

Full Board meeting
FRIDAY 19 SEPTEMBER 2025 AT 14.00
Princes' Road, Chelmsford and via MS Teams™

MINUTES

Members: Sheila Salmon (Chair), Richard Davidson (Vice Chair), Trevor Bolton (Vice Chair), Sarah Atkinson, Jan Church, Rachael Cornwall, Richard Davidson, Matt Dearsley, David Holmes, Christian Norman, Jaya Patten, David Peace, Rak Rehal, Paddy Reilly, Helen Russell, Nadia Themis, David Warnes (CEO).

College Officers: Debbie Garroway, Debs Hurst,

Director of Governance: Ra Hamilton-Burns

Governance support officer: Amy Simmonds

An item marked in **GREEN** on the left-hand column has been pre-scrutinised and is being recommended by a sub-committee. This delegation is designed to allow the Board to focus on key strategic issues on the agenda whilst still ensuring that they have sight of information and ultimate decision-making power.

		Action
1.	<p>Apologies for absence Professor Sheila Salmon thanked everyone for attending her first meeting as chair of the Board. She thanked Amanda Montague once again for all her work and dedication to the College and wished her well with her future plans.</p> <p>Apologies had been received from Sarah Atkinson, Rachael Cornwall, Rak Rehal and Helen Russell.</p> <p>David Holmes and Paddy Reilly joined the meeting via TEAMS.</p>	
2.	<p>Declarations of interest and to notify any confidential items David Warnes, Debs Hurst, Debbie Garroway and Ra Hamilton-Burns declared an interest in the Confidential Item 14.</p> <p>David Warnes declared that he is a Board member of BPP University.</p>	DoG
3.	<p>Minutes of the previous meetings Corrections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EBITDA target of 7% and it was agreed that if income is not achieved – costs will be cut accordingly. <i>Curriculum areas will be shared at the December Board by Debs Hurst as it will be updated to reflect real time costs. Curriculum efficiency and resources required are outlined and more scrutiny on concomitant costs and their effect on the bottom line are taken into accounts.</i> <p>AGREED: THE BOARD AGREED THAT THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27 JUNE 2025 WERE A TRUE AND ACCURATE RECORDS</p> </p>	Chair Chair

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board noted the electronic resolution electing Trevor Bolton and Richard Davidson as Vice Chairs 2025 – 2027 • The Board noted the electronic resolution awarding the cleaning contract 	
4.	<p>Matters arising / actions</p> <p>There had been only one action arising from the minutes:</p> <p><i>Chief Operating officer to bring a paper outlining the ten possible areas for expenditure and the rationale for identifying these to the September Board meeting.</i></p> <p>This will be covered in item 7.</p>	
5.	<p>i. CEO's Report</p> <p>Achievement (2024-25)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicative achievement results show a favourable picture in most areas compared to 23-24 and to national rates where these are known. There are two areas of concern that will be addressed as part of the quality improvement plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Apprenticeships ◦ Adults (level 2 online learning) • Finalised achievement will be confirmed ahead of the hard close in October and included in the SAR validation panel on the 8 October 2025. David Warnes reminded the Board that members of the Quality and Learners' Committee are invited to attend the validation panel meeting. <p>Enrolment (2025-26)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrolment continues until the end of September, but a snapshot as of the 11 September indicated a strong performance, in line to meet the College's 16-18 allocation target. • T-level enrolments are disappointingly low and may be c30 students under allocation, these programmes come with an in-year clawback of funding which might be in the region of £180-£300k. • Today's enrolment update is 2689 against the target was 2489 and it is likely that 200 more learners will be recruited in the next couple of weeks. • Total enrolment stands at 2731 compared with 2683 including adults – this is growth of circa 9.5% and it is likely that this will drop to 5% by R04 in November 2025. • At 18 September, the College is carrying ten 'live teacher' vacancies. A number of new staff are currently undergoing rigorous onboarding checks. This is very close to the national benchmark on teacher vacancies. <p>Devolution - there will be a governor twilight session in the New Year when more is known about the position as candidates are coming forward for the</p>	

mayoral election next May. The local government reform is the more pressing agenda as the government has to make a decision on how many unitary authorities there will be in Essex.

