West Thames College Further Education Corporation

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporation
held at 6.00pm on Wednesday 8 October 2025
at the College

Present: Mr S McGeoch (SM)   Chair
                    Ms M Gajewska (MG)   CEO and Principal
                    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)

Apologies: Mr A Rides (AR)
                    Mr M Othi (MO)
                    Ms B Bata (BB)
                    Mr F Ahmed (FA)

In Attendance: Mr J Bolt (JB)   Associate Member
                    Ms K Frost (KF)   Head of Governance
                    Ms C Ajit Singh (CAS)   Associate Member
                    Ms L Stewart (LS)   Interim Executive Director
                    Mr M Cooper (MC)   Executive Director
                    Ms K Lehmann (KL)   Vice Principal
                    Ms C Beaman (CB)   Vice Principal

37/25   **Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest**

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming all attendees. Apologies were received and accepted from BB, MO, AR and FA. It was confirmed the meeting was quorate.

There were no declarations of interest concerning items on the agenda.

38/25   **Safeguarding Update**
The 'Annual Safeguarding Report 2025' (Paper 2a) was received in advance of the meeting and was noted.

Governors received a safeguarding update. KL highlighted key changes in the 2025 edition of *Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE)*, including increased emphasis on online safeguarding, artificial intelligence (AI), deepfakes, and image-based abuse. The update addressed digital harm and a refined approach to domestic abuse,

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recognising that children may be harmed by seeing, hearing, or experiencing its effects. New guidance on AI included expectations around educating students about online harm. Staff were reported to be confident in discussing harmful attitudes and ideologies. Expectations around supporting SEND students were also raised, with trauma-informed approaches encouraged.

Safeguarding governors reported that they had held their first meeting of the year, with one scheduled each term and dates set for the full year. The summer meeting had shown a comprehensive match between policy and practice. No concerns were raised, and safeguarding remained a priority linked to student experience and ensuring students felt able to share concerns. Staff were confident in handling safeguarding matters.

It was noted that Ofsted had commented positively on safeguarding. A staff governor confirmed at the CQSE Committee that all staff had completed safeguarding training. During the ET+ Student Experience meeting, students were asked about safety and confirmed no issues, offering complimentary feedback.

The importance of safeguarding was emphasised and governors were encouraged not to hesitate in asking questions during visits, reinforcing that safeguarding was everyone's responsibility.

Governors asked how new students were made aware of safeguarding. KL confirmed that safeguarding was covered during onboarding and that students were confident in identifying the safeguarding team and knowing whom to approach.

Governors asked about trends and were informed of a general increase in mental health concerns, with a 14% rise in safeguarding cases overall. Mental health accounted for a large proportion of these cases, and the trend was continuing upward this year.

Governors asked whether students referred for support were receiving it. MG explained that waiting lists for young people in the local area were very long, and the college provided its own counselling services while students waited for external support. This was becoming increasingly difficult.

Governors noted the appointment of a new safeguarding and wellbeing officer and asked about staffing levels. KL confirmed there were three officers in Isleworth, two in Feltham, and that MG also provided coverage, indicating strong staffing levels.

Governors asked whether anyone on the safeguarding team had a medical background. KL responded that mental health first aiders and counsellors were available on site.

Governors asked about safeguarding priorities for the coming year. KL expressed concern about the rise in mental health issues and the complexity of cases. When asked whether the team was adequately equipped, KL stated that the team had a wide range of skills but acknowledged that there was always more to learn as the safeguarding landscape evolved. Regular updates were received through the Hounslow Safeguarding Group, and DSLs met regularly.

Governors asked whether safeguarding cases were more common at the start of term. KL noted that the first six weeks were typically busy, though this varied. MG added that students were now being asked to disclose safeguarding concerns prior to enrolment, allowing the college to reach out to local agencies earlier and improve information gathering.

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Governors offered to assist with framing challenges and working with local NHS contacts. MG noted that the biggest challenge remained the threshold for CAMHS and the length of time students waited for support.

b) Safeguarding Policy

The 'Safeguarding Policy 2025' (Paper 2b) was received in advance of the meeting.

Governors raised a query regarding Appendix 4, page 29, which stated that students should be informed that college staff must share information disclosed. They asked whether this applied to non-vulnerable adults. It was clarified that most procedures in the policy referred to statutory safeguarding requirements. In cases involving non-vulnerable adults, the matter would be treated as a welfare issue. The appendix referred specifically to statutory safeguarding requirements.

Action: It was agreed that the policy should be amended to make the distinction between statutory safeguarding requirements and welfare more explicit.

On the recommendation of the CQSE Committee, it was decided to approve the Safeguarding Policy.

39/25 **Minutes of the Last Meeting**

a) **Corporation Meeting**
Minutes from the meeting of the Corporation held on 2 July 2025 (Paper 3a) were received in advance of the meeting.

