

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COLLEGE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Governors held on Thursday 30 January 2025 at 5pm in Room 206A, Wellington Road Campus

PRESENT

Mr Mike Hastings - Chair	Mrs Annie Pendrey
Mr John Bradford	Mr Darren Shaw
Mrs Jane Carter	Ms Abigail Smith
Mr Sam Duru – on Teams	Ms Doina Surchicin
Mr Simon Evans (until 7pm)	Mr Mark Taylor – on Teams
Ms Wendy Harris	

IN ATTENDANCE

Mrs Alison Buick	Head of Governance
Mr Paul Davies	Director of Finance
Mr Mike Dixon	Assistant Principal
Ms Fiona Henderson	Interim Assistant Principal Quality and Engagement
Mr Peter Merry	Deputy Principal and Chief Executive

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and thanked Governors for attending. Introductions were made to the recently appointed Governors, who were attending their first meeting.

37/25 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM 1)

Apologies were received from Mrs Amanda Tomlinson, Ms Louise Fall, Ms Dionne Barrett, Ms Shavante Clarke and Mrs Lynn Parker. Mr Scott Thompson was not in attendance.

Mark Taylor made his usual declarations of interest relating to CLQ and Adult Education Services. He also noted that he was a Director of WV Living, which could be relevant to the planned disposal of Paget Road.

38/25 MINUTES (ITEM 2)

It was **resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2024 be **approved**.

39/25 MATTERS ARISING AND ACTIONS (ITEM 3)

Governors reviewed the actions from the previous meeting and noted the following:

- Jane Carter had provided a document on supported internships as agreed.
- An update on cyber security would be brought to the next meeting in March 2025.

40/25 CHAIR'S ACTIONS (ITEM 4)

None.

41/25 CORRESPONDANCE (ITEM 5)

Two correspondence items from December 2024 had been circulated with the papers, relating to the DfE's letter on the outcome of the qualification reform review and the AOC's letter to unions about additional funding for the FE sector.

The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive commented on both letters. In respect of the qualifications review, the college had mapped the changes against the current curriculum plan and would also look at the impact on the draft plans for 2025/26, including any qualifications that were being de-funded. Further details would be brought back to the Board when the curriculum planning for next year was more advanced. The funding letter to the unions was pertinent to the later agenda item on the proposed pay award.

The Chair asked if there were any further details about the allocation of capital funding but it was confirmed that there were not. It was hoped that information would be received by March.

42/25 STRATEGY (ITEM 6)

Mark Taylor withdrew for the duration of discussions on CLQ and Adult Education Services.

Property, Rail and CLQ Update

It was noted that CTOG had met on 13 January and received a full update on all aspects of the campus projects. Draft minutes of the meeting had been circulated with the papers for this meeting. Governors had previously received the presentation slides.

CLQ

- A new Project Manager had been appointed from January to November 2025.
- Tours of the site had been arranged for college staff and were continuing. Feedback to date had been very positive. A tour would also be arranged for Governors.
- The final design decisions were now being agreed.
- Work was ongoing with the contractors to reduce risks. The completion date was September 2025, with opening from early November 2025.

The opening date and reasons for the delay were discussed. The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive noted the internal project group that had been set up and the work streams in place to plan the transition to CLQ. Key tasks had been agreed.

- Risks were starting to reduce as the project progressed. Costs were noted. The college element was within budget but there were emerging pressures on the Council and Adult Education elements. Costs were being discussed with the Council and DfE.
- Work had continued on the Development Agreement. The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive highlighted the following for Governors to note:
 - There had been extensive work with legal teams before Christmas. Mike Hastings and Amanda Tomlinson had been part of the discussions, as per the previously agreed delegated authorities.
 - The document had now been agreed and was subject to DfE approval. At this stage therefore it remained unsigned.
 - An updated Memorandum of Understanding on working collaboratively with the Council was needed. The existing document dated back to 2018.
 - There were some difficulties in assessing the budget position due to the complexities in separating out the college and Council elements.
 - The DfE had requested a meeting to discuss the position with the college and Council, including the use of the Paget Road proceeds. The college view was that this was a matter for the DfE and Council to agree.

The Chair noted the progress to date on the Development Agreement, including the efforts of the senior staff to get to this stage. The position was complex. There were some caveats in the details and these were for the DfE and Council to discuss.

Questions and comments were invited.

A Governor asked about the use of Paget Road proceeds to repay college debt. It was confirmed that this was the intention. Early repayment would be beneficial for the college.

