

HARLOW COLLEGE FURTHER EDUCATION CORPORATION

CORPORATION MEETING

Minutes of the meeting held at Harlow College – Wednesday 21 May 2025 – 9.30am

Membership:	*Paul Taylor (Chair)	*John Godley	*Lily Lin
	*Caroline Betts	*Arthur Hall-Jackson	*Karen Spencer
	*Matt Braund	*Bronte Humphrey	Ian Tompkins
	Rod Bristow	*Stephen Isherwood	Ed Whittle
	*Julia Fillary	*Ayub Khan	*Heather Wilson
	Vic Goddard	*Ray Levy	

* denotes present

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

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Rod Bristow, Vic Goddard and Ian Tompkins due to work commitments and Ed Whittle for personal reasons.

The Chair welcomed Matt Braund to his first meeting and Matt introduced himself.

2 Declaration of Interests

Paul Taylor declared an interest as he is a director of a company which the College is in discussion with around leasing space for STAC. This will be a College management decision and not a Governor decision. Paul Taylor will recuse himself if necessary.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2025 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 Principalship Presentation (minute 6 refers)

Karen Spencer confirmed that a letter of support from Harlow College was submitted in support of Essex County Council devolution.

5 Update from Student Governors

The Corporation received and considered the Student Governor Update, presented by Arthur Hall-Jackson and Bronte Humphrey, Student Governors.

The Chair thanked the Student Governors for their invaluable input into the Corporation over the academic year and they were presented with a card and gift. The Student Governors reported on what their next steps are after they finish College, with Bronte Humphrey going to university to study drama and Arthur Hall-Jackson securing a Level 4 apprenticeship with Rolls Royce.

The Student Governors reported that they, along with the Student Ambassadors, have been involved in the recent open evenings at Harlow and at STAC. Feedback from the events was extremely positive about how helpful the students were. They have attended the recent Wellbeing Fair and ongoing work is being undertaken around sustainability. There has been a focus group at STAC with the NHS around food conversations. The Student Ambassadors were also involved in a recent DfE immersive visit both at Harlow and at STAC.

A Governor asked if there is any nervousness with students around the current job market and if there is apprehension around their futures. Bronte Humphrey reported that with Performing Arts there is always a nervousness for finding work whereas those not studying Performing Arts are more focused on going to university than the current job market. There seems to be more nervousness with A-Level students rather than those studying vocational courses.

Karen Spencer reported that when she talks to students, they do not seem particularly concerned about the job market. At STAC over 85% of students go directly into employment at the airport and it is similar with the health and care students at Harlow securing work at the hospital.

Arthur Hall-Jackson reported that next steps are handled well at STAC and the destination data is strong.

Karen Spencer highlighted the pilot enrichment programme at STAC, from which three students have been successful in securing sponsored places for commercial pilot training. In addition, the technical and hand skills training students receive at STAC are setting students apart from other applicants when applying for jobs. Arthur Hall-Jackson reported that some elements of hand skills are not part of the Level 3 course and could easily be incorporated to give students an advantage. Will Allanson agreed to follow this up.

Paul Whitehead reported that the College focuses on wider skills development, equipping students with the skills to be confident to speak, talk to adults and perform well in skills tests, thus ensuring credible candidates are placed in front of employers.

The Corporation was informed that the process for recruiting new Student Governors has commenced.

The Corporation noted the Student Governor Update.

6 Principal's Report – Annual Accountability Statement 2025 – 2026

The Corporation received and considered the Principal's Report – Annual Accountability Statement 2025 – 2026, presented by Karen Spencer, Principal.

Karen Spencer reported that the Annual Accountability Statement is a statutory requirement which forms part of the College's Annual Strategic Conversation with the DfE and the FE Commissioner's Team and that the proposed Statement is aligned to the College's Strategic Plan.