IT WAS DECIDED the minutes were a true record of the meeting and they were approved.

b) **Matters Arising**
An update on progress towards the actions agreed at the last meeting was reviewed noting the wider sharing of employer advisory board meetings and the circulation of sales and marketing targets for apprenticeships. The progress on updating the data dashboard was discussed, with plans to explore the use of Power BI for better integration and reporting.

40/25 **Strategic Items**

a) **Executive Report**
The 'Executive Team Report' (Paper 4a) was received in advance of the meeting.

MG summarised key points from the report. A new Ofsted framework had recently been published, which represented a significant departure from previous versions. While its stated aim was to reduce the mental health burden on students and staff, MG noted that the framework did not appear to achieve that goal. Under the new system, institutions would receive 16 separate grades, each assessed on a five-point scale. Unlike the previous "best fit" approach, the new framework required institutions to meet all criteria to be awarded an "exceptional" rating.

New inspections were scheduled to begin on 10 November, with substantial changes in the areas being assessed. The most notable shift was in the definition and evaluation of inclusive learning. The framework placed increased emphasis on

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categories such as students eligible for free school meals, those with high needs, GCSE/Maths resit students, looked-after children, and care leavers. Institutions would need to demonstrate how they met the needs of all these vulnerable groups. Although Ofsted could inspect at any time, it was not expected to occur during the current academic year.

Governors asked whether the new framework was similar to that used in schools. MG confirmed that it was.

Governors commented that the college had achieved its "Outstanding" rating by focusing on doing the right thing and emphasised the importance of continuing to prioritise that.

MG also provided updates on national policy developments. The forthcoming Post-16 White Paper was expected to introduce changes to qualifications, curriculum, and assessment, including a new option referred to as "B levels." The paper was anticipated within the next week and could have significant implications for planning in the next academic year and beyond. The Lifelong Learning Entitlement was also discussed, with questions about its delivery and practical impact. The Greater London Authority was preparing to issue a strategy on adult training. The college was contributing to the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) review.

Positive developments were noted from the Labour Party Conference, where the Prime Minister had directly referenced the FE sector and announced some funding. Changes in government responsibilities were also discussed, with adult education and apprenticeships now sitting with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Governors asked about planning for adult skills funding. MG responded that it was too early to determine the direction of funding under DWP. While there were pockets of specific funding available, the college had applied for additional funding, particularly for construction courses. Adult skills funding was expected to be closely tied to sectors, jobs, and industries.

Governors raised concerns that if funding was routed through DWP, it might be allocated to individuals rather than institutions. MG noted that a minister had recently visited an FE college, which was a positive sign, but acknowledged that delays were likely. The college was exploring opportunities for additional funding, especially as core adult skills funding was decreasing.

Governors asked about the increase in technical colleges and whether they would be new institutions or expansions of existing ones. MG explained that details would be included in the Post-16 White Paper. Announcements had already been made regarding construction and MOD-related centres, which would be regional centres of excellence. Existing colleges would receive distributed funding to ensure broader sector benefit, though specific implementation details were still pending.

MG provided a detailed update on funding and recruitment. Recruitment for 16–19-year-olds was positive and above target. High Needs Student numbers had exceeded expectations, and the Independence Hub had launched the previous day. Adult skills delivery was planned to reduce, but the college was over-delivering on Free Courses for Jobs. Opportunities existed to deliver these courses in full and to offer skills bootcamps. In Higher Education, recruitment had been disappointing, with no enrolments in HNC/HND courses. However, Level 4 modular provision was available.

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The college had transitioned to apprenticeships in teaching. An update on apprenticeship numbers was provided at CQSE, with a target of 100 new apprentices. The first quarter showed 25–31 apprentices, and RT reported that more were in the pipeline. There was confidence in meeting the Q1 target, though the remainder of the year would be more challenging.

Staffing had improved, with vacancies reduced from 33 to 26. Some areas remained difficult to recruit for, particularly English.

b) **Development Plan 2024-25 (Final Position)**
The 'Development Plan 2024-25 Final Position' (Paper 4b) was received in advance of the meeting and was noted.

Governors asked at what point in the year delivery would be assessed against the accountability agreement. MG confirmed that this would take place during the annual conversation. Governors then asked how the college was progressing. MG explained that all elements of the accountability agreement had been incorporated into the 2025–26 Development Plan and gave an update on progress. In terms of targets, not every course was being delivered, but overall progress was on track and would be monitored through the development plan.

c) **Approval of Development Plan 2025-26**
The draft 'Development Plan 2025-26' (Paper 4c) was received in advance of the meeting

MG summarised the plan, confirming that it incorporated targets from the accountability agreement and apprenticeship growth. Feedback from the CQSE Committee was noted, particularly regarding the presentation of targets. It was agreed that targets should be shown as percentages and numerical values, and where increases were indicated, baseline figures should be included. Staff sickness would continue to be presented as a percentage, which was the standard format.