One governor commented that, having met some of the mayoral candidates, it appears that adult skills are low down on their agenda and emphasised that the College should hone its message and 'ask'. David Warnes reminded the Board that Appendix 3 has the manifesto of FEDEC (this has now been updated, and version 3 will be shared with governors.)

Action: DW to share version three of the FEDEC manifesto with the Board.

FEDEC is also working with the [Greater Essex Business Board](#) to ensure that there is synergy between the messaging of both organisations.

David Warnes drew the attention of the Board to three key messages from the FEDEC vision:

- *We will create the conditions for a skills and employment system that delivers greater economic growth, with opportunities for all local people and employers.*
- *It will become easier for employers in Greater Essex to find employees with the right skills and people from all backgrounds will have a greater choice of appropriate, meaningful work that pays well and allows them to progress.*
- *We will do this by ensuring that there is a shared understanding of the skills system, one that is responsive, inclusive and efficient. Courses will be designed to deliver maximum productivity, accessible to all and shaped and delivered in coordination*

[Colleges for technical excellence \(CTEC\)](#) were announced in September. For the Eastern region, West Suffolk College put in the winning bid and Chelmsford College is working with them and it is anticipated that this may be a route to additional funding for construction etc. Governors commented that it is to be hoped that the CTEC funding is shared across the region and will benefit the College. David Warnes was pleased to report that the lead on the bid at West Suffolk College has already contacted him.

Governors asked for more detail on the reference to Social value at £51m. This will be unpacked at the PSR meeting in more detail and thus on to the Board. Richard Davidson commented that, in his experience, this is an encouraging amount to be attributed to social values and looked forward to more detail and measures which will be informative.

Action: ELT to report on social values to the November PSR Committee and the December Board meeting.

The Chair said that the reformed Integrated Care Partnership for Essex will have considerable funds and the College is networking with them to explore opportunities to work with them.

	<p>The post-16 skills plan has been delayed due to changes in government machinery and is expected in December 2025.</p> <p>Prosperity report</p> <p>Funding targets are for 2024-5 outturn but the hard close in October 2025 and the audit will confirm them. The College is also undergoing an external audit at the same time. The red RAG areas represent a small proportion of the College's provision.</p>																									
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	<p>Governors asked why commercial had such a shortfall in achievement.</p> <p>Advanced learner loans are in decline generally, but access courses are growing so there may be an opportunity to grow this area. David Warnes said currently the College is missing the opportunity to market the online access offer more widely. Debs Hurst explained that the innovate programme and grant were achieved in 2024-5 and this may have detracted from the ALL numbers. Numbers on 'access to HE' courses are dropping as learners were affected by the pressures of the economy. It may be that Essex CC withdrawing from this provision might be an opportunity for the College. The goalposts on Adult Learning Loans keep moving and funding does not always match employer demand. All providers therefore struggle to meet their full allocation.</p>																									
	<p>Governors asked when, and how, commercial income will be reviewed. David Warnes explained that the headline target has been set but the team is still working on the specific provision.</p> <p>Action DH to report on commercial income in detail to PSR Committee</p>																									
	<p>Staff to income ratio is at 69-70%. The College recognises that the FEC sets a target of 65% but there are reasons that it is not meeting it.</p> <p>The curriculum efficiency meetings mitigate against underutilised staff. Governors asked for regular updates on the staff to income ratio so that</p>																									

¹* Subject to final reconciliation from external auditors

** Off-set by adults not eligible for FCFJ but drawing down ASF instead

*** Due to lower recruitment on L3 Access courses, competing against L3 foundation year offer at HEI's

**** Focus in 2024-25 was to build the ASF online programmes and Sector-based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs'), which both exceeded targets set.

