years
- to approve the appointment of Jonathan Mills as special advisor to the board (employer engagement) for a term of office of twelve months.

15 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no items of additional business.

16 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was agreed as Thursday 15th May 2025 at 17:00. It will be preceded by a student panel at 16:00 and followed by the board’s summer term meal in Refined.

Staff and student governors left the meeting at 18:50.

The meeting closed at 19:00.

Signed: Kate Tiscott Meeting Chair

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