



## **STRATEGY, GOVERNANCE AND SEARCH COMMITTEE**

### **Minutes of a Part I Meeting**

**Held on Zoom on Wednesday 19 March 2025 at 5pm**

		<b><u>Meeting Attendance</u></b>
<b>Present:</b>	Tina Coates (Committee Chair)	(3 out of 3)
	Paul Britton	(3 out of 3)
	Jo Croft (Chair of Governors)	(2 out of 2)
	Rob Lewis	(3 out of 3)
	Gillian May (Group Principal & Chief Executive)	(3 out of 3)
	Ian Thomson	(2 out of 3)
<b>In attendance:</b>	Tracy Reeve	Group Director of Governance (3 out of 3)
	Amanda Down	Principal Sixth Form
	Anne Entwistle	Principal FE
	Karen Griffiths	Group Vice Principal
	Jill Small	Estates Consultant, Small Solutions Ltd.

### **MINUTE**

#### **No**

### **ACTION**

1.

#### **Apologies for Absence**

No apologies had been received. The Chair welcomed Jill Small (JS) to the meeting; JS had worked with WFCG and BCA for many years as a property and estates consultant and would be presenting the revised College Estates Strategy (item 8 on the agenda).

2.

#### **Notification of Any Other Urgent Business**

There was no other business notified.

3.

#### **Declarations of Interest**

No Member declared a conflict of interest with the agenda.

4.

#### **Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on 4 February 2025**

The Minutes of the previous meeting held on 4 February 2025, having been previously circulated to members, were **AGREED** as an accurate record and the Chair's approval would be recorded.

**All Members were agreed.**

5.

#### **Matters Arising from the Previous Meeting held on 4 February 2025**

***The meeting NOTED a report from the Group Director of Governance which confirmed that all matters arising had been actioned or were on track for timely completion when due.***

#### **ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

6.

#### **WFCG Annual Accountability Statement**

The Group Principal/ CEO (GM) presented the draft College Annual Accountability Statement 2025 for consideration. GM reminded the meeting that this was supposed to be a 'succinct document' and continued to be a mandatory document for FE colleges and a condition of funding with the DfE. This had been reviewed by SLT – as required on an annual basis by DfE – and updated since last approved in May 2024. The draft had also been discussed with other Berkshire Principals from a regional and pan-regional perspective. GM thanked SG&S Committee member Rob Lewis (RL) for his input in editing and proof-

**MINUTE**  
**No**

**ACTION**

reading the draft; some changes had been made. GM confirmed that the Accountability Statement as presented covered the 'duty to review' under the Local Needs Duty.

GM highlighted that the WFCG Accountability Statement 2025 included new local market intelligence data, demographic updates, and other significant changes, including the Slough and Langley College rebrand. Key additions for this iteration included:

- information on devolution work through the Berkshire Prosperity Board and Thames Valley Principals' collaboration.
- acknowledgment of the ongoing FE dashboard usage for WFCG in-year data.
- the annual review of the local needs duty statement.

The meeting was assured that the document aligned with the WFCG Curriculum and Skills Strategy (as approved in March 2025) and highlighted expansions in employer-led provision, apprenticeship pathways, direct entry for school age learners 14-16 (from September 2026), and industry-standard facilities improvements. GM confirmed that the revised Annual Accountability Statement would be published on the WFCG website and reviewed as part of the strategic conversation with the Department for Education (scheduled for 28 March 2025).

***The updated WFCG Accountability Statement 2025 was APPROVED and would be recommended to the Board for approval (27 March 2025).***

GM/ TR

7. **Updated WFCG Curriculum & Skills Strategy**

The CEO/ Group Principal (GM) reminded the meeting that the last review of the Curriculum Strategy had taken place in 2022 when WFCG was newly merged. Now that the college had completed a successful Ofsted inspection and achieved many of the initial objectives it was timely to update the Curriculum and Skills Strategy to deliver the objectives on the WFCG Strategic Map 2025-28.

