

**HARLOW COLLEGE FURTHER EDUCATION CORPORATION**  
**CORPORATION MEETING**

**Minutes of the meeting held at Harlow College on  
Monday 16 October 2023 – 9.30am**

Membership:	* Liz Laycock (Chair)	* John Godley	* Karen Spencer
	* Sonny Bazzoni	Mike Hardware	* Paul Taylor
	Jon Bouffler	* Stephen Isherwood	* Michael Travers
	Rod Bristow	* Ray Levy	* Dawn Turner
	* Hannah Cheesman	* Lily Lin	* Ed Whittle
	* Julia Fillary	Rachel Miller	

\* denotes present

In attendance: Paul Whitehead, Vice-Principal  
Becky Jones, Vice-Principal  
Deanne Morgan, Executive Director – Finance  
Ruth Lucas, Head of Governance

### **Annual Safeguarding Training**

The annual safeguarding training scheduled for the start of the meeting had to be postponed due to staff illness.

#### **1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Jon Bouffler, Rod Bristow, Rachel Miller and Will Allanson.

Liz Laycock welcomed Sonny Bazzoni, the newly elected Student Governor, to the meeting and he introduced himself.

#### **2 Declaration of Interests**

There were no new, additional declarations of interest.

#### **3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2023 were approved by the Corporation as a true and accurate record of the meeting and were signed by the Chair.

#### **4 Matters Arising**

##### **4.1 Climate Change Survey (minute 4.3 – Matters Arising refers)**

The Chair of the Corporation asked if all Governors had completed the survey and Ruth Lucas reported that it is not possible to find this information out.

#### **4.2 EV Charging Points (minute 13 – Any Other Business refers)**

Governors were informed that the EV charging points have been installed and are working. They are available for staff and visitors to use and charging is done via an app.

#### **4.3 Charity Set-Up**

A Governor asked if the College had set up a charity yet as discussed last academic year. Governors were informed that it is the process of being set up.

### **5 Principal's Report**

The Corporation received and considered the Principal's report, presented by Karen Spencer, Principal.

Governors were informed that the new Advanced British Standard has been announced by the Government and that the Principal's report contained a link to the full document. A lot of questions have arisen from this and that the sector has been subject to qualification reform every year over the last few years. This is set to continue for the next ten years, however it is unclear what will happen if there is a change of government at the next general election. There is a fundamental need for the government to look at pre and post 16 education provision together.

On a more positive note, more funding for the sector has been confirmed and the sector appears to have a higher profile in government than previously.

A Governor asked about aviation qualification reform, as previously discussed by the Corporation. Karen Spencer that she is attending a meeting later in the day with the DfE at which there will be an update on this. It is expected that a new set of overlapping qualifications will be published.

Karen Spencer reported that colleges nationally are reporting drops in achievement rates and there are significant increases in the number of students having to resit GCSE English and Maths. The College is expecting an increase in the region of 34%.

A Governor asked if the College knows students' previous grades. Paul Whitehead confirmed that the College has this information and students with the same grade on entry are put in the same class. Paul Whitehead reported that the increase in students having to resit English and Maths has meant that it has not been possible to reduce class sizes as originally envisaged.

Karen Spencer reported that the College has submitted the application to the Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF), with the College acting as the lead partner for Greater Essex. The outcome of the application is expected at the end of October 2023. Essex Chambers of Commerce are the designated Employer Representative Body.

Karen Spencer reported that Greater Essex are submitting a Stage 2 devolution bid which would include Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock. Essex County Council would be the accountable body. The Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) are being disbanded

and responsibility for the South East LEP is being transferred to Essex County Council.

Karen Spencer reported that the College's next Strategic Plan will be aligned to the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). The College and Corporation will undertake a self-assessment and review the priorities in the Strategic Plan in the new year and this will form the basis of the new Strategic Plan.

There is a need to review how the College aligns with the LSIP every three years or when a new LSIP is published for the area. There is a requirement that this is undertaken in collaboration with other Essex colleges. Round table events are being planned for the new year to take this forward. The government does not want to replicate provision unless there is a clear demand for it and it is aligned to LSIP priorities. The LSIP has identified gaps which include careers advice and softer skills rather than the more technical skills.