	<p>focus is on maintaining the target of 69%. Debs Hurst reminded the Board that government decisions around National Insurance or national minimum wage rises are outside the College's control and mean that achieving the staff to income ratio is challenging.</p> <p>Governors asked whether or not reducing agency staff and offering supplements had achieved recruitment, the College should be looking at the impact of these measures more carefully. It is important to look at the effects on recruitment and retention to offer stability for students. It was suggested that focus should be on the individuals that have received supplements and if the desired impact has been achieved.</p> <p>A governor asked if Construction is the highest contributor to the College to warrant the supplements in pay. David Warnes reminded them that there is a market premium of £1k extra per construction learner HVCP and that construction lecturers are notoriously hard to recruit nationally.</p> <p><i>Paddy Reilly joined the meeting online at 14.40.</i></p> <p>The proposed targets for 2025/6 are listed and the suggestion by the Board that a KPI on bursary spend was acknowledged.</p> <p>Pay review – the final proposals will go to the PSR Committee in November.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The AoC has proposed a 4% pay rise • Unions are considering the outline proposals • The SLT is recommending a broad envelope of pay award, but this will vary as there are a number of variants for staff. • There will be some areas of expenditure which need to be implemented in the interim, for instance for teaching staff who have achieved their qualifications. <p>The Board acknowledged that the detailed plan will be presented to the PSR Committee in November but discussed an initial outline agreement to allow necessary pay awards to be made before this.</p> <p>AGREED: THE BOARD AGREED TO AN INITIAL PAY AWARD BUDGET OF £500K</p>	
6.	<p>Risk Management Report</p> <p>Risk Register and Dartboard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All risks have been renumbered from the beginning of the year, with the number on the risk register corresponding with the number on the dartboard. Risks have been allocated to individuals of the senior leadership team. • On the Risk Spreadsheet there is a page showing the Boards' risk appetite and this has been used against the risks highlighted. • <i>Agency cost control is a risk and this will be monitored.</i> • MIS system has moved from RED to AMBER as enrolment went well using the new system. Timetabling has caused more issues, and a great deal of effort is being put into address this. As a result, staff have experienced stressful inductions as the timetables were not working well. 	

Jan Church, staff governor, commented that whilst difficult for staff, the issues during enrolment had been more difficult and unsettling for students which posed a bigger risk as they do not have the experience or trust in the College that the staff had. A communications programme with the students to keep them in the picture had been ongoing.

Governors asked how much of the new MIS system was now fully functional as the College is placing a great deal of reliance on it. Debs Hurst was not able to answer this question as it has only been in use for three weeks and the primary focus has been on timetabling. The current system is an off the shelf programme unlike the prior bespoke system. Governors asked if the teething issues had been due to the system or human error. It was thought that it had been a mixture, but the problems are being resolved, and staff are now able to view a great deal of information on the learners.

There was a suggestion that the system could have been tested over the summer. It was explained that the implementation of the system had been very time consuming and there was no opportunity in the timeframe to undertake trials.

A governor pointed out that after mitigation four red risks remain and asked that this be put on a future agenda for more discussion.

ACTION: ELT to arrange a risk appetite twilight for governors for Audit and Risk Committee.

The risks no longer showing are:

- Head of Teaching, Learning, Skills Academy. This position has been filled for one year and progress is being made.
- Commercial income achievement will be reviewed during the year
- Director Recruitment. The Senior Leadership Team is fully staffed

One new risk had been added.

- Risk 17 - Use of generative AI could lead to misinformation, exacerbating bias, violating data privacy and cyberattacks.

Governors suggested that the detail of the AI risk should be defined in more detail.

Action ELT to consider the wording and detail of Risk 17 on AI.

A governor suggested that a risk around safeguarding of students and extremism should be put on a future agenda. This topic is reported to the Quality and Learners' Committee. The College wider leadership group is reviewing this in light of the current climate and the 16 CEOs in the Eastern region are drafting a letter articulating their concerns to their respective MPs.

