

CORPORATION BOARD

Minutes of a meeting held on Monday 15th December 2025
Abingdon Campus at 5 pm

Present

Nicolas Pagès (Chair)
Adam Mumford
Alan Bark
Astrid Schloerschedit
Helen Brown
Jacqui Canton (Principal)
Edward Collett
Amanda Tilley
David Walker
Jessie Weavers-Medina
Sam Wolfe
Graham Caleb
Neil Edwards

In attendance

Jo Milsom, Deputy Principal
Olivier Cognard, Vice Principal
Mark Lay, Finance Director
Scott Gray, Vice Principal,
Paul Starkey, Vice Principal
Nikkie Almond, Head of Student Services (item 4)
Jude Brown, Clerk & Governance Advisor (Minutes)

Governor questions are shown in bold italics in bullets.

1. Opening Comments

1.1 Apologies and items to be raised under AOB

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming all attendees and noting the apologies received. Apologies had been received from Ben Haxton, Clare Forder and Amelia Badger.

The Chair welcomed the two new external governors Graham Caleb and Neil Edwards, Paul Starkey, the new Vice Principal of Curriculum, Adults and Apprenticeships who had recently joined the College, and Nikkie Almond, the Head of Student Services who attended to provide safeguarding training for governors. A brief round of introductions was held.

The meeting was quorate.

No items were raised under AOB at the start of the meeting.

1.2 Declarations of Interest

No new declarations of interest were made.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 23rd October 2025

2.1 Public Minutes

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved. The Chair of the Board thanked external governor David Walker for chairing the October meeting.

3. Matters Arising, Written Resolutions & Action Points

The Chair covered the report briefly noting the two written resolutions that had been approved to appoint the new external governors, and the updates to the risk register which had been completed by the Finance Director.

The Board noted the report.

4. Safeguarding Update and Refresher Training

The Head of Student Services gave a safeguarding presentation including an update on recent changes to Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE) and key themes and trends that were emerging in safeguarding.

There had been relatively few changes to KCSiE in 2025 as several pieces of anticipated legislation or government strategies had not yet been published. The focus of the changes that had been made was online harms and these had been highlighted in the recent College Development Day as well as tying into the College's digital strategy. There was also a stronger emphasis on digital literacy and the ability of students to recognise misinformation and disinformation.

The College had a run a themed week about AI, cyber drama and deep fakes with timetabled sessions for students as well as input from the local police.

The Head of Student Services explained what low level concerns were and the many new words or areas that are of concern in safeguarding work. She also highlighted which of these terms had been seen in the College as it was useful for governors to see the complexity of the cases being dealt with.

The main themes from Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) referrals included domestic violence within teenage relationships and sexual abuse. Statistics from Counter-Terrorism Police and Thames Valley Police were also presented on Prevent cases where 87% of referrals were male and 56% aged 18 or under. Themes in the Thames Valley area reflected local, national and international concerns issues. Educational settings were the biggest source of referrals.

The Head of Student Services gave an overview of the College safeguarding team's Power BI dashboards highlighting the number of cases and number of students involved and the types of cases. Mental health is a significant driver of casework, partly due to declining resource availability of services outside the College. Cases are also increasingly complex.

- ***Does the College do any work with parents?*** The College does not currently have a way to share with parents unless they are involved in case work, but this is something the Head of Student Services is looking at.
- ***Are the cases in the Term 1 statistics repeat or new cases?*** Most are new and the Head of Student Services noted that the police's Operational Compass (an initiative aimed at reducing the long-term impacts of domestic abuse by providing early intervention and support) meant that the police were getting better at reporting domestic violence incidents.
- ***How does Abingdon and Witney College compare to other colleges in relation to Prevent?*** The data presented on counter terrorism and Prevent was for the Thames Valley area. The Head of Student Services does have regular meetings with peers at Henley College and Activate Learning and explained some differences mainly due to demographics.
- ***Do we have families who won't engage with Social Services?*** Yes, and this can be for a number of reasons such as previous bad experiences or fear of social services.
- ***If case involvement is increasing, what is the plan to manage this?*** In some cases, the DSL plans to push back on Social Services closing cases. The Head of Student Services sits on the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Board. Training staff and supporting students' resilience as well as liaising with local schools is also key.

Governors noted that the presentation was very helpful and thanked the Head of Student Services. The Head of Student Services left the meeting.

The Board noted the report.

5. Strategic Overview

5.1 Principal's Report

The Principal presented a summary of the report, highlighting key items, including an update on the recruitment of young people where the College had seen continued growth in 16-18 and apprenticeships. Enrolments for the following academic year were also highlighted as looking strong. There were no health and safety areas of concern and the Principal then outlined some of the high-level policy changes where detail was yet to be provided by the Government.