Group Vice Principal (KG) presented the summary paper and the revised WFCG Curriculum and Skills Strategy 2025-28. KG outlined how the Curriculum & Skills Strategy was linked to the College Corporate Strategy (2025-2028) and was designed to ensure that the College remained responsive to local, regional and national skills needs. The key areas of focus and objectives outlined in the strategy during the next three years would be as follows:

- **Regional Skills Development:** Expansion of industry-relevant programmes, including T Levels, green technologies, digital and screen industries.
- **Adult & Community Learning:** A flexible curriculum to meet the needs of adult learners, including short courses and professional upskilling.
- **Higher Education & Apprenticeships:** Growth in employer-led pathways and specialist provision in priority sectors.
- **14-16 Schools Provision:** Development of a direct-entry programme to support alternative education pathways for young learners. The meeting noted that there appeared to be substantial demand for provision for this age group who were not in mainstream school provision.
- **Specialist SEND & Foundation Learning:** Strengthening pathways for neurodiverse learners and expanding progression routes.

Governors were reminded of the importance of strategic impact and the associated financial growth to enable the full financial recovery forecast for WFCG. The meeting noted that the strategy outlined significant growth opportunities during the three-year period, including:

- **Expansion of Level 1 provision** (+90 learners by 2027/28) to address local skills gaps and social mobility.
- **Increase in Higher Education enrolments** (128 learners by 2027/28) generating £608K in additional income. This element of the strategy might be more problematic in the face of recently announced cuts to adult funding.
- **Growth in apprenticeships**, with targeted employer partnerships increasing enrolments to 440 by 2027/28.
- **New direct-entry 14-16 provision**, supporting alternative routes for disengaged learners with a projected intake of 150 by 2027/28.

KG informed the meeting that in drafting the new strategy the SLT had tried to reflect the key

strengths across WFCG and the current direction of travel as well as the regional and national priorities. KG informed the meeting that local priorities did not seem likely to change under the new government's Skills England agenda. This would require an ongoing focus on working with employers and local authorities although there might be some change as the devolution agenda moved forward. KG assured the meeting that the Curriculum and Skills Strategy reflected all areas of provision and had a close focus on foundation students which would be key under the proposed new Ofsted inspection framework.

Principal FE (AE) gave the meeting more detail on the proposed expansion of the 14 to 16 offer at Slough and Langley College; the aim would be to grow the ESOL provision and offer a 5-day provision for young people. Governors noted that the funding for this provision was awarded on an in-year basis, unlike the current lagged funding for 16-18 learners. Governors (RL) sought clarity on the required curriculum for 14 to 16-year-olds; AE confirmed that FE colleges had more freedom than schools and would offer different streams including academic and vocational courses. The Corporation Chair (JC) raised concerns about capacity and resources for this new offer. AE assured the meeting that the curriculum teams already had the necessary resources in place for the part-time provision from September 2025 and would ensure additional resources were in place for the direct access provision from September 2026. The in-year funding model in place for 14-16 learners would make it easier to fund growth in delivery of this provision.

GM reminded the meeting that this new Curriculum & Skills Strategy would be the focus of the annual strategic conversation with the college relationship team at DfE at the end of the month. GM also informed the meeting that the initial report from the government's review of curriculum reform had now been published but was leaning towards very limited changes. Once confirmed the report would be brought to the governors for information. The meeting noted that this new Curriculum and Skills Strategy had also been discussed at Quality & Curriculum Committee on 18 March 2025; the Q&C Committee would recommend to the Board for approval.