Paget Road Disposal

The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive gave an update:

- The first stage of the three stage process had been completed and there were 23 expressions of interest. All would progress to stage 2.
- The disposal was being done jointly with the Council, which owned the parcel of land that was occupied by Wolf Mountain.
- Bruton Knowles had been appointed to manage the disposal process.
- Various surveys were currently being completed on the site and a data room was being prepared in readiness for release to interested parties for stage 2.
- The DfE would be taking a keen interest in the process and outcome, given that they held a charge over the site and the proceeds would be used to pay down college debt.
- One of the 23 expressions of interest was from WV Living, a subsidiary company of the Council. Mark Taylor was a director of this company, had declared his interest and had withdrawn from this discussion.

The Chair asked if any more delegated authority needed to be in place before the next Board meeting. The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive confirmed not. Bruton Knowles would continue to work through the process. Formal bids would be evaluated when received and a recommendation brought back to the Board in due course.

Newhampton Arts Centre (NAC)

Legal work was progressing for the sale of NAC.

Joint Asset Strategy and Action Plan

The college's involvement in this wider city based project was noted. Further details would be brought back as work progressed

Adult Education Service Update

The Principal had provided a short update, the contents of which were noted.

Mark Taylor re-joined the meeting.

SAR Executive Summary

Mike Dixon, Assistant Principal, noted the summary that had been provided following review of the detailed document at the last meeting. Since the document had been drafted, qualification achievement rate data had been published. The SAR would be updated for this, but no significant impact was expected.

College Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)

Fiona Henderson, Interim Assistant Principal Quality and Engagement, presented the QIP but noted that there was work in progress to further refine the details. QEB meetings had started with curriculum teams. At this stage, it was important for Governors to see the direction of travel and the planned outputs. However, an updated document with fuller information and more detailed targets would be brought back to a future meeting.

A Governor commented on the need for more metrics, deliverables and named staff in the document. The Interim Assistant Principal agreed and explained that this was part of the work now in progress. A Governor who had attended a QEB meeting earlier in the day agreed and confirmed that he had seen evidence of this. It had been a positive session and he was encouraged to see that curriculum leads had a good understanding of the details.

The Interim Assistant Principal also commented on further work to reflect the vision and intent in the QIP. This would include apprenticeships.

A Governor asked how the outputs from the Governors' Strategy Day in October were being incorporated. The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive confirmed ongoing work on this being led by the Principal. Staff views were now feeding into this. An update would be brought to a future Board meeting.

The Chair commented that it was clear that the Ofsted report and most recent SAR were linked in with the QIP, and asked what oversight and ownership was now expected from Governors. The Interim Assistant Principal responded that there would be a termly management review. A reporting schedule with Governors would be agreed.

43/25 COLLEGE UPDATE (ITEM 7)

The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive noted the Principal's general updates, including sector pay issues, the views of unions on strike action in sixth form colleges and the recent visit of a local MP to college.

Student Engagement

Personal Development – Term 1 Position

The Interim Assistant Principal noted that personal development was graded as Good but had some strong elements of outstanding, including for the tutorial programme and the speed with which student in year feedback had been actioned. Students were receiving very good support for next steps and progression. Student surveys, feedback, tutorial activities, Prevent and British Values were all well embedded. Staff were to be encouraged to further promote the good work being done.

A Governor asked what metrics could be used to capture further data. The Interim Assistant Principal confirmed that EBS was used and that there was work planned to look at how robust the data was. It would be important to gather information for Ofsted.

Safeguarding – Term 1 Position

The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive confirmed that he was now the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). The following were noted:

- Safeguarding referrals were lower than at the same time in 2024.
- There remained many challenging issues being reported.
- There had been a reduction in mental health referrals, which was attributed to support from personal tutors, assessors and mental health first aiders.
- Support for the Prevent agenda remained a key focus, and the activities of the college in this area were noted.
- The safeguarding team was strong and the lead manager was well connected to local panels and referral agencies.

The Chair asked whether there were robust processes for sharing data with other organisations. The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive confirmed that there were. As the new DSL, he had been reviewing this.

The role of the new Progression Coaches this year was noted. The pilot for this had worked well and was felt to have contributed to the reduction in safeguarding referrals. More work to evidence this was needed.

A Governor commented that they had been the safeguarding lead at a recent Ofsted inspection. There had been a particular focus on record keeping, including time between referrals and issues being closed down. The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive confirmed that safeguarding processes and paperwork were robust but that the potential lags would need to be reviewed. Action: Deputy Principal and Chief Executive.