- ***It's good to see the growth in student numbers but does the college have capacity and where are the pinch points?*** The Principal explained that everyone had been accommodated so far through careful timetabling and capacity management, and that the Vice Principal, Funding, Planning and Improvement is modelling future student numbers. The Vice Principal explained that the numbers indicate growth at least for a further three to four years but there are several factors that may influence continued growth over and above inputs from the school roll numbers such as the impact of housing developments locally. He is liaising with the council for numbers from the local development plans. The challenge is that the College would take different approaches depending on whether the growth is temporary or sustained, and the numbers do not allow a forecast of what the students may wish to study in the future.
- ***Are we experiencing a different trend to other colleges?*** The Vice Principal felt that Oxfordshire has a net inflow of people compared to some other areas. The birth rate was thought to have dipped in the 2024-25 cohort, but the College is not seeing this. There is insufficient detail about the Government's proposed 'guaranteed places' scheme to be able to say how this may impact capacity.
- ***What will happen with the new science parks?*** The Vice Principal explained that this should be included in the Councils' development plans.
- ***How much do students commute into the College?*** The Vice Principal felt that students are mostly local and students only commute for more niche provision. Student location and availability of public transport influence choices with many preferring their local college.

The Board noted the report.

5.2 Confidential Item

This item was discussed and confidential minutes recorded.

External governor Professor Sam Wolfe had to leave the meeting temporarily at 6pm. The meeting remained quorate.

The Board agreed to approve the proposal.

6. Curriculum, Quality and Students

6.1 CQS Committee Update

The CQS Committee Chair provided an update following the recent meeting, noting key points, including an overview of the Higher Education provision at the College, an update on the curriculum developments, including discussion of the proposed V Levels, and a presentation on the new approach to target setting. The Committee had also welcomed the student governor to her first meeting.

The CQS Committee had reviewed the FE and HE Self-Assessment Reports (SAR) and Quality Improvement Plans (QIP), recommending both for approval at the Board during this meeting. The Deputy Principal had given a helpful background to all the ways in which the college collects input from students for Student Voice. The Committee had also reviewed the Equalities Report and the annual report on quality related complaints and recommended both to the Board.

The Committee had reviewed its own self-assessment and given thought to broadening CQS membership to governors who were not educationalists. Lastly the Committee had discussed how to get the right balance between promotion of freedom of speech and protection for an updated Freedom of Speech Code of Practice.

- ***How did you balance these requirements in the Code of Practice?*** The HE members of the Committee felt that the promotion had to go further than stated as this has been a key issue in HE, so the College is getting some advice and further review so as to manage the safeguarding concerns raised for the younger FE students. A revised draft will be shared when available.

The Board noted the verbal update.

6.2 CQS Committee Annual Report

The Chair of CQS summarised the Committee's annual report briefly.

The Board noted the report.

6.3 Annual Equalities Report

The Deputy Principal gave a brief overview of this report which had been reviewed by both F&GP and CQS Committees for its staff and student elements respectively.

External governor Jessie Weavers-Medina offered to take part in the working group. Other governors were encouraged to consider taking part and to asked to contact the Clerk if they were interested.

The Board approved the report.

6.4 Student Engagement Feedback – 27th November

The members of the Board who had attended the recent student engagement meeting in Abingdon gave their feedback noting how engaged, mature and measured the students had been as well as positive about the College. Common themes had included space, timetabling and communication. It was discussed that the students who attend are volunteers but that the Student Voice coordinator tried to get a balance between curriculum areas. The one issue that had been raised at the session had been dealt with.

The Board noted the verbal update.

6.5 Further Education SAR & QIP

The Vice Principal, Curriculum and Quality, highlighted that the document had been reviewed at the SAR workshop in October as well as by CQS Committee before coming to the Board. He noted that work to align with the new Ofsted framework would take place in the coming months and so the format would be different next time.

- ***How does the dip in construction achievement impact plans for a potential new location?*** The Vice Principal explained that it was carpentry that had had a dip but that the faculty overall had had growth in achievement and new staff which was now impacting the students positively. The pass rate had been good, but the retention needed improvement.

The Board agreed to approve the FE SAR.

6.6 Higher Education SAR & QIP

The Vice Principal, Curriculum and Quality, explained the background to this paper which had also been recommended by CQS Committee to Board for approval.

The Board agreed to approve the HE SAR.

6.7 Annual Report on Quality-related Student and Employer Complaints (FE and HE)

The Deputy Principal gave a brief overview of this short paper which had been reviewed and recommended to the Board for approval by CQS Committee.

External governor Professor Sam Wolfe returned to the meeting at 6.35pm.

The Board approved the annual report on quality-related student and employer complaints.