***The SG&S Committee:***

- i. ENDORSED the Curriculum & Skills Strategy 2025-2028.***
- ii. ENDORSED the strategic priorities outlined in the strategy, particularly:***
  - Expansion of Level 1 and Foundation Learning to improve access for disadvantaged learners.***
  - Growth of Higher Education and Apprenticeships to meet employer needs and drive income generation.***
  - Development of a direct-entry 14-16 provision, with an application for DfE funding by August 2025 for a September 2026 launch.***

**8. WFCG Estates Strategy 2025-2028**

Jill Small (JS) presented the updated WFCG Estates Strategy which aligned with the Curriculum & Skills Strategy and was based on a recent review of the condition of college buildings across all four campuses. JS confirmed that the strategy aimed to prioritise areas for growth, address building conditions, and prepare for any potential funding opportunities. The meeting noted that the Estates Strategy followed a specific format required by the Department for Education and incorporated recent condition surveys and improvements made with previous funding. The meeting noted that while significant additional capital funding from government was unlikely, the WFCG estate was generally in good repair but did have some category 4 buildings which needed attention. JS confirmed that 58% of the total WFCG estate (52,387m<sup>2</sup>) was in 'good' or 'very good' condition, but there were areas that needed improvement. Running costs for the estate were £95.29 per m<sup>2</sup> in 2023-24, rising to an estimated £98.02 in 2024-25. Governors were reminded that recent key investments had been made through capital grants and internal capital allocation, supporting the delivery of skills priorities such as digital, screen industries, green technologies, and land-based studies. Space utilisation had improved across the Group due to increased student numbers and efficiency measures. JS highlighted that challenges remained in upgrading the ageing infrastructure, improving IT systems and ensuring sustainable development. The meeting was assured that the new Estates Strategy included a focus on sustainability and addressing the 'net zero' agenda. A new DfE condition survey to be completed in Spring 2025 was expected

**MINUTE**  
**No**

**ACTION**

to inform further funding opportunities. However, the key estate priorities already identified included:

- Refurbishment of C Block (£300k) and North Wing (£200k) at Slough & Langley College for adult and high needs/ 14-16 schools provision.
- Urgent roof repairs at Windsor College (£50k).
- Progression of the Top Farm Drive redevelopment at BCA, with Phase 1 funded but Phase 2 requiring £2.5m investment.
- Continued commitment to IT infrastructure investment (£500k per annum for three years).

JS confirmed that the Estates Strategy supported the Group's Curriculum & Skills Strategy and the Sustainability Policy. The revised Estates Strategy had been developed collaboratively with many staff across the college group and was also intended to be a useful tool for the DfE and the FE Commissioner's team. Corporation Chair (JC) sought clarity on how the condition report tied in with the Estates Strategy. JS confirmed that the Condition Report was conducted as a separate exercise which focused on maintenance and condition issues, but the Estates Strategy incorporated the findings of the condition report.

The meeting discussed the benchmarking of costs, and governors noted that while there was a sector benchmark against other colleges, it would be more meaningful to look at costs per site across the group. JS suggested that the cost per square metre at WFCG would be considered 'reasonable' for the sector. The Committee Chair (TC) thanked JS for her work on this revised strategy and agreed with other governor comments that the Estates Strategy fitted well with the other WFCG strategic documents. *TC suggested that the language about student experience could be more prominent in the next iteration of the document.*

**The Strategy Governance & Search Committee APPROVED the WFCG Estates Strategy 2025-28 as presented as a framework for prioritising future investments and estate management decisions.**

**The Committee also:**

- ENDORSED the capital investment priorities, recognising the need for further funding to address outstanding infrastructure challenges.**
- SUPPORTED ongoing engagement with funding opportunities, including potential DfE capital allocations, to secure resources for priority projects.**
- ACKNOWLEDGED progress on IT infrastructure upgrades and endorse the continued phased investment over the next three years.**
- COMMITTED to sustainability initiatives, supporting the Estates Team in embedding energy efficiency and renewable technologies across the estate.**

**ACTION: All of the above actions to be RECOMMENDED to the Board for approval (27 March 2025).**

9. **GOVERNANCE SUMMARY REPORT**

The Group Director of Governance (TR) presented the Governance report, discussing the reappointment of existing governors and the need to improve the EDI balance on the Corporation. TR highlighted an article included in the meeting paperwork which highlighted the sector-wide challenges that FE colleges faced when recruiting governors. These included: competition with other sectors which possibly offered greater prestige or even financial incentives and under representation of governors from ethnic minorities, different socio-economic backgrounds and people with lived experience of FE.