There was a discussion about the low number of apprenticeship safeguarding referrals, and the opportunities they may have to make disclosures. The Interim Assistant Principal noted CPD for assessors as there was a need to both bridge the knowledge gap in this area between curriculum and assessor staff, and to address some inconsistencies between assessors. Safeguarding staff had worked with assessors to improve understanding of differences between safeguarding and pastoral concerns. There were around 500 apprentices currently.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report

The report had been provided in the same format as the previous year and included a range of statistical analysis. The following were specifically noted:

- Two thirds of students were male and one third were female.
- There was a focus on closing down apprentices that were out of funding.
- The BME achievement gap was reducing.

Governors commented on the need to further segment data for students with declared disabilities. It was noted that students with additional learning support generally performed better than those without, but that this did not appear to be the case at Wolverhampton. The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive agreed to ask the team to review this area. Action: Deputy Principal and Chief Executive.

Student Success

Quality of Education – term 1 Update

The Interim Assistant Principal Quality and Engagement commented on the following:

- Quality was good with outstanding features.
- The college worked with 24 awarding bodies and none had raised any concerns about the college.
- There was clear onboarding for new staff.
- Quality strategies were in place. There would be more thematic deep dives in year, for example to look at tutorials and exam preparation, as well as curriculum areas that were at risk.
- There had been 269 learning walks in the year to date, covering 89% of staff. Eight staff that had not met expected standards were working with learning innovators to improve practice.
- Areas for improvement were consistency of teaching, learning and assessment, target setting and collaborative planning of delivery.
- CPD day in February would be looking at behaviours and resilience for learning, as well as other areas.

Questions and comments were invited.

Governors commented on the need to build a reflective culture and to have time for staff to do this.

A Governor asked if staff had platforms to share practice and management acknowledged that this was a gap to be addressed. However, there were many other areas of good practice being seen.

A Governor asked if target setting was discussed in staff one to one meetings. The Assistant Principal (Mike Dixon) confirmed that this was part of the standard agenda for curriculum review meetings every four weeks. EBS was used and target setting was currently being reviewed.

Behaviour and Attitudes

The Assistant Principal, Mike Dixon, confirmed that behaviour overall was good. Attendance for 16-18 students last term had been 90%, and it was thought that this was partially due to the positive influence of the Progress Coaches. A significant reason for referral to a Coach was for attendance related concerns.

There was a discussion about Progress Coaches, which was a new innovation this year. There were two Coaches and both had high workloads. As a result there had been a re-focus of their time into Health & Social Care, Early Years, Construction and A Levels.

The attendance data, including by level, and comparatives for the previous two years were noted. Attendance to Maths and English remained challenging. A task and finish group had been formed to look at this in more detail.

A Governor asked about learning walks for Maths and English. The Interim Assistant Principal commented on these and the specific CPD in place. There were notable strengths in the Maths department in particular. Links had been made with teachers in local secondary schools as well.

Retention was high, at 98.9%. The differences in retention by gender, ethnicity and disability were noted.

Disciplinary data for the year to date was also shared. This showed a reduction in levels 1 to 3 compared to the same time in the previous year. The main reason for disciplinary meetings was attendance.

A Governor commented that it would be useful to see if there was any correlation between behaviour statistics and survey results. It was agreed to provide this information for future meetings. Action: Assistant Principal (Mike Dixon).

People Engagement

Workforce Development Update

The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive highlighted aspects of the written report:

- There were a small number of staff in performance management processes.
- The college continued to engage with the DfE's Taking Teaching Further programme.
- 15 members of teaching staff had applied for funding through the FE Teachers Scheme.
- Work continued with Colleges West Midlands. Unconscious Bias training was being delivered.
- Welcome events were being held with new staff.
- Annual Performance Review meetings were in progress.
- A Pulse survey was to be issued to staff within the next few weeks.

Gender Pay Report

The report had been prepared and included data as at 31 March 2024. There was a detailed analysis provided. It was noted that 65% of college employees were female and 35% were male. There were 501 employees at that time.

The headline findings showed an overall median gender pay gap of 27% and a mean gender pay gap of 18%. These figures were higher than the UK average of 13.1%, but aligned almost identically with the education sector averages of 26.7% (median) and 17.2% (mean).

It was a legislative requirement for the Gender Pay report to be published, so it would be added to the college website.

(Simon Evans left at 7pm)

Business Success

Enrolment and Funding Contract Update

The RO4 funding return showed that 16-18 enrolment was above contract and above plan for 2024/25.

The adult position showed no growth compared to the previous year, despite stretching targets being set. New starts for the remainder of the year were being reviewed, including via partnership provision.

