MINUTES

BOARD of GOVERNORS

5.30 pm – Wednesday 2 April 2025

Room: 304

Attendance:

Governors	
Joanna Davidson – Chair Amanda Blinkhorn – Teacher Governor Monika Kinasiewicz – Support Staff Governor Jon Sibson Max Silver Alice Rubbra Fran Fahey	June Jarrett Lukas Mandangu Peter Knowland – Student Governor Tom Robins Susan Corby Dipa Ganguli – Principal
Staff	
Di Teasdale – Deputy Principal Korede Obasaju – Vice Principal Finance & Resources Jo Luff – Head of Governance	

1. Introductory Matters
The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. The meeting was quorate. Apologies were received from Ben Lonsdale. No declarations of interest were made. The Chair informed the meeting that at the end of this and future Board meetings, time will be given for the Governors and Principal to have an opportunity for informal conversations. Staff will be asked to recuse themselves from this part of the meeting.
2. Minutes and matters arising from last meeting: 11 Dec 2024
Minutes were reviewed and approved. There were no outstanding actions to report.
3. Chair's Update
The Chair provided a verbal update: • The annual strategic conversation with the DfE went well. The College received positive feedback on the detail of work presented and for the first time GLA were in attendance • Both Joanna and Dipa have been involved with lots of external engagement raising the profile of the College • The Commercial T&F Group met 24 March. The next meeting will be held 22 April. Details and notes from those meetings are available to Governors in the Board folders

- Work will begin shortly to review the risk management strategy - looking to align the strategic plan and risk register providing a more objective based overview of risk.

4. Principal's Report

Dipa presented the report. Key points noted by the Board were:

- The financial landscape is challenging. DfE have received a zero-growth budget, effectively redirecting skills funding to cover other priorities such as free school meals and other areas of school budgets
- It follows that devolved areas will see cuts of 2 to 3% - however, the GLA have confirmed cuts of 3.3%. Next year GLA will receive an integrated settlement enabling them to decide where to focus their spend
- The College can no longer rely on government funding and will need to work on the assumption it will shrink further
- Data shows participation in learning is increasing, so it is frustrating that adult learning budgets are being cut. Various forums and networks are lobbying to stop the cuts - WMC will petition too
- Recent Government announcements include: £600m to be made available for construction courses (recycled money) compared to £210m made available for tailored learning over the past decade
- We continue to look at how to develop courses in line with Government priorities
- Decisions now are being made for the curriculum in September - reduction in funding puts a further strain on budgets, it is critical to ensure that decisions for both fees and the curriculum are based on sound financial viability
- The Brand Survey was launched. The response has been very positive. A working group has been set up (including Joanna and Peter) who will review the outcomes of the survey next term
- We are now fully signed up to the AoC EDI Charter. Work in this area continues: 2 x forums have been set up for staff and learners to meet every half term. For staff, a mandate has been sent that one member of staff from each department must attend
- A mosaic for the garden is being created to celebrate the College's 170th anniversary and will be unveiled at an event on 10 July - all Governors are invited to attend.

The Board discussed the report focusing on concerns about funding, noting the work of the Commercial T&F Group who are meeting with the ELT to address these issues.

5. Staff Forum Report

Amanda provided feedback from the Staff Forum held 20 March 2025:

- From a staff perspective the move to Rhyl has worked well – main issue is no lift available to access the classes on the top floor, so difficult for those with mobility issues
- 58 staff responded to the recent pensions survey and 53 have requested independent pension advice
- Concerns remain for teaching staff on sessional contracts - staff were reminded to speak with their Curriculum Managers for a move to permanent contracts
- Staff discussed the branding survey - the consensus of those there were in favour of using the name The Working Men's College.

Dipa confirmed that sessional paid staff do receive employment benefits and that business cases for staff wishing to move from sessional to permanent contracts may be submitted via Curriculum Managers.

