

HCA Governing Board – Meeting Minutes

Date: 4:30pm on 13th October 2025 **Location:** A10, College Road Campus

Present	In attendance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mervyn Jones (<i>Chair</i>) ▪ Abigail Appleton (<i>Principal/CE</i>) ▪ John Auckland ▪ Judy Balderson ▪ Ellie Bunston ▪ Jennette Arnold ▪ Nicola Hewitt ▪ Christy Bolderson ▪ Kate Seekings. ▪ Russell Roberts ▪ Peta Darnley (<i>Search and Governance Committee Chair</i>) ▪ Ian Axtell ▪ Oliver Cameron-Swan (<i>Staff Governor</i>) ▪ Myfanwy Page (<i>Staff Governor</i>) (<i>Online</i>) ▪ Helen Hurford (<i>Student Governor</i>) <p style="text-align: center;">Collectively referred to as the “Board” and individually as a “Board Member”.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Justin Gregory (<i>Vice Principal of Higher Education, “VPHE”</i>) ▪ Xaviere Hughes (<i>Vice Principal of Further Education, “VPFE”</i>) ▪ David Hawkins (<i>Vice Principal of Business Development and Student Experience, “VPBDSE”</i>) ▪ Abigail Boyce (<i>Clerk to Governors, “Clerk”</i>)
<p>Quoracy: Meeting was quorate in accordance with paragraph 1 below.</p>	<p>Absent: Clive Hodgeman and Tim Williams (<i>Finance Director</i>)</p>

Note: *In these minutes, Board Members’ contributions that have a substantive impact on College decisions, actions, or policy, such as influencing a decision, prompting a significant change, or raising a valid challenge, are italicised and/or underlined. Routine questions, minor procedural amendments, or suggestions that do not materially affect decisions are recorded in the discussion but are not highlighted.*

1. Quorum

The meeting was duly constituted as a quorum of 15 members was present, representing 94% of the total membership. This satisfies the 40% quorum requirement set out in Article 13(1) of the college’s Instrument of Government.

2. Apologies and Declarations

- a. **Apologies for absence:** Apologies for absence were received from Clive Hodgeman. Tim Williams, the Finance Director, was also unable to attend due to illness.
- b. **Declarations of interest:** The Chair declared an interest in relation to minute item 4(a) “Nomination of the new Chair” and accordingly did not participate in the discussion or decision-making for this item.
- c. **Governor update:** The Chair noted that this was Oliver Cameron-Swan’s final meeting as a staff governor. The Board thanked him for his contributions to the College.

3. Minutes of last meeting

- a. **Approval of minutes of meeting held on 07th July:** the minutes were approved as a true and accurate record.

b. **Matters Arising:** all actions were noted as complete or as in progress.

4. Governance

a. **Chair Recruitment: Nomination of New Chair**

The Search and Governance Committee Chair outlined the recruitment process for the new Chair, including the extended timeline and the rationale for the nominated candidate. The recruitment panel highlighted the candidate's strong skills, experience in the arts, integrity, and ability to handle challenging situations. The Principal confirmed that the candidate would provide valuable support in their role, and any potential conflicts of interest or past controversies were considered but not deemed a barrier.

One Board Member raised questions regarding local perception and the candidate's chairing experience; these were discussed by the Board and concluded not to affect the decision to proceed.

The Board also considered the likely student and community response and agreed that a communications plan would be prepared. The Board approved the appointment of the nominated candidate as Chair, with the Search and Governance Committee Chair responsible for notifying the candidate and implementing the communications plan.

Decision: Board agreed to approve this appointment.

ACTION: The Search and Governance Committee Chair will notify the appointed candidate and the Principal will develop the communications plan.

b. **Annual Governance Review: Outcomes from Governor Feedback Sessions**

The Chair summarised feedback, highlighting key themes around paper clarity and social engagement among staff and Board Members. To aid comprehension of the reports, Board Members suggested including more detail in appendices. The Chair proposed reintroducing the link governor system to support engagement and noted informal engagement opportunities, such as graduation. In response to comments on presentation length, a Board Member noted that presentations may sometimes need to be longer to ensure all members can engage with the content. Another Board Member suggested clarifying on the cover sheet that the priority level refers to timing rather than the importance of the document.

ACTION: Clerk to Amend the cover sheet to clarify that the priority level refers to timing rather than the importance of the document.

5. Principal's Reports

a. **Principal's Reports**

The Principal presented her report and highlighted the following key areas:

- **Events and Cultural Centres:** The Principal provided an overview of upcoming events, including the Pop Shop, the new library, and the new gallery. Emphasis was placed on embedding the College within these cultural centres to enhance engagement with the community.