Apprenticeships had recruited 85% of the target for new starts. Several leads for new business, including with new employers, had been generated and there were no specific concerns about the ability to meet the income target for the year.

Management Accounts – December 2024

The Director of Finance presented the report and highlighted key points including variances in relation to income and pay and non-pay budgets.

Governors noted the following:

- The management accounts showed an Earnings Before Interest, Tax, Depreciation and Amortisation (EBITDA) surplus of £542k compared to a budget surplus of £620k. The summary table showed the EBITDA margin generated by partnership delivery and by net campus contribution, as previously discussed.
- The year to date position showed that the college was on track to achieve or exceed budget. The EBITDA surplus was derived from income of £14.5m offset by pay costs of £8.6m and overhead costs of £5.3m. The current income shortfall related to under-delivery of Adult provision and was offset by reduced partnership costs of £1.5m. The year-to-date savings on pay and overhead costs were noted.
- The forecast outturn had been prepared based on known changes to income and cost and included a provision for a pay award from 1 February 2025. The forecast showed an increase in EBITDA of £1.3m (8.3%) compared to budget.
- The main variances were noted, as set out in the written report, and included:
 - The in year uplift for 16-18 learners.
 - Growth in Local Authority High Needs funding.
 - Virement of adult funding from classroom to partnership delivery.
 - Increases in overhead costs, particularly relating to partnership costs and exam support costs.
- The cash position was positive. A rolling 24 month cashflow was being developed.
- Some investment opportunities with Barclays were being considered.

- Financial health was good, and the reasons for this were explained.

Questions and comments were invited.

Governors noted the significant improvements to the college finances compared to previous years. The efforts of staff to achieve this were noted.

A question was asked about the impact of changes to National Insurance. The funding allocated by DfE for this was to be confirmed so it was not yet clear if there would be a shortfall. Any shortfall would create some financial pressures. The impact for 2024/25 would only be for the last four months of the year.

The potential investments with Barclays were discussed.

The Board of Governors received the Management Accounts to December 2024.

Pay Award

The Director of Finance outlined the pay award proposal, which was 2.5% or £750, whichever was the greater. This was in line with AOC's recommendation. The impact of this was £660k for a full financial year. There were also some adjustments to pay scales to reflect National Minimum Wage and to maintain incremental parity at lower levels.

The pay award was being recommended with effect from 1 February 2025 and to include senior postholders.

The same award would be recommended to the City of Wolverhampton College Enterprises Board as well.

Management had considered the FE Commissioner's staff pay to turnover benchmark and noted that the college continued to be considerably above this. However the pay award proposed appeared in line with other colleges and also that made by the City Council.

Resolved: that the Board **approved**:

- A pay award of 2.5% or £750 (whichever is greater) from 1 February 2025 for all staff including senior postholders.
- The implementation of the updated national minimum wage as of 1 April 2025.
- Scale point 18 to increase by a further £400 (cumulative £1,150) on implementation of the national minimum wage (1 April) to maintain incremental parity with scale point 17.

Financial Regulations

Minor updates had been made to the document but there were no changes to procurement or approval thresholds.

Resolved: that the Board **approved** the Financial Regulations

Treasury Management Policy

The policy had been reviewed and was presented for approval. There were no substantive changes.

Resolved: that the Treasury Management policy was **approved**.

Partnerships Update

The Subcontracting and Partnerships Policy had been updated and the main changes were outlined in the written report.

A Governor commented on the risks that partners could recruit ineligible students. Management agreed that this was a risk but confirmed that there was much work done to check this, including at regular QEB meetings. All partners were included in the QEB review meetings cycle.

Resolved: that the Board **approved** the Subcontracting and Partnerships Policy.

The current partner performance was noted. Approval was requested for a further £500k of rail partnership provision. This supported both demand in this area and the adult education budget position.

Resolved: that the Board **approved** the allocation of a further £500k for rail partnership provision in 2024/25.

44/25 COMMITTEE REPORTS (ITEM 8)

The minutes of the following recent meetings had been circulated:

- Campus Transformation Oversight Group 9 December 2024
- Campus Transformation Oversight Group 13 January 2025.

There were no recommendations from these meetings.

The Board of Governors received the committee reports.

45/25 ANY OTHER BUSINESS (ITEM 9)

The Director of Finance had offered finance training for any interested Governors.

46/25 CONFIDENTIALITY (ITEM 10)

It was resolved that the following reports would remain confidential:

- Rail, Property and CLQ Update
- Adult Education Service Update

47/24 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING (ITEM 11)

Board of Governors – Thursday 13 March 2025 at 5pm at Wellington Road

The meeting ended at 7.35pm.