The Board discussed the report. Questions included:

- How many staff attend the forum?
  18 members of staff attended. We would like to see more people attend and are looking at how to best increase attendance. We do provide feedback after the meeting and people will feed comments or questions for the forum if unable to attend.

- If anyone has mobility issues that means attendance at Rhyl is difficult, can we make space at Crowndale? If that is the case, we will do what we can, but we are unable to make any guarantees. We obviously want to ensure that accessibility is available to all.

6. EDI Policy

Dipa presented the new EDI Policy for review and approval. Governors noted their role and responsibilities as set out in the policy, and the Chair reminded the Board that EDI as with safeguarding is both an individual and collective responsibility.

An annual EDI report will be presented at the next Board meeting. The College does not have to publish gender pay gap information but in line with good practice, data will be published.

The Board discussed EDI training. Dipa informed the Board that the College is signing up to become an Anti-Racist Affiliated College. First step in the process is an Anti-Racism training day in June for 30 x key senior staff (this will also be offered to Chairs). Online training modules are available through the Education & Training Foundation and can be included along with Safeguarding and Prevent training as part of a Governor induction programme.

It was agreed for Susan to take an interim role as EDI Link Governor which will be reviewed following the completion of the skills audit.

The Board approved the policy.

7. FPDC Chair's Report (items not covered above)

a. FPDC Meeting: 25 March 2025

Max provided a verbal report:

- We all agreed the key challenge ahead of us is to build financial resilience in the face of likely further public sector cuts and increased costs. Discussed the need to shift our current reliance (90%) from Government funding to fee income. It is imperative to work towards securing a break-even budget and as reported the Commercial T&F Group are also working on this
- Julie provided an HR report – the Committee discussed absence management, recruitment and the outcomes of the staff survey
- The Estates Strategy was reviewed and approved – once all quotes are in Board approval is needed to carry out works/agree spend needed for the window refurbishment; the Maurice Hall has been successfully refurbished (both works funded from a capital project grant); the move to Rhyl has been smooth and feedback is positive
    - The Committee reviewed the Risk Register for those items within its remit.

b. Management Accounts – 31 January 2025

Korede presented the management account report:

- The accounts were scrutinised by FPDC – this period shows an adverse variance against budget mainly due to a shortfall in tuition fees and other unbudgeted staff costs
- The financial health score for the college for the period remains 'good'
- Work continues to find cost savings.

The Board noted the report.

c. Fee Policy

Korede presented the draft Fee Policy for 2025/26. Notable changes to the policy are:

- Inflationary uplift of 5% applied to all relevant fees - reflecting increased costs to run the College and therefore the courses
- A change to the concession rates from 50% to 35% for Tailored Learning and 20% for Full Cost courses - moving in line with other providers, whose concessionary rates are lower

- Staff concessions will go from 50% to one 20% concession per term at the College
- Removal of 10% early bird discount
- New conditions for refund eligibility
- Provisional room hire rates made more commercially viable.

Max reported that both the FPDC and the Commercial T&F Group discussed the impacts of the proposed changes and associated risks of learner attrition. It is key to find the balance between increasing fees v. the risk of a drop in numbers and maintain the financial viability of courses, removing the need to rely on reserves.

Korede assured the Board that course fees were benchmarked against other providers – WMC will continue to remain competitive and offer value for money. The outcomes of the fee policy changes will be analysed next year and help inform any future decisions.

The Board discussed and questioned the impact of the proposed changes – acknowledging that for some learners these changes may be meaningful, and some learners may not return. Other commercial approaches/models were discussed.

The Board recognised the need to ensure the College remains financially viable and, considering the recent funding announcements, agreed to approve the policy requesting that an impact assessment on proposed fee changes is included to help inform decisions next year.