Debs Hurst is attending an AI in FE conference in October and will feed back useful learning to future discussions. The DfE has released a couple of programmes for leaders and one for teachers and this will be disseminated and made part of mandatory staff training.

	<p>It was noted that Essex has several significant investments which will generate new employment, and the College will remain alert to ensure that they support the employers.</p>																									
7.	<p>Finance Report</p> <p>a) CFFR - Outturn for 2024/25 including July 2025 Management Accounts</p> <p>Debs Hurst presented the final outturn subject to external audit which has not changed significantly from the Board presentation on June 26, 2025.. There is an external funding audit underway, and the annual audit will commence at the end of October. The College currently has 'good' financial health. Debs Hurst confirmed that the College had been selected for the funding audit on a random sampling basis.</p> <p>Governors thanked the team and recognised the considerable effort to bring the College to a 'good' financial grade, when it had been judged as 'requires improvement' since 2013.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>CFFR (heading)</th> <th>Forecast Position £'000</th> <th>DRAFT 'actual' position £'000</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Total Income</td> <td>21,545</td> <td>21,640</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Less Total Operating Expenditure</td> <td>20,075</td> <td>20,270</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Net Operating Income</td> <td>1,470</td> <td>1,370</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Add Release of Capital Grants</td> <td>470</td> <td>453</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Surplus/Deficit before Interest, Tax, Depreciation and Amortisation (ITDA)</td> <td>1,940</td> <td>1,822</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Less ITDA</td> <td>1,678</td> <td>1,687</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Surplus/ Deficit</td> <td>262</td> <td>137</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>The significant improvement in the College's financial position has meant that Lloyds Bank has released it from financial oversight.</p> <p>AGREED: THE BOARD AGREED THE REVISED CFFR OUTTURN REPORT FOR 2024-5</p> <p>b) CFFR - Indicative Budget for 2025/26</p> <p>The budget has been set to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase surplus to > £350k • Retain 'good' Financial Health – Points >200 • Improve EBITDA % to > 7% • Improve Current ratio to > 1 • Increase cash resilience by £300k to £1.8m <p>Most of the funding is certain but the costs are also rising along with the revenue. The senior team will continue to monitor costs and analyse</p>	CFFR (heading)	Forecast Position £'000	DRAFT 'actual' position £'000	Total Income	21,545	21,640	Less Total Operating Expenditure	20,075	20,270	Net Operating Income	1,470	1,370	Add Release of Capital Grants	470	453	Surplus/Deficit before Interest, Tax, Depreciation and Amortisation (ITDA)	1,940	1,822	Less ITDA	1,678	1,687	Surplus/ Deficit	262	137	
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contribution. The contribution analysis will go to the PSR Committee in outline in November but may be ready in detail for February 2026.

Governors asked if it is possible to align staff costs to particular provision such as 16-19, however this is not straightforward as some staff work across the College.

Paddy Reilly left the meeting at 15.20

AGREED: THE BOARD AGREED THE REVISED CFFR FOR 2025-6

c) Proposed Capital Programme 2025-2028

- Capital works for £600k had been approved at the June Board for works over the summer
- £300k from College fund and £300k from condition improvement grant from DFE
- The condition improvement grant was £1053k
- Total costs for all works are estimated at £602,189
- Two additional items require approval
 - Urgent health and safety works for fire suppressant for both campus refectories – this is an insurance requirement
 - Costs of £60k (representing Chelmsford College's half of an agreement) for list of equipment for the refurbished Dovedale leisure centre.
 - *There is a contingency of £50k for additional items that will arise*

Governors asked what the impact of this will be to the financial KPIs. Debs Hurst confirmed that it will cost the College £50k and will affect the cash days. Governors asked that this be reported at the next meeting.

ACTION: DH to report the impact on cash days of the additional capital projects expenditure.