Governors asked about Higher Education (HE), noting that CQSE had discussed discontinuation, but the decision had been made to continue due to the opportunity presented by the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE). RT confirmed that an expression of interest for HE was in progress. MG added that to deliver LLE, the college must be registered as a HE provider this year, and that changes in government approach made it necessary to retain registration.

Governors asked whether costs had been reduced. MG explained that HE delivery did not involve separate staffing and that there had been moderate growth in 16–19 provision.

Regarding apprenticeships, *governors asked* whether there were any red flags if targets were not met mid-term. MG stated that the plan aimed for 100 apprenticeships and that there was confidence in achieving this target. The college was also exploring new apprenticeship standards. RT noted that reporting showed a healthy pipeline of conversations with employers. A red flag would be the absence of such a pipeline, which would be the first indication of concern.

Governors observed that the apprenticeship budget was £290k, while the Development Plan target was £350k. MC clarified that the budget did not need to match the target. The target was aspirational but deliverable, while the budget was set prudently, acknowledging under delivery in previous years.

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Governors asked about student voice, noting that greater interaction between students and the Corporation had been discussed but was not reflected in the development plan. Governors highlighted the role of the Executive Team and staff in maximising the effectiveness of the Governing Body. A gap was identified in the development plan regarding how the management team catalyses the best use of governance, particularly under section 2.2.

Action: Add a target to the Development Plan about maximising the effectiveness of the Governing Body, particularly greater interaction with student voice.

Governors asked the Executive Team whether there were any current concerns. MC responded that the budget was being recast based on late-arriving information, which was covered in a confidential item. The team felt comfortable with the current position.

IT WAS DECIDED to approve the Development Plan 2025-26.

d) **Update on New Strategic Plan**
The Chair outlined the ambition for the new strategic plan to be structured across three levels:
- A detailed internal version aligned with the current development plan.
- An intermediate version designed for simpler reporting.
- A concise, public-facing version suitable for external audiences.

The Chair raised concerns about the three-year strategic plan, noting the volume of change ahead and the need to assimilate and convert this into strategy by February. It was acknowledged that additional work would be required and that the college was still waiting for critical information. The Chair emphasised the importance of the digital strategy and the role of AI, noting that there had not yet been sufficient discussion at Corporation level. It was agreed that this would be a critical area for future meetings.

41/25 **Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience (CQSE) Committee Report**

a) **Committee Report**
Minutes from the meeting of the Committee held on 1 October 2025 were received in advance of the meeting. (Paper 5a). The Chair of the Committee highlighted key points from the meeting:
- **Apprenticeships:** RT reported positive progress on apprenticeship targets. Of the 30 apprenticeships planned, 11 would be teaching and learning roles, with the remaining 19 allocated to employer-based apprenticeships. While the outlook was optimistic, it would still be a challenge. The Committee was exploring opportunities for teaching assistant apprenticeships.
- **T Levels**: Two out of three T Level programmes had recruited sufficient students to proceed. The Early Years T Level did not recruit, primarily due to challenges with English and Maths requirements. The team was considering an apprenticeship pathway as a follow-on for Level 2 Early Years students. The financial impact of under-recruitment was estimated at £130k this year; this had been provided for in the revised budget. Although the issue was noted, it did not meet the threshold for an increased risk rating.
- **Curriculum and Skills Builder Framework**: MG emphasised the integration of the Skills Builder framework across the curriculum, focusing on transferable soft skills. Governors were encouraged to keep this in mind during link visits

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and to ask staff how these skills were embedded in lessons. Observing how transferable skills were delivered was considered a valuable focus area.

Action: It was agreed that this prompt would be added to the link governor proforma. RT and KF to action.

- **SEND Provision**: Governors acknowledged the significant investment in physical resources for SEND students and congratulated the College on achieving its target numbers.
- **Digital Strategy and Cybersecurity**: Risks related to cybersecurity, affordability of technology, and gaps in staff knowledge were discussed. The Committee concluded that the digital strategy should include a comprehensive risk analysis and address implications for curriculum, teaching, and learning.
- **CQSE Meeting Agenda**: The agenda for the next CQSE meeting was discussed. Governors would be reviewing SARs and QIPs for each curriculum area and meeting with each curriculum manager for 10 minutes. It was agreed that link governors should prepare thoughtful questions in advance to maximise the impact of these meetings.