Karen Spencer gave an overview of the priorities in the Statement as follows:

- **Health Sciences**
 - Discussions are progressing with the hospital.
 - Meetings are being held with senior managers both at the College and at the hospital.
 - There will be a focus on two or three key achievable outcomes which the College and hospital work on together.
- **Aviation, Transport, Logistics and Engineering**
 - Looking to secure additional space for next year at STAC to accommodate growth in student numbers.
 - There is an issue with the lagged funding model where full funding for additional learners in one year is not received until the following year.
 - Discussions are now taking place with Ayrshire College around the 147 licencing centre.
- **Construction and Green Technologies**
 - Work is continuing on automotive and retrofit.
 - The Government has announced technical excellence colleges for construction and a construction skills package. There is a need for one in Essex due to large infrastructure projects and this should be pursued by Essex County Council.
- **Digital and Emerging Technologies**
 - Digital work is ongoing.
 - The College is using TeacherMatic which is an AI tool that helps to create schemes of work and session plans. The College is working with TeacherMatic to develop modules for the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, self-assessment, governance and policies. Once these have been produced, they will be rolled out to all colleges who are signed up to TeacherMatic.
- **Soft Skills and Employability Development**
 - The College has developed Careers City Central which is a virtual careers environment where people can find out more about different careers. This was funded through the Local Skills Improvement Fund and was recently launched with Essex colleges. It will be rolled out to secondary schools, providing teaching resources and session plans. A similar platform has been developed for aviation careers. These should both sit alongside the Essex Opportunities Portal.

A Governor asked how different the Annual Accountability Statement is to the annual governance statement in the Financial Statements. Ruth Lucas reported that the Annual Accountability Statement is forward looking for the upcoming academic year whereas the statement in the accounts reflects the previous year. Deanne Morgan

confirmed that the financial commentary in the accounts will align to the Annual Accountability Statement.

A Governor asked where the statistics in the Statement were from and whether the source should be referenced. Governors were informed that the data is from published ONS and Essex County Council data. The Corporation agreed that the data should be referenced in the Statement.

The Corporation approved:

- The Annual Accountability Statement 2025 – 2026, subject to the data being referenced.
- The submission of the Annual Accountability Statement 2025 – 2026 to the DfE once the data has been referenced.
- The publishing of the Annual Accountability Statement 2025 – 2026 on the College's website once the data has been referenced.

7 Search and Governance Committee Reports

7.1 Minutes of the Search and Governance Committee Meeting – 7 May 2025

The Corporation received and noted the minutes of the Search and Governance Committee meeting held on 7 May 2025.

7.1.1 Membership of Harlow College Further Education Corporation

The Corporation received and considered the Search and Governance Committee's recommendations for membership of Harlow College Further Education Corporation.

The Search and Governance Committee recommended the reappointment of Julia Fillary as a Governor of Harlow College Further Education for a period of four years, commencing on 8 July 2025.

The Corporation unanimously approved the Search and Governance Committee's recommendation. Julia Fillary was reappointed as a Governor of Harlow College Further Education for a period of four years from 8 July 2025.

7.1.2 FE Commissioner Termly Newsletter – Spring Term

The Corporation received and noted the FE Commissioner Termly Newsletter – Spring Term, presented by Ruth Lucas, Head of Governance.

7.1.3 FE Commissioner Intervention Assessment Summary Report: Weston College

The Corporation received and considered the FE Commissioner Intervention Assessment Summary Report: Weston College, presented by Karen Spencer, Principal.

Karen Spencer reported that the Weston College report highlights failures in governance, particularly around how the Principal's remuneration and contractual obligations were managed.

Governors were informed that a detailed discussion on the report was held at the Search and Governance Committee meeting held on 7 May 2025 and that the different elements were considered, along with any implications for Harlow College.

The thirteen recommendations raised in the report have been mapped out, along with the College's current practice and any action that could be taken to increase transparency. Governors were informed that the College was not falling foul of any of the recommendations however the actions would enhance the information being provided to Governors.

Governors were assured that the College ensures there is segregation of duties and all required information is fully declared and published in the Financial Statements. It was agreed that when Senior Post Holder remuneration is agreed that a monetary value will also be reported to the Remuneration Committee and the Corporation, rather than just the percentage value. Governors were informed that the College has policies and procedures for declaring personal relationships however these will be reviewed to ensure the organisation and the individuals are best protected.

There is a possibility that colleges will be mandated to not have Governors serving for more than two terms. At present the recommendation is that these Governors should be in the minority. The Corporation was informed that there are currently two Governors who have served more than two terms and the Search and Governance Committee recommended that two should be the maximum number. A Governor suggested that these two Governors could look at changing Committees however there is an issue with which Committees the Chair of Governors is permitted to be a member of.

There was a discussion around whether or not this would be classified as fraud and subject to prosecution however this is unknown at present.

A Governor highlighted that it is key for Governors to understand their role as a Governor, with the need to dissect and question the information provided. It is essential to have the people with the right skills and abilities on the Corporation.

It was noted that auditors might have a "knee-jerk" reaction to the report as their name and reputation is on the line.

