

- The other critical friend was a principal from Chichester College Group. He was unable to attend the validation meeting but provided feedback directly to the vice principal beforehand. He and the vice principal debated at length about the high needs grading, and he eventually agreed with the vice principal's decision to grade it as 'good' due to the maths and English gaps.

The principal also explained that colleagues from Wolverhampton College took part in the departmental SAR validation meetings, and there was much discussion about being too harsh rather than too generous. Across the college's curriculum, there were noted to now be more grade 1 areas than grade 3s, and those grade 3 areas were closer to being grade 2 than in the past, plus those areas still graded 2 were stronger than they were previously. The validation process was thorough, and the college has always been more cautious than generous. Vocational and apprenticeship provision were agreed to be in a strong position, and A-Level provision has improved significantly. The overall grading showed one less 'outstanding' grade than last academic year, but it was noted that the 'good' grades were more secure.

Some governors were involved in the validation meetings, and they encouraged others to get involved next academic year if they can. This was noted as a great way to engage and get involved with the college's curriculum activity. One governor, who had attended the Construction department's validation meeting, particularly highlighted the fact that the college's Pleasley Mill endpoint assessment centre had been marketed to other providers, providing an opportunity to generate income towards the cost of running the centre. She also observed that staff were very familiar with their data, which was very positive.

Governors agreed that it was right to be challenging as this drives the college to ensure learners achieve their desired outcomes. It was noted that apprenticeship provision has particularly come a long way in recent years. The board extended its thanks to staff.

Finally, the principal reminded governors that the students in attendance at the panel meeting prior to the board had widely confirmed that they and their peers were having a good experience, and this was also very important.

AGREED: to approve the Self-Assessment Report, once the amendments requested by the Standards Committee had been made.

11

AUDIT AND RISK

The committee chair presented his detailed report, particularly inviting governors to note the following:

- Following the recommendation to change the risk reporting process, a new report format had been devised, which the committee felt was more informative and easier to understand

Signed: _____  _____ Meeting Chair

Date: 26th February 2026

and follow. The committee members asked other governors to review this new format and feed back so that it can be taken forward. Nonetheless, governors were also reminded not to rely solely on the covering report and disregard the detailed risk register. The report was described as being complementary to the risk register and was not intended as a replacement.

- No issues had been raised in relation to internal audit. However, the committee had a lengthy discussion about funding audits, Members felt that, considering the impending changes to the senior staff, it would be appropriate to have a thorough funding audit in 2027/28. This would provide governors with assurance that the new team was handling things correctly and any issues had been identified.
- The committee was hopeful that the internal auditors would be able to deliver a timelier audit than last year, which was reassuring. It was noted that internal audits are no longer mandatory, but it was felt that this should be continued as it gives additional assurance in respect of key matters.
- The website update and launch date had been delayed to the beginning of January, not due to any particular issue but more to ensure that key staff would be available if any problems were encountered, considering that the college would be closed over the Christmas period and it could not be guaranteed that staff would be free. The committee members were satisfied with this explanation and felt that it was the right course of action to take.

The chair of the Corporation Board gave her thanks for the comprehensive annual report. She noted that it was good to the auditor's confirmation that staff take the recommendations seriously and work to implement them.

The committee members particularly asked the board to note that there had been a smooth transition between the previous and current committee chairs, and the level of challenge had not been impacted.

AGREED:

- to note the content of the chair's report
- to note the content of the minutes of the meeting
- to note the 2025/26 risk register and support the new reporting format
- to note the internal auditor's progress report
- to note the Audit Committee's annual report to the board.

12 **JOINT MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND FINANCE & ESTATES COMMITTEES**

The committee chair presented his detailed report, particularly inviting governors to note the following:

- The audit completion report was clean and unqualified.

Signed: _____ *Kate Tiscott* _____ Meeting Chair

Date: 26th February 2026

- The investment property valuation had reduced by £1.1m. This was due to the treatment of the retail price index within the Nottingham Trent University rental agreement.
- There were no real adjustment errors.
- A recording of the auditor's key comments was available for governors to view. Unfortunately, due to a technical oversight, this was not a direct recording of the actual joint committee meeting, but the external auditor had met separately with the head of governance afterwards and repeated the comments he made within the meeting itself.

AGREED:

- to note the content of the chair's report
- to note the content of the minutes of the meeting
- to note the audit completion report.

13 **2024/25 FINANCIAL YEAREND**

The finance director presented the members' report and financial statements for governors to approve, indicating that he was also asking the board to approve for the chair to sign the letter of representation.

He apologised for a late change to the uploaded document. He advised that it was key to ensure that the right version was provided for the board to review as it was necessary to make a representation that the Financial Statements are believed by the board to be accurate and that the college has not hidden anything. This version had been submitted to the auditor today and was ready to be submitted to the Department for Education following the board's approval.

No compliance issues had been highlighted within the Regularity Self-Assessment Questionnaire, and the finance director indicated that there was nothing to be brought to the attention of either the DfE or the auditor.

AGREED:

- to approve the financial statements 2024/25
- to give approval for the principal and the chair of the Corporation Board to sign the letter of representation
- to agree that the chair of the Corporation Board should sign the Regularity Self-Assessment Questionnaire.