42/25 **Finance, Resources and Capital Projects (FRCP) Committee Report**

a) **Committee Report**
   Minutes from the meeting of the Committee held on 24 September 2025 were received in advance of the meeting (Paper 6a). The Chair of the Committee gave a verbal update from the meeting, highlighting the following key points:

- **Financial Regulations**: The Committee continued its review of the financial regulations and recommended approval of the Financial Scheme of Delegation (FSOD).
- **Benchmarking Data**: Benchmarking against 12 other FE colleges in the London region showed the College was generally average across most indicators. However, it had the second highest average number of teaching staff per learner (FTE), the highest staff training costs per FTE staff, the joint highest contracted teaching hours and the highest energy cost per square metre. The benchmarking tool was considered useful but limited for strategic planning, which was more focused on student outcomes.
- **Finance Operations**: Management accounts were now operating on a 30-day month-end cycle with improved validation procedures, expected to enhance reporting quality. The operating surplus stood at £35k as of July. The College's financial health score was 210, with projected compliance against financial covenants.

   Governors asked about an underspend on IT and furniture. Students had raised concerns about broken chairs and non-functioning computers. MG confirmed that new equipment had been ordered and a rolling programme was in place to update computers. The College was exploring a facility for students to report issues directly to enable quicker resolution.

- **Insurance**: The Committee reviewed the insurance report and noted concerns about no coverage for terrorism and limited coverage for cyber risks. MC agreed to explore options and report back at the next meeting. *Governors asked* whether tribunal costs were covered; MC confirmed they were, provided procedures were followed.

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- **Risk Register**: The ONS reclassification risk was removed. The risk related to government policy and funding was updated, with the impact score increased to 3, resulting in a net score of 9.
- **S&LC Lease**: The Committee discussed the Skills and Logistics Centre lease, noting that it would expire in 10 months and expressing concern that no action had yet been taken to resolve the issue.
- **Premises Security**: The College was working to comply with Martyn's Law, which requires institutions to protect against terrorism. Plans included purchasing a tannoy system and developing lockdown procedures. A joint session with HRUC was scheduled for early December to develop the policy, which would be reported back to FRCP and Corporation in the spring. The policy would be followed by training for all staff and students.
- **Estates Management**: The estates maintenance plan would be reviewed at the November meeting.
- **College Financial Handbook**: No substantial changes were reported in operational procedures. Minor updates were made to the annual report wording. Compliance with the financial handbook regarding fraud controls would be considered during the next review of the Fraud Policy.

Governors asked about cyber insurance coverage. MC explained he was investigating further and would provide recommendations.

Governors expressed concern about the College having the second highest average staff cost per learner. They also noted that pay costs as a percentage of income had increased from 64% to 68% between July 2024 and July 2025 which was a significant shift. MC acknowledged that this was higher than desirable and attributed the increase to greater reliance on agency staff. It was noted that CQSE might be better placed to address this issue, and that it raised strategic questions.

Governors asked about average class size. MC confirmed that this was not currently reported to the Committee but could be reviewed. LS highlighted that the curriculum profile, including a large number of EHCPs and increasing SEND provision, would naturally lead to smaller class sizes. While no formal analysis had been conducted, it was agreed that comparisons should be made with colleges of similar profiles and that utilisation should be considered. MG confirmed that class sizes were reviewed and merged where appropriate, and that some provision types justified smaller groups.

Action: MC to investigate and report on average class size.

b) **Latest Management Accounts**
The 'Draft Year End Management Accounts' (Paper 6b) were received in advance of the meeting and were noted.

c) **Updated College Financial Handbook**
A paper outlining changes to the College Financial Handbook and the 'Letter to Accounting Officers June 2025' (Papers 6c) were received in advance of the meeting and was noted.

d) **Financial Scheme of Delegation**
The 'Financial Scheme of Delegation 2025' (Paper 6d) was received in advance of the meeting.

IT WAS DECIDED to approve the Financial Scheme of Delegation.

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43/25   **Written Resolution to Approve the Internal Auditor**

It was noted that the Corporation had passed a written resolution to appoint TIAA Limited as Internal Auditors to West Thames College for three financial years commencing 1 August 2025 and ending 31 July 2028, with the option for the Corporation to extend annually for up to two further years (to a maximum of 31 July 2030) on the same terms, subject to satisfactory annual performance review.

44/25   **Confidential Items**
Confidential items were discussed.

46/25   **Date of the Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting of the Corporation was Wednesday 10 December 2025.

Summary of Actions

Minute No.	Action	Lead	Target Date
38/25	Update the Safeguarding Policy with comments received from governors and to make the distinction between welfare and the statutory safeguarding requirements clear.	KL	Dec 25
40/25c	Add a target to the Development Plan about maximising the effectiveness of the Governing Body, particularly greater interaction with student voice	MG	Dec 25
41/25	Add a prompt to the Governor Link Visit form to prompt governors to consider transferable skills as part of their link visit.	RT/KF	Dec 25
42/25	Investigate and report on average class size.	MC	Dec 25

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