



West Thames College Further Education Corporation

Minutes of the Corporation Strategy Meeting

held 10.00am to 4.00pm on Wednesday 11 February 2026

At Allianz Stadium

Present:	Mr S McGeoch (SM) Ms M Gajewska (MG) Ms R Turner (RT) Mr P Sullivan (PS) Ms A Gray (AG) Ms C Zervoudakis (CZ) Mr G Casley (GC) Mr T Hayhoe (TH) Mr S Taylor (ST) Mr A Rides (AR) Ms B Bata (BB)	Chair CEO and Principal
Apologies:	Mr F Ahmed (FA) Mr M Othi (MO)	
In Attendance:	Mr J Bolt (JB) Ms K Frost (KF) Ms C Ajit Singh (CAS) Ms L Stewart (LS) Mr M Cooper (MC) Ms K Lehmann (KL) Ms C Beaman (CB) Ms R Swidan (RS) Ms B McGuire (BM) Mr E Stober (ES) Mary Vine-Morris (MVM)	Associate Member Head of Governance Associate Member Interim Executive Director Executive Director Vice Principal Vice Principal Curriculum Director Curriculum Director Curriculum Director Area Director AoC

1/26 **Welcome**

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming all attendees. It was noted that this was the first of two Corporation Strategy Days scheduled for the academic year. The purpose of the day was to provide feedback to the Executive Team on the draft Strategic Plan, which had been circulated in advance.

The CEO welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that the decision to book with the Radisson RED Hotel Twickenham had been made to demonstrate one of the College's key employer partnerships. The hotel supported internships, work experience, Employer Advisory Boards, and strong ongoing collaboration with the College.

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2/26 **Policy Landscape Update: Insights from Association of Colleges**

Mary Vine-Morris (MVM) from Association of Colleges (AoC) was welcomed to the meeting. MVM gave a presentation on the policy landscape. The update covered the following areas:

Context: MVM noted that there were around 30 colleges in London, including several college groups operating across multiple campuses. There was at least one college in every London borough, and London colleges continued to play an important role as community institutions. Two current concerns were highlighted:

- The number of students had fallen to around 350,000 compared to approximately 500,000 a few years ago, largely due to the reduction in adult learners following funding cuts.
- There had also been a decline in apprenticeship numbers, with London showing particularly low volumes compared with other regions.

Politics and Policy: MVM explained that the national profile of colleges had risen recently. Responsibility for adult skills, apprenticeships and Skills England now sat with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), while the Department for Education (DfE) remained the main regulator and funder. The primary priority for DWP was reducing the number of benefit claimants and supporting people into employment.

Government Priorities: Government priorities currently included:

1. Enhancing achievement for young people.
2. Reducing NEET numbers.
3. Increasing the number of learners undertaking Level 4+ courses.
4. Reducing skills-shortage vacancies in key industrial strategy sectors, particularly construction and health.
5. Engaging colleges as anchor institutions contributing to health, safer streets and local economic growth.

Governors highlighted the importance of government action on preventative NEET work. It was noted that schools were experiencing significant attendance issues from Year 7 onwards, which could have a substantial long-term impact on society if young people were unable to secure employment as adults.

MVM reported that South Thames College was undertaking work to join up with the NHS, other sectors and partner colleges to explore ways of addressing these challenges.

Challenges facing the sector: Colleges remained highly dependent on government funding, and there was limited flexibility within the DfE budget to support new initiatives. Qualification reform and ongoing implementation issues were highlighted as a further pressure. Other sector-wide challenges included pay, SEND provision, apprenticeship funding rates, and adult education. MVM also noted the introduction of a new inspection framework, alongside wider concerns relating to capital borrowing, VAT, and competition from schools and universities.

Governors discussed the following areas:

- The planned Surrey devolution proposals might have an impact on the College.
- Student numbers were projected to fall sharply in future years, creating a risk to the College. The impact of lower student numbers was already being seen in Hounslow schools.

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- AI was likely to have a significant impact on future skills needs. Careers in areas such as law and paralegal work were becoming less attractive due to automation, and this could lead to increased demand for vocational courses. Governors discussed the challenge of identifying and recruiting sufficient staff to teach these programmes. It was further noted that, should learner numbers on vocational pathways grow, the College would need to expand its facilities, which would be difficult without access to additional capital funding.
- The reduction in employer investment in training was noted. Employer spending had decreased by approximately 24% since 2017, likely due to widespread cost pressures and a tendency to seek short-term returns rather than longer-term workforce development.
- There were increasing levels of graduate unemployment, with many graduates not entering the labour market. It was reported that a number of graduates lacked employability skills and resilience, and that more students were choosing to remain at home while attending university. The government's stated vision remained to increase the proportion of young people progressing into higher-level study.

Post 16 Education and Skills White Paper: An update was provided on the implementation of the Post 16 Education and Skills White Paper. It was noted that AoC had requested that defunding of existing qualifications be slowed until suitable replacement qualifications were fully in place.

Ofsted's new inspection framework: Governors noted the increased focus on leadership workload and wellbeing, and it was acknowledged that expectations of governors were continuing to grow, despite governors being volunteers.

Funding and Finance: An update was provided on funding and finance. It was noted that although 16–18 funding had increased significantly, this was offset by rising costs. Three-quarters of colleges were now operating above the 65% pay ratio benchmark, and many colleges continued to experience vacancies in key subject areas. There were no new grants available to support major capital projects, and the adult skills budget remained flat-cash, creating further pressure on overall financial sustainability.

MVM was thanked for the useful and informative presentation.

3/26 **Feedback on the Strategic Plan**

Attendees broke into four groups to consider the following prompts:

- What were the most important aspects of the presentation?
- What would the College need to bear in mind going forward?
- What sets West Thames College apart?

Following on from that the groups considered key messages to give to stakeholders including strengths, gaps and changes in the Strategic Plan.

4/26 **Data Dashboard**

The Chair summarised the responses from the recent questionnaire he had circulated regarding the data dashboard, which was currently under review.

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