14 **FINANCE AND ESTATES**

The committee chair invited governors to submit any questions or comments in respect of his detailed written report. The finance director particularly asked governors to note the following matters:

- The amended Financial Regulations were provided for approval. The changes made were minor. The college made the decision last year to refer to the College Financial Handbook within its

Signed: _____ *Kate Tiscott* _____ Meeting Chair

Date: 26th February 2026

that there is a continuity plan, and this is tested in pieces. The IT team brings back the college's major systems from backups on a monthly basis and makes these and all the data operational. In a worst-case scenario, which would be that payroll had been affected, the college would repeat the same net payments that had been made the month before, which would be close enough to accurate to be acceptable until systems were back online. Fast payments could be sent for anyone who was missed, such as very recent new starters who were not on payroll the month before or had had a change to their role and/or salary in that time. It was acquiesced that this could possibly result in the college erroneously paying a very recent leaver, but there are spreadsheets in place which would help to mitigate this risk.

One governor asked how often the external firm has had to remotely shut down the college's servers. The director advised that this has never been necessary. They have been in touch three or four times per week to report any issues noted, but these have always been false positives caused by something the college is doing within its own servers or systems.

Governors confirmed that they were assured by this report.

In reference to the estates report presented to the Finance and Estates Committee and provided to the board for noting, it was acknowledged that the number of live projects was staggering. The director: IT, estates and learning resources commented on the positive progress of the Chesterfield Road building work. However, this was being countered by challenges at Portland Square in that the concrete did not meet modern building regulations. Regulators have agreed that the college can move the plumbing department in and then put steel reinforcements in place so that the electrical curriculum can be moved in later in the year, which will reduce the impact on provision.

Governors were complimentary of the efforts of both the director: IT, estates and learning resources and the finance director to bring in these projects at reasonable cost and in good time.

AGREED:

- to note the content of the chair's report
- to note the content of the minutes of the meeting
- to approve the Financial Regulations
- to note the capital and estates update
- to note the cybersecurity report.

15 **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

The committee chair presented his detailed report, particularly inviting governors to note the following points:

- The committee had an extensive conversation about the people plan.

Signed: _____ *Kate Tiscott* _____ Meeting Chair

Date: 26th February 2026

One governor indicated that this was raised at a Workforce Development Committee meeting in the previous academic year and was found to be primarily due to teachers who had come into the education sector from industry. He asked whether this was still the case. If so, he suggested that something should be done right from the start of their employment so that they know from the beginning what is and is not appropriate. The vice principal stated that it is sometimes the case that those newly out of industry struggle to identify the boundaries, and the college significantly strengthened its induction, particularly for those who are new into education. The teaching and learning coaches are told which staff members are new to teaching and deliver a six-week rolling induction programme to these individuals. However, sadly, some of the concerns received related to quite experienced staff members who should have known better. The vice principal stated that she and the HR director visit staff members and have a stern conversation with them when they have done something inappropriate.

AGREED:

- to note the content of the chair's report
- to note the content of the minutes of the meeting
- to note the People Plan 2025/26.

16

PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

The principal presented his in-depth report, particularly highlighting the following key points:

- Governors were encouraged to read the principal's Friday briefings, which are shared by the vice principal: communications, engagement and student experience. He advised that these really bring the college to life.
- The principal and vice principal: curriculum and quality will work together to produce a briefing in relation to the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper. However, the principal encouraged governors to read the paper in full if they can as this particularly has connotations for disadvantaged learners.
- Foundation apprenticeships are now being extended to hospitality and retail.
- A scheme has been devised to guarantee a work placement for people who have been NEET for 18 months or more. This was noted to be somewhat concerning as it gives the wrong message to those who have been attending college that they could have been doing nothing and still secured the same opportunities. This will need to be monitored.
- A project is underway to support and encourage learners to consider reservist careers as part of their future plan. There will be a number of events leading up to the main event on 5th June 2026 which will involve a military village with military dogs, chefs, engineers, etc. for students to engage with.

Signed: _____  _____ Meeting Chair

Date: 26th February 2026

- The Mansfield Ambition Exchange events have commenced. They have so far been hampered by a lack of parking, but this will improve. The principal asked governors to support these events and promote them through their networks.
- The summit highlighted within the written report took place in early December. This was a great event and showed that there was a real drive to support local small businesses to embrace higher and degree apprenticeships and explore how a more flexible model might be created to allow local people to access Higher Education.
- The principal was in the process of writing the East Midlands Heartlands strategy, and some of the work with NTU will form a significant part of this.
- Jon Melbourne, the new CEO of Sherwood Forest Hospitals Foundation Trust, had a visit to the college scheduled for January.
- The next categories of technical excellence colleges had been released: these were advanced manufacturing, defence, digital, and clean energy. Staff were attending the relevant webinars, and the principal has contacted EMCCA to see whether there are any thoughts are on which of these should be the college's focus.
- The college has agreed to undertake a curriculum efficiency and financial stability review through the FE Commissioner's team. This will possibly take place in February or March, and governors will be kept informed.

One governor raised a comment about the systems thinking event, which was noted to have been busier this year than it has been in the past. It was structured so that attendees could join for all or part of the event, aligned with their availability.

AGREED: to note the content of the update.

17 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There were no other items of urgent business.

18 **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Thursday 26th February 2026 at 17:00. This meeting would be preceded by a student panel meeting and followed by the Friends of the College meal in Refined.

It was agreed that confidential matters would be recorded separately.

Staff and student governors and the special advisor left the meeting at 19:00.

The meeting closed at 19:15.

Signed: _____ *Kate Tiscott* _____ Meeting Chair

Date: 26th February 2026