A Governor highlighted that work-readiness is key for employers and reported that it would be interesting to see what the definition of local is in relation to the LSIP. Karen Spencer reported that there is no definition of local and it is recognised that it is not easy to navigate across Essex without travelling into and out of London. Karen Spencer confirmed that there is not much duplication in the LSIF application. There is an issue with Harlow's location being on the East Herts border and that there is a need for Essex County Council and government to look at permeability across the county borders.

A Governor asked if the Strategic Plan review will need to include other LSIF partners. Karen Spencer reported that the Strategic Plan will be a Harlow College plan solely however there is a need to review College provision with other Essex colleges.

The Corporation noted the Principal's report.

## **6 Quality, Curriculum and Self-Assessment Update**

The Corporation received and considered the quality, curriculum and self-assessment update, presented by Becky Jones, Vice-Principal.

Becky Jones reported that the College is continuing to prepare for an Ofsted inspection.

Continuous professional development (CPD) is focusing on skills and behaviours required by students and embedding English and Maths. There is a focus on artificial intelligence and how to use it positively with staff, with this then filtering down to students.

Deep dives have commenced this term which stimulate the deep dives Ofsted will undertake. At the end of the process, each delivery team will have five areas for development and five things to celebrate identified.

The closing data for 2022-2023 is being inputted into team healthchecks and meetings will be held with the Vice-Principals to discuss the data and raise key questions. Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) actions will be set from this.

Governors were informed that the Institute of Technology (IoT) has opened and all of the College's higher education provision is situated in there. The December Corporation meeting will be held in the IoT.

The College is re-establishing a partnership with Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) and looking to set up provision from September 2024. The College is aligning its Access and T-Levels courses so that they will feed into the College's higher education offer and all foundation degrees offered by the College will have a top-up available at ARU.

A Governor asked if higher education courses have not yet been validated, is the September 2024 start date ambitious? Becky Jones reported that ARU have said it is achievable and the College will work to this timetable.

Governors noted that this academic year, the College is running T-Levels in Early Years, Design, Surveying and Planning and Health Science. The College is working to roll out T-Levels in Electrotechnical and Plumbing in September 2024.

Becky Jones reported that all students passed their T-Level last academic year however there is an on-going issue with the work placements, which has previously been reported to the Corporation. A Governor asked whether the work placements are seen as too long or too short by employers or if there were other issues. Karen Spencer reported that there are a multitude of different issues.

Governors noted that the AoC is reporting that T-Levels and defunding of BTEC qualifications will continue as planned however there is some uncertainty with alternative higher-level qualifications.

A Student Governor reported that defunding of BTECs is demoralising and is taking away the confidence of young people and causing them to fear that there is no clear path for them.

A Governor asked about retention and the impact on data and if this links to CPD actions to address these issues. Becky Jones reported that these are not covered in this report however it will be part of the College's self-assessment report and quality improvement plan. A retention task force is in place and the data is being drilled down at Head of Academy level. A sub-group of the College's Executive Team is looking at retention and engagement, with another group focusing on staff development and industry updating.

Governors were informed that the data in the tables in the report is draft data for 2022-2023 as the data is currently in the process of being finalised.

Becky Jones reported that full self-assessment reports for the different areas of the College's provision will be presented to the November Standards and Curriculum Committee. As part of the Governor self-assessment event, Governors will be provided with healthcheck data for a delivery team, along with some specific questions to ask, linked to Ofsted. Governors will then come back and share the information later in the afternoon. Details of which teams Governors will be paired with will be circulated in advance of the session.

The Corporation noted the quality, curriculum and self-assessment update.

## **7 Finance and Resources Reports**

### **7.1 Predicted Financial Outturn 1 August 2022 – 31 July 2023**

The Corporation received and considered the predicted financial outturn for the period 1 August 2022 – 31 July 2023, presented by Deanne Morgan, Executive Director – Finance.

Governors were informed that the predicted outturn builds on previous management accounts reported to the Corporation and Resources Committee.

Governors noted that the original planned deficit was £478k however the current forecast deficit is £238k. The reduction in the deficit is mainly due to the LGPS costs being lower than anticipated and higher interest rates on the College's account.

The AoC is still pressurising government to look at underwriting pensions as they do for schools.

Governors were informed that the figures in the report are subject to external audit and an ESFA audit, both of which are currently taking place.

A Governor asked about the College's electricity contract and Deanne Morgan confirmed that the College had entered into a one-year fixed rate contract, which has been included in the current budget forecasts.

The Corporation noted the predicted outturn for the period 1 August 2022 – 31 July 2023.