9.1 **Review of EDI and Skills Audit**

The committee discussed the board's skills and diversity. TR reminded the meeting that a detailed skills audit had been undertaken in June 2024 and considered by SG&S Committee in June 2024 and the Board in July 2024. TR reminded the meeting that there were no major skills gaps, though finance expertise and having qualified accountants on the Board remained important. TR highlighted that although there was an apparent gap in law and property management the College had access to strong external consultants to support the Board

**MINUTE**  
**No**

**ACTION**

where necessary. The meeting suggested that a summary of potential gaps should be created for future reference which could indicate where low or zero skills scores were acceptable (covered by external consultants) as opposed to gaps which needed to be addressed. TR confirmed that although there were no current skills gaps which required urgent action the priorities for recruitment of governors at WFCG would seem to be:

- Governors to improve the EDI balance on the WFCG Corporation
- Financially orientated candidates to fill the vacancies on Audit Committee and Resources Committee (particular focus on qualified accountants due to FEC steer).
- Candidates with knowledge of the wider education sector and the FE sector.

The meeting discussed the ongoing need to improve the EDI composition of the WFCG Corporation. The data on staff EDI characteristics was noted as 75% white across the group but this was not reflected in the 94% white governing body. The strong female representation was positive but the meeting asked for more data on how the governor EDI data reflected the student population. The meeting discussed the operation of the Mirror Board which had been designed to offer access to a more diverse pool of thinking and 'lived experience' for the WFCG Board. However, the meeting felt that the Mirror Board – although intended to increase diversity – had not engaged with the main board as much as expected. The CEO informed the meeting that many of the documents brought to the Board during the last year had been taken through the Mirror Board first to get their input and viewpoint. However, the meeting suggested that it would be a good idea to invite governors to attend Mirror Board meetings and establish a more formal system of feedback. It was also agreed that specific targets to improve board diversity should be set (predicated on staff and student EDI data).

**ACTION:**

- i. **Skills: Create a summary of 'acceptable' skills gaps versus those that needed addressing.**
- ii. **EDI: Set targets for EDI composition of the WFCG Corporation based on staff and student diversity statistics.**
- iii. **Formalise and improve the feedback mechanism from Mirror Board to the main board (including governor attendance at Mirror Board meetings).**

TR

TR

TR/ SB

9.2

**Board Membership**

The Group Director of Governance (TR) presented a paper which detailed the Members of the Corporation with cessation dates and sub-committee membership. Governors were reminded that the current Board membership of TWFCG was determined at 18 members and there was currently one vacancy.

- **Reappointment of existing External Governors**

The meeting noted that there were two governors who were coming to the end of their first term of office during the current quarter: Paul Britton and Sam Foley (both terms ending on 31 May 2025). The Director of Governance informed the meeting that she had canvassed both PB and SF and they were both prepared to serve a second term. The meeting discussed both of these existing governors.

**Paul Britton (PB):** The meeting agreed that PB's specialist knowledge and experience as CEO of the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce was still a vital addition to the Corporation at WFCG. His detailed knowledge of the local and regional skills agenda and networking contacts with local employers had proved very valuable for WFCG over the last few years. The Director of Governance (TR) reminded the meeting of PB's contribution to the 'strong' Ofsted skills judgement in March 2024.

**The Meeting AGREED to RECOMMEND to the Board that Paul Britton be re-appointed as a Board Member of TWFCG for a four-year period (to 31 May 2029).**

**Sam Foley (SF):** The meeting agreed that SF's role as Chair of Resources Committee as a qualified accountant was still vital to the skills set of the Board at WFCG. Her experience of estates work and campus development within an educational setting also made her a key member of the college's Capital Development Steering Group. TR informed the meeting that SF intended to end her period of working abroad and move back to the UK in April 2025 which would make her attendance at face-to-face Board meetings possible.