The detailed presentation in 7c – appendix 1 detailed the key estates themes and the limitations on the condition grant. It outlined considerations of work that the College might wish to invest in. The DfE had visited the College on the 3 September to undertake a condition survey which will hopefully generate more grant. The Board thanked Debs Hurst for her report and recognised that this report will enable the Board to be strategic around capital priorities. The PSR Committee will consider any grants that might be offered as a result of the DfE condition survey.

AGREED: THE BOARD AGREED TO INCREASE THE TOTAL CAPITAL SPEND TO £750K – OF WHICH £400K WILL COME FROM THE CONDITION GRANT AND £350K FROM COLLEGE FUNDS.

d) MIS system update

Debs Hurst gave an update on the implementation of the MIS system from UNIT-e and CEDAR.

- The project began in February 2025 with training from the supplier

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project plan was generic and there was no detailed programme • ESS provided a change of project lead which was beneficial • Enrolment has been challenging as some staff had insufficient experience of the system • Improvements are being made • The commitment of all staff has made the enrolments possible, and Debs Hurst recognised the extraordinary efforts that have been made. <p>The Board offered their thanks and recognition to Stuart Hodges, Steve Pigmore, Rachel Harrington and Tony Rowe who had worked tirelessly to implement the system. Additionally, Lesley Hammond and the team were singled out for praise.</p> <p>ACTION: THE CHAIR WILL WRITE TO EACH INDIVIDUAL THANKING THEM FOR THEIR WORK TO IMPLEMENT THE MIS SYSTEM.</p> <p>ACTION: DEBS HURST TO REPORT CONTINUING PROGRESS ON MITIGATING MIS RELATED RISKS TO THE AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE.</p>																																					
8	<p>Quality & Learners' Matters</p> <p>I. 2024-25 Outcomes update</p> <p>Debbie Garroway reported the current overview of learner performance across key educational programmes from academic years 2025/26, compared with 2024-25. Learners were recruited in adult, online provision but retention for this group had not been good. The College is working to review the reasons behind this.</p> <p>A more detailed breakdown showing three-year trends in achievement, retention, and pass rates across age groups, qualification levels, and delivery types will be provided for the SAR Validation Panel on 6 October, and the Quality and Learners' Committee in November.</p> <p>Achievement Rates by Learner Group and Level KPI's 2025-</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Learner Group / Level</th> <th>Achievement Rate 2024-25</th> <th>Current/Predicted Achievement</th> <th>RAG</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>16-19</td> <td>83.6%</td> <td>85.7</td> <td>Green</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Adults</td> <td>89.6%</td> <td>79.7</td> <td>Red</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Apprenticeships</td> <td>67%</td> <td>55.2 (predicted)</td> <td>Yellow</td> </tr> <tr> <td>High Needs 16-18</td> <td>86.5%</td> <td>TBC</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>High Needs 19+</td> <td>92.7%</td> <td>TBC</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Entry/Level 1 (16-18)</td> <td>85.8%</td> <td>85.9</td> <td>Green</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Level 2 (16-18)</td> <td>80.1%</td> <td>84.8</td> <td>Green</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Level 3 (16-18)</td> <td>83.0%</td> <td>86.4</td> <td>Green</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Governors asked what the 'College only' achievement in the adult learner group would be as this significantly reflects on the success of the College. The team is still working to determine this and it will be reported in the</p>	Learner Group / Level	Achievement Rate 2024-25	Current/Predicted Achievement	RAG	16-19	83.6%	85.7	Green	Adults	89.6%	79.7	Red	Apprenticeships	67%	55.2 (predicted)	Yellow	High Needs 16-18	86.5%	TBC		High Needs 19+	92.7%	TBC		Entry/Level 1 (16-18)	85.8%	85.9	Green	Level 2 (16-18)	80.1%	84.8	Green	Level 3 (16-18)	83.0%	86.4	Green	
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College SAR. It was recognised that subcontractors are experts in online provision which is the sole focus of their provision, and the College will learn from their best practice.