### **7.2 Revised Financial Forecasts and Sketch Management Accounts for 1 August 2023 – 30 September 2023**

The Corporation received and considered the revised financial forecasts and sketch management accounts for 1 August 2023 – 30 September 2023, presented by Deanne Morgan, Executive Director – Finance.

Governors were informed that since the last Corporation meeting at which the financial forecasts and budget for 2023-2024 were agreed, the College has been notified that it will receive an additional £1.2m funding for 2023-2024. This additional funding will be used to: honour the collective agreement with the trade unions with a 2% pay award for 2023-2024, backdated to 1 August 2023; increase staffing to match the increase in student numbers; increase capital spending and eliminate the forecast deficit of £800k, with a £15k surplus now being forecast.

Governors noted that financial health continues to be good and the bank covenants continue to be met.

Governors reported that the increase in funding is good news for the sector and for the College.

Karen Spencer reported that there is no formal process to resubmit a revised budget to the ESFA following the allocation of the additional £1.2m, however it is recommended that the Corporation agree that the College finances are monitored against the reforecast budgets presented in this report.

A Governor asked why the contingency had been reduced. Paul Whitehead reported that the contingency has been set at a sensible level with due regard to the bank covenants. The budget is a tight plan based on savings and growth, however the College now has a greater picture on its income lines. The reduction in the deficit and contingency has been set out based with more knowledge on what the College believe will happen. If too significant a contingency is set, it does not explain to Governors how the College plans to use the funding. There is the possibility that the set contingency will get used however the College will try to safeguard this as much as possible.

The Corporation noted the revised financial forecasts and sketch management accounts for 1 August 2023 – 30 September 2023 and agreed to monitor the College's financed against the reforecast budgets presented in this report.

### **7.3 Recruitment of Learners - Enrolment Report 2023 – 2024**

The Corporation received and considered the report on recruitment of learners – enrolment report 2023 – 2024, presented by Paul Whitehead, Vice-Principal.

Governors were informed that the 16 – 18 learner numbers have increased, primarily due to the higher learner numbers at Stansted Airport College. The overall numbers are subject to change and final numbers will be based on the first full return at the beginning of December 2023. Staffing has had to be increased in some areas due to the increase in student numbers. There is no information at present as to whether there will be an ESFA business case process for in-year exceptional growth.

Governors were reminded that the College had previously capped its apprenticeship starts however systems are now more established. 148 apprentices have started so far this year, with two more cohorts planned throughout the year.

A Governor asked where the growth in apprenticeships had come from. Paul Whitehead reported that it was mainly due to reopening the College's electrical apprenticeship and the College being more pro-active with starts across all apprenticeship areas. Karen Spencer reported that more young people, particularly those aged 18 – 19, are looking for apprenticeships. A new fast-track pre-apprenticeship has been launched at Stansted Airport College to coincide with Ryanair's apprenticeship recruitment window.

Governors were informed that the College's apprenticeship provision is still subject to the lowest form of ESFA monitoring and that the ESFA territorial teams have been reorganised and the College will now have a new contact.

A Governor highlighted the need to look at end point assessment and Paul Whitehead reported that there is a need to work through realistic timescales for this and now better systems are in place, this is improving. A Governor

asked if the cost is fixed for employer even if the end point assessment is extended. Paul Whitehead confirmed that the costs are fixed and that the end point assessment is not part of the funded period therefore this is a cost to the College.

Governors were informed that recruitment is strong for the College's adult provision, particularly for the part-time evening courses. There is particular strong recruitment for adult English and Maths, ESOL and Counselling.

Higher education numbers are currently low however there are plans in place to develop this as outlined in agenda item 6 – Quality, Curriculum and Self-Assessment Update.

Adult Learner Loans are broadly on target.

There has been an increase in the number of high needs funded learners across the College, with a particular increase within vocational areas rather than in Supported Studies. The College has increased the number of learning support practitioners to support this.

The Corporation noted the report recruitment of learners – enrolment report 2023 – 2024.

## **7.4 Procurement Report**

The Corporation received and considered the procurement report, presented by Karen Spencer, Principal.

Karen Spencer reported that the College has engaged with D+B Facades through a government framework and highlighted the quote for the work in Building J.

Governors were informed that the College's Financial Regulations document that the Principal and Deputy/Vice Principal (Finance) have "No maximum limit (within procurement law)" for expenditure. However, for good governance and to ensure expenditure is approved in harmony with managing public money, high value purchases are brought to the attention of governors.