***The Meeting AGREED to RECOMMEND to the Board that Sam Foley be re-appointed as a Board Member of TWFCG for a four-year period (to 31 May 2029).***

***ACTION: Both of these re-appointments to be taken to the Board for approval on 27 March 2025.***

TR

- New candidates

The meeting discussed the two candidates who had been interviewed online by the last SG&S meeting held on 4 February 2025.

**Kerry Blandin (KB):** The meeting had been very impressed with KB – her passion and FE sector knowledge was impressive. KB's non-white ethnicity would also be valuable to improve the diversity of the Board. She was well connected in the local area and understood the challenges facing the college. KB had been a member of the Mirror Board when she was an employee at WFCG and was really keen to move into the role of Governor. The meeting had been impressed by Kerry's enthusiasm and her willingness to ask questions and challenge the meeting. The meeting agreed that Kerry Blandin would make a valuable contribution to governance at WFCG with her knowledge of the education sector and lived experience of FE. It was agreed that she should be appointed to the current vacancy on the WFCG Corporation.

***The SG&S Committee AGREED to RECOMMEND KB's appointment as a Governor of WFCG for a four-year term of office starting immediately.***

**Dhiry Bihari (DB):** The meeting agreed that although he would be a valuable addition to the governance process at WFCG DB was not such a strong candidate as KB. However, his engagement with the wider Slough community would be of value and would bring a different EDI focus to the Board. It was suggested that DB be offered a co-opted Governor role at WFCG with a seat on Quality & Curriculum Committee (subject to a conversation with the Chair of Q&C Committee).

***It was AGREED that DB should be offered a co-opted Governor role on the Board of WFCG with a seat on the Quality and Curriculum Committee.***

***ACTION: Take proposals for KB and DB to Board for approval on 27 March 2025***

TR

- Additional applicants for Governor role at WFCG

TR informed the meeting that she had received three further applications for governance roles at WFCG in response to the recent advert on LinkedIn and from an advert placed on the ICAEW website. The following three applications had been circulated with the meeting paperwork to allow SG&S Members to consider them.

- J. Zaenab (ICAEW referral) – ACCA part-qualified accountant. The meeting agreed that his experience was not at the correct level to be considered for a governance role at WFCG.
- Colin Hayfield (LinkedIn) – A qualified chartered accountant with a wealth of governance experience. A strong candidate but the SG&S Committee would need to further investigate any possible conflict of interest arising from his role as Chair of Governors at Manor Green School, Maidenhead.
- Sam Marshall-Davies (LinkedIn) - Currently working for a global kitchen servicing and maintenance company based in Maidenhead. SMD ran their employer provider training academy in Theale and was supporting company growth through Training Development and Coaching. SMD has previously worked at BCA (2015-2021) as Head of Rugby and Curriculum Coordinator so had knowledge and lived experience of the FE sector.

***The meeting AGREED that:***

- Colin Hayfield and Sam Marshall-Davies should be invited to attend for an interview with the members of SG&S Committee.***
- J. Zaenab's application should not be taken any further.***

***ACTION: Convene an interview panel to take forward new candidates.***

TR

**MINUTE****No****ACTION**

9.3

**Use of the College Seal**

The meeting noted the one use of the WFCG seal since the last timetabled Corporation meeting. TR confirmed that this had been enacted earlier on 19 March so was not included in the written report.

i) Licence amendment with trustees at Strode's to allow the maintenance & repair work on the alms houses at the Strode's College campus.

**NOTED**

***The Governance update report was NOTED and RECEIVED.***

10.

**Any Urgent Business**

There was an item of 'other business' which was covered in the Part II confidential meeting.

There had been no other urgent business notified.

11.

**Dates and Times of Future Meetings**

The date and time of future meetings in 2024/25 were noted as:

- Tuesday 10 June 2025

**NOTED**

The meeting closed at 6.55 pm

Chair.....

Date.....