8. Audit Committee Chair's Report

Tom provided a verbal report:

- The internal audit plan is on track and outstanding recommendations are or have been implemented
- A Cyber Security audit was completed by a specialist firm – the outcomes were very positive and complimentary about the IT team. It was noted that a key person risk sits with David Barnes (IT Manager), so investigating ways on how to best mitigate this
- In line with good practice and DfE guidelines, the appointment of external auditors should be reviewed every 5 years. Given the timing and work needed to draft and timetable a comprehensive tender process the Committe recommend that the Board agree to retain Buzzacotts for a further year to cover the 2024/25 end of year audit. A shortlist of audit firms will be presented to the Committee for review at the next meeting and then final Board approval in July
- The Committee reviewed the Risk Register for those items within its remit.

The Board approved the Committee's recommendation to retain Buzzacotts for completion of the 2024/25 end of year audit.

9. CQSC Chair's Report

Jon and Di presented a verbal update from CQSC held 12 March 2025:

- Judy presented an update report on the employment and careers strategy – good progress is being made; employer engagement is working well
- The first Learner Forum was held, ensuring the voice of learners is heard and feedback through to CQSC. The meeting was very productive and informative – 8 x learners attended
- The Committee reviewed progress to date against the SAR – good progress is being made in all areas
- Curriculum planning is underway for 2025/26. New courses such as door security, first aid, employability are being introduced on a small, trial scale
- The College is on track to meet the funding allocation but not the fee target
- The Committee reviewed the Risk Register for those items within its remit.

The Board discussed the curriculum plan and discussions held at the Commercial T&F Group developing a business-based approach. Dipa confirmed that new courses must fit with what learners and employers both want, government/sector priorities and be financially sustainable. Amanda confirmed teachers are behind this approach and would welcome opportunities to be involved.

10. Governance

a. External Board Progress Review

Following the external review completed in June 2024 Joanna, Dipa and Jo met on 12 February with the consultant Simone Tyson from HfL for a progress review. From their recommendations Jo produced and presented an action plan with evidence of progress. Feedback from HfL was extremely positive on the work to date and our plans for further implementation. The Board noted that in line with DfE requirements the next external review is due in June 2027.

b. Board & Committee Membership

The Board reviewed their membership and noted:

- June Jarret's 9-year term of office as Governor & Safeguarding Link ends July 2026
- Monika Kinasiewicz term of office ends Nov 2025 – a staff election will be held in the Autumn Term
- Camden are still yet to appoint an LA representative to the Board
- Fran Fahey has decided not to complete a further 3-year term but will remain as a Governor through to the end of this academic year.

The Board agreed the re-appointment of the following Governors for a further 3-year term (Cohrt B): Alice Rubbra, Jon Sibson and Tom Robins.

Currently the Audit Committee includes 3 x members: 2 x appointed Governors and 1 x independent member. It was agreed that a 3rd Governor is needed on the Committee and any persons interested in the role were asked to come forward. Note: Governors are not eligible to sit for both the FPDC and Audit Committees.

The Board agreed to replace the existing Search Committee with a Nominations Committee to support Governor recruitment, review/evaluation and development. This will be established after the skills audit has been completed.

c. Task & Finish Group Terms of Reference

The Board reviewed and approved the draft ToR for establishing task and finish group for specific and short-term areas of work.

d. Commitment Statement – Strengthening Governance

Jo introduced the draft commitment statement. Its purpose is to set out the Boards commitment to the process of continual review and development and includes processes for: annual individual and collective Board and Committee reviews and commissioning 3-year independent, external Board reviews.

The Board approved the statement and the proposed process – implementation will be discussed further at the next Chairs' Committee meeting.

e. Skills Audit

Governors will be sent a skills audit for completion by 30 April 2025. The audit has been designed to capture the skills, knowledge and experience necessary to enable the Board to fulfil its duty as well as reflect the College's strategic plan. Outcomes from the audit will help inform recruitment and training/development opportunities. All new Governors will be required to complete the audit as part of their onboarding process.

11. Any Other Business

No other business was raised.

12. Date of Next Meeting:
5.30 pm Wednesday 9 July 2025
PART 2 Confidential: Governors & Principal discussion only
All staff left the meeting.

Reviewed and approved by the Board of Governors: 9 July 2025