A Governor asked if the procurement was a competitive process and Paul Whitehead confirmed that it was competitive via the framework.

The Corporation approved the Principalship to formally appoint D+B Facades as the preferred contractor to deliver the external cladding and glazing works on Building J.

## **8 Audit Committee Reports**

### **8.1 Minutes of the Audit Committee Meeting – 03 October 2023**

The Corporation received and noted the minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 03 October 2023.

## **8.2 Item 1 – Regularity Audit Self-Assessment Questionnaire**

The Corporation received and considered the Regulatory Audit Self-Assessment Questionnaire, presented by Deanne Morgan, Executive Director – Finance.

Deanne Morgan informed Governors that this is an ESFA document which the College has to complete and submit to the external auditors.

The Corporation was informed that the Regulatory Audit Self-Assessment Questionnaire had been discussed in detail by the Audit Committee at its meeting held on 03 October 2023 and that one additional control has been documented since the meeting around sport checks for stock and low value asset items. The Audit Committee recommends that the document is signed by the Chair and Accounting Officer.

The Corporation approved the Regulatory Audit Self-Assessment Questionnaire and agreed for it to be signed by the Chair and the Accounting Officer.

## **8.3 Item 2 – English Colleges’ Code of Good Governance**

The Corporation received and considered the report on the English Colleges’ Code of Good Governance, presented by Ruth Lucas, Head of Governance.

Governors were reminded that there is a requirement in the Accounts Direction that colleges report against a code of governance and that the College adopted the English Colleges Code of Good Governance in 2015. As part of the Statement of Corporation Governance which is included in the Financial Statements, there is a declaration of compliance with the Code.

Ruth Lucas reported that the AoC has launched a new Code of Good Governance which if adopting, colleges need to adopt it by 2024-2025 at the latest.

Governors were informed that the College’s response to the Code had been discussed in detail at the Audit Committee meeting held on 03 October 2023 and that the Audit Committee’s recommendation is for the Corporation to approve the response.

Governors noted the area of part compliance around Governors serving for more than two terms and that the College’s approach to this is outline in the approved Governor Recruitment Policy and Procedures.

The Corporation approved the College’s reporting of compliance with the Code of Good Governance for English Colleges in the annual accounts.

The Corporation noted the report on the English Colleges’ Code of Good Governance and approved the College’s reporting of compliance with the Code of Good Governance for English Colleges in the annual accounts.

## **9 Disability Statement**



The Corporation received and considered the Disability Statement, presented by Paul Whitehead, Vice-Principal.

Governors were informed that the only proposed change was to update the examination access arrangements wording in line with JCQ requirements.

The Corporation approved the Disability Statement.

## **10 Governance**

### **10.1 Governor Code of Conduct**

The Corporation received and considered the Governor Code of Conduct, presented by Ruth Lucas, Head of Governance.

Ruth Lucas reported that the College's governance solicitors, Eversheds, produce the Code of Conduct and outlined the changes to this version, which were mainly to reflect the requirement to produce an Annual Accountability Statement and updates arising from the ONS reclassification.

The Corporation approved the Code of Conduct and Ruth Lucas circulated the declaration for Governors to sign.

### **10.2 Self-Assessment of Governance**

The Corporation broke into three smaller groups to consider the self-assessment of governance.

The focus of the groups was to highlight any areas of concern or to ask any questions about the self-assessment. No areas of concern were identified however it was agreed that a recap on strategy would be useful for Governors. Governors were informed that this will form part of the strategic planning process in January 2024.

The Corporation approved the self-assessment of governance questions and Ruth Lucas will circulate an MS Forms for Governors to complete. This will form part of the Governance Self-Assessment Report which will be presented to the Search and Governance Committee at its meeting on 21 November 2023 and will be used in the External Review of Governance scheduled for Spring 2024.

## **11 Any Other Business**

The Corporation was informed that the College has submitted an application to the Department of Transport's Reach for the Sky programme. If successful, the funding will be used to expand the work of the College Aviation Network.

## **12 Dates of Future Meetings**

Autumn Term 2023	Tuesday 28 November 2023	12.30pm
	Self-Assessment Day *	

	Thursday 14 December 2023	9am
Spring Term 2024	Thursday 28 March 2024	9am
Summer Term 2024	Wednesday 22 May 2024	9am
	Thursday 11 July 2024	9am