7. Financial Statements

7.0 Financial Statements to 31 July 2025 Cover Paper

7.1 External Auditor's Findings Report (AFR) 2025

7.2 External Auditor's Letter of Representation

7.3 Draft Self-Assessment of Financial Propriety and Regularity 24/25

7.4 Accounting Estimates to 31 July 2025

7.5 Internal Auditors' Annual report

7.6 Audit Committee Annual Report

7.7 Board Assessment of Fraud Risk

7.8 Financial Statements to 31 July 2025

The Finance Director presented an overview of the financial statement documents included within the Board papers, providing an explanation of the purpose and content of each item required for the statutory return.

It was explained to the Board that each document had been reviewed by the F&GP and Audit Committees, with the Chair also reviewing the documents. The statements include information from both Internal and External Auditors, who provided the necessary documentation and levels of assurance required for the submission of the annual strategic report.

The variance between the financial performance for 2024/25 previously reported and the final position was explained to the Board, following additional income relating to SEND and a paper was presented at 8.2 of the meeting's agenda to explain this. The note in the Letter of Representation about the related party transactions for an external governor and a member of SMT who had both left during the year was explained.

Members of the Audit and F&GP Committees expressed their support in recommending these documents to the Board.

The Board approved all the financial statements presented with a note to correct the new Chair's name and state the word queer in the definition of the LGBTQ+ acronym as the others were stated.

8. Finance and General Purposes

8.1 F&GP Committee update

The Chair of F&GP Committee gave an overview of the recent meeting where the Committee had received reports about estates, the results of the annual staff satisfaction survey through the People Services report, marketing, finances including the year to date and the adjustment to the 2024-25 accounts, financial benchmarking, the Financial Statements and several policies which appear later in the Board agenda.

The Chair highlighted areas of strong and weaker performance in the staff survey as well as explaining some of the variances in financial benchmarking which he recommended the Board review at the next Annual Strategy Day.

The Board noted the verbal update.

8.2 Update on 24/25 Financial Result

The Finance Director explained the change made to the 2024-25 accounts as a result of additional income relating to SEND provision, which had been reviewed by F&GP Committee and agreed with the external auditors.

The Board approved the updated financial result.

8.3 Management Accounts to 30 September 2025

The Finance Director gave a brief overview of the management accounts to the end of September.

The Board approved the management accounts.

9. Audit

9.1 Audit Committee Update

The Chair of Audit gave an overview of the recent Audit Committee meeting which had reviewed the Financial Statements and heard from the internal and external auditors as well as receiving the report from the Chair of F&GP. The Committee felt that the College was in a good position and the auditors were satisfied. Regular annual reports on the use of the seal, sub-contracting, value for money and whistleblowing had been received. It had been decided to change the timing of the whistleblowing report to after the end of the financial year.

The Committee had also heard about the work being done by the Finance Director to ensure that the College was prepared for the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act

(ECCTA). It had also been agreed to review the fraud risk questionnaire in draft earlier in the year to ensure any concerns were taken account of in the planning phase of the external audit. The Committee had reviewed the Fraud Prevention policy and recommended it for approval.

The Chair of Audit also noted that the rounding issue in the bank loan covenant had been discussed, and the Committee was satisfied that there had not been a breach.

The Board noted the verbal update.

9.2 High Level Risk Register

The Finance Director gave a brief update about the high level risk register.

The Board approved the risk register.

10. Nominations, Remuneration & Governance

10.1 NRG Committee Update

The Chair of the NRG Committee gave a brief update as there had not been sufficient business to warrant a meeting of the Committee in November. The Committee had previously recommended some external governor candidates for interviews which had now taken place, and the Chair was pleased to see that they had been appointed and were present at the meeting.

The Board noted the verbal update.

10.2 External Governance Review Timeline

The Clerk gave the background to the paper which was the timeline of the next External Governance Review. The timeline had been brought forward to allow more time for the review itself to take place as feedback had been that the last review happened in a very condensed timeframe. Further materials would come to the Board at the appropriate time for review and approval.

The Board approved the timeline for the next External Governance Review.

11. Policies

11.0 Policies Cover Sheet

11.1 Fraud Prevention Policy

11.2 Staff Disciplinary

11.3 Managing Allegations Against Staff

11.4 IT Policy

11.5 Tuition Fees 2026-27

11.6 Modern Slavery Statement

11.7 LGPS Discretions

The Clerk presented the policies for approval, explaining that each had been reviewed by the relevant committee in each case and recommended to the Board for approval. The Clerk gave a brief overview of each policy and the reasons behind them.

The Board approved all the policies presented.

12. Any Other Business and Future Business

There were no AOB raised.

The Chair highlighted that the term of the Vice Chair would come to an end in July 2026 and asked governors who may be interested in the position to speak with him.

Governors were advised that the new date for the Annual Strategy Day would be 11th May.

The next Board meeting was scheduled for Thursday 26th March at 5pm and will take place at the Witney Campus.

The meeting closed at 7pm.

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Signature *Nicolas Pages*

Chair of the Board

15/04/2026



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