The Corporation noted the FE Commissioner Intervention Assessment Summary Report: Weston College.

8 Resources Committee Reports

8.1 Minutes of the Resources Committee Meeting – 14 May 2025

The Corporation received and noted the minutes of the Resources Committee meeting held on 14 May 2025.

8.1.1 DfE Financial Health Rating Letter

The Corporation received and considered the DfE financial health rating letter, presented by Deanne Morgan, Executive Director – Finance.

Deanne Morgan reported that this is a standard letter which colleges receive annually based on the Financial Statements' submission to the DfE and their observations.

Governors noted that the Governing Body Financial Dashboard has not yet been published by the DfE and will be presented to the Corporation at its next meeting.

The Corporation noted the DfE Financial Health Rating Letter.

8.1.2 Management Accounts

The Corporation received and considered the management accounts for the period 1 August 2024 – 28 February 2025, presented by Deanne Morgan, Executive Director – Finance.

Governors were informed that the management accounts were discussed in detail at the Resources Committee meeting held on 14 May 2025.

Deanne Morgan reported that the forecast year-end deficit is approximately £200k however the College has been allocated an additional £212k as part of the sector's additional £50m for this academic year and this will be mapped into the April management accounts.

Governors were informed that the agency expenditure has reduced due to the College being successful in converting some agency staff to permanent members of staff.

The College is still waiting details on the funded element of the NI increase however a conservative assumption has been included in the accounts.

The Corporation was informed that the DfE has changed the process for in-year growth, with it only being funded at 50%. This equates to 11% overall for the additional students the College has this academic year.

Work on the apprenticeship debt has been ongoing. The College is in a strong position for this to be cleared this academic year and closed off in this year's Financial Statements.

A Governor asked what management's biggest concern was with the finances and accounts. Paul Whitehead reported that currently finances are stable however there is a concern for next academic year with the anticipated growth in student numbers and uncertainties with in-year growth funding. There is a risk of taking on too many additional students and there is a need to ensure the College does not grow too quickly. Karen Spencer reported that there is a moderate plan for growth, however the College will look to safeguard partner schools and will be fully inclusive with how it recruits students. Paul Whitehead reported that there is now a waiting list in place at STAC for next academic year, as additional student numbers are being capped at 100. A number of courses in Harlow will soon be going to waiting lists, with growth also being capped at 100 additional students at Harlow. If the College grows any further, it will not have the finances to resource the courses. Some colleges grew too fast last year and with in-year funding not being funded at the anticipated level, some are going through redundancy processes. The College however is ensuring that it is in a stable position by capping growth in student numbers.

A Governor asked when the last time the Government refused growth funding. Karen Spencer reported that there was no growth funding during COVID and that now the DfE have introduced a Post-16 grant rather than growth funding. An increase in the base rate for 16 – 18 year olds from 2025 – 2026 has been confirmed by the DfE however there has been no indication of growth funding. Governors noted that Harlow's demographics are very different to other areas nationally and that Harlow is the fastest growing town in the country therefore there is a demand for education that needs to be met.

A Governor asked whether the diverting of Level 7 apprenticeship funding would benefit colleges. Karen Spencer reported that there could be some benefit and it will shift and rebalance the system to a certain extent.

A Governor asked about the SEND budget and whether the College is content with its allocation. Paul Whitehead reported that the number of SEND students has significantly grown this year and the budget has increased from £1.9m to £2.4m. A significant amount of work has been undertaken and a bigger team has been established. The College has a good reputation for supporting SEND students and is seen as a natural progression route for many students. Essex is moving to a banded funding model and the College should benefit from slightly more funding or as a minimum the same amount of funding. Agency staff have been converted to permanent members of staff and there is a stable staff base going into the new academic year.

The Corporation noted the management accounts for the period 1 August 2024 – 28 February 2025.

9 Admissions Policy

The Corporation received and considered the Admissions Policy, presented by Paul Whitehead, Deputy Principal.

Governors were informed that the proposed changes were to clarify more clearly the deadlines for applications for students with an EHCP. This will ensure that the College gets the necessary paperwork and ensure effective planning can be undertaken in advance of the students starting at College.

The Corporation approved the Admissions Policy.

10 Any Other Business

Paul Taylor reported that one of his members of staff who was a Harlow College T-Level student has just successfully completed his apprenticeship.

11 Dates of Future Meetings

Summer Term 2025	Thursday 10 July 2025	9.30am
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