Debbie Garroway reported the high-needs learners have a dedicated team which is working tirelessly in a challenging environment.

Correction - Apprenticeships achievement was 54.2% in 2024/5 against a national rate of 54.6%.

Paddy Reilly re-joined the meeting at 15.40

II. Quality Improvement priorities 2025-26

For the 2025–26 academic year, the College will focus on three key priorities to strengthen educational outcomes and maintain high standards across all provision. These priorities are designed to ensure that every learner and apprentice receives exceptional support, teaching, and preparation for their future. They are derived from the outturn in 2024-25 and are focused on the areas that will enable the College to continue to move to overall excellence:

1. High attendance as a foundation for success

Consistently strong attendance and punctuality are essential for learners to thrive. College leaders will closely monitor attendance, communicate expectations clearly, and take timely, effective action within their teams to sustain high levels of learner engagement.

2. Outstanding apprenticeship standards

Apprenticeship provision must deliver consistently high-quality outcomes across all standards. This will include ensuring that every apprentice benefits from a rich learning experience, combined with a relevant pastoral programme that equips them with the skills, knowledge, and personal development needed for their next steps.

3. Exceptional teaching, learning and assessment for all

Teachers and work-based tutors will be supported to provide inspirational and inclusive learning experiences. The College will prioritise professional development and collaboration to ensure that all learners and apprentices achieve the best possible educational outcomes.

Debbie Garroway reminded governors that the quality team in 2024-5 had been limited but the new appointments will support achievement of these priorities.

Richard Davidson left the meeting at 15.48

Governors thanked Debbie for the clear and ambitious report. They noted that the 'what' is outlined but asked for how these targets will be achieved and if technology will be harnessed.

- Opportunities will be evaluated as appropriate for each area.
- One example is that the department for high needs will be encouraged to use technology for its bespoke needs.

The staff governor commented that staff are encouraged to use technology to support their teaching and students.

	<p>Richard Davidson joined the meeting at 15.53.</p> <p>Christian Norman thanked Debbie Garroway for her report and he summarised some highlights of the report which were encouraging:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite attendance challenges, 16-19 achievements are up • Risk of the timetabling system can hiccup the start for learners but focus will continue to communicate with them and encourage them to look past the enrolment. • There is a clear focus on giving the learners a superb experience and supporting their success 	
9	<p>Governance matters</p> <p>The Director of Governance had provided the following for governor information:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. Infographic – the Board year 2024-5 at a glance II. Updated 2025-6 meetings calendar (appendices) III. Link Governors 2025-26 proposal <p>David Warnes had provided a proposed list of link governors for review. Amy Simmonds will coordinate and make calendar events between governors and SLT members to ensure continuity and record keeping.</p> <p>AGREED: THE BOARD AGREED THE LINK GOVERNOR PROPOSAL FOR 2025-6</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> IV. Board membership and structure (appendices) <p>Governors noted the updated membership for Board and committees. The Director of Governance gave an update on the student governor elections for which there are five candidates. She has contacted them all to offer a pre-election meeting and introduction to the role so they can go forward knowing what the commitment entails. The results will be known on 3 October, and it is hoped that the new student governors will attend the Development Day on 10 October.</p>	
10	<p>Committee minutes to note –</p> <p>The Board noted the minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee of the 25 June 2025</p>	
11	<p>Recommendations from Committees</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Audit and risk committee - 25 June 2025 <p>The recommendations had been approved in the June 2025 Board meeting.</p>	
12	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>There was none.</p>	
13	<p>Date of Next Meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friday 10 October 2025 all day • Friday 5 December 14.00 • Friday 6 February 2026 all day • Friday 13 March 14.00 • Friday 26 June 14.00 	

	David Warnes, Debs Hurst, Debbie Garroway, Jan Church and Nadia Themis left the meeting at 16.00	
	Part B meeting – confidential session began.	

chair approved