- **Enrolment Figures:** The Principal reported that Higher Education Level 4 enrolments exceeded expectations, while Further Education enrolments were slightly below predicted targets but remained above last year's figures. The decrease in Further Education was discussed and if linked to student preference for vocational courses and wider national employment concerns. A successful Open Day and strong interest in the new Fashion Business & Retail programme were highlighted as positive indicators for future growth. Board Members noted the sector-wide slowdown in applications but acknowledged that HCA continues to perform well and congratulated the Principal and team on the increase in application numbers.
- **Marketing and Outreach:** The Principal highlighted marketing strategies, emphasising the importance of building strong relationships with feeder schools. Board Members were provided with copies of the physical Further Education prospectus, and the approach to face-to-face engagement with key schools was highlighted. The Board requested ongoing updates on engagement work with feeder schools.
- **Post-16 Education Changes and National Policy:** The Board was updated on key developments in the Post-16 Education Bill and the Lifelong Learning Entitlement, which will affect student loan access and lifelong learning provision. It was noted that uncertainty around implementation may impact planning and resource allocation. Updates were also provided on the new Ofsted framework and the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), which will almost certainly become mandatory next year. The forthcoming Curriculum and Assessment Review will introduce new qualifications, with strategic implications for curriculum design, quality assurance, and governance.
- **Curriculum and Course Performance:** The Vice Principal for Higher Education presented course performance figures, noting that Fine Art was underperforming due to cohort complexities and that some courses face recruitment and marketing challenges. The Committee discussed that the ongoing internal curriculum review will inform decisions on the portfolio, including the potential continuation or closure of lower-performing courses. It should be clarified that this review is internal and separate from any work with the FE Commissioner, which does not determine course offerings. The Chair confirmed that the portfolio development report will be presented at the December Board meeting.

b. Annual Strategy Delivery: KPIs and Objectives

The Principal presented the KPIs and objectives, outlining the reporting approach for the year and highlighting ongoing concerns regarding MA recruitment, while seeking guidance on setting next year's targets.

Board Members advised on aligning targets with the financial plan, ensuring clarity between growth targets and budget assumptions, and suggested benchmarking against national performance to evidence progress.

The Principal explained adjustments to targets based on cohort sizes and feeder course strength and explained how the additional objectives aligned with the College strategy. Monitoring arrangements and committee oversight were discussed, with certain objectives requiring committee review and an annual review touchpoint proposed.

6. Finance Update: including Management Accounts and key risks

a. Management Accounts July 2025

The Principal presented the accounts in the absence of the Finance Director, noting a slightly better-than-expected position. The Chair requested the report be amended to correct a reference to a deficit, which is in fact a positive.

b. Risk Register

The Principal provided an overview of the Risk Register and noted that it will be reformatted and presented to the Audit Committee.

c. Current Budget Risks

The Principal reported that student accommodation vacancies is a significant risk, although recruitment efforts are ongoing. Additional risks were noted around pay expenditure and the November budget, driven by AoC guidance on wage increase being 4% and the additional increase in the National Living Wage. It was noted that the cost-of-living pressures have reduced demand for accommodation as more students choose to study locally, though it was reported by the Principal that external recruitment remains strong. The Board discussed the risk of potential industrial action, the link between TEF outcomes and fee-setting, and the implications of Ofsted changes and unfunded EHCP students.

7. Annual Reports

a. Sustainability Report

The Principal presented the updated report, noting that carbon data had been added since the last version reviewed by the Finance and General Purposes Committee in September. The Committee had requested that future reports provide a higher-level summary, and monitoring will continue.

b. Health and Safety Report

The Health and Safety Report was reviewed by the Board, who expressed their support to the Health and Safety Manager and acknowledged the positive approach to reporting near misses.

c. Estates and Operations Report

The Estates and Operations Report was reviewed and noted by the Board.

All of the above reports were received and approved by the Board.

8. Policies

a. Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy

The Board agreed to withdraw the policy for substantive amendments following concerns raised by a Board Member. The Safeguarding Governor, in collaboration with relevant staff, will oversee the revisions. The policy will be published on the website in draft form, with the final version submitted to the Board for review and ratification in December. Clarification regarding the process for responding to suicide concerns will be incorporated into the updated policy.

b. Child-on-Child Abuse Policy

The Board reviewed the Child-on-Child Abuse Policy. A Board Member queried the need for it to be a separate policy, asking whether it could be incorporated into the Safeguarding Policy. It was clarified that the Child-on-Child Abuse Policy is required as a distinct document, though it

can be cross-referenced within the overarching Safeguarding Policy. The Board agreed that the comments and approach applied to the Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy, including the review, amendment process, and draft publication on the website, also apply to this policy.

ACTION: A Board member will work with the HCA Safeguarding Lead to update the Safeguarding policies, which will be submitted to the December Board for approval.

9. **Governance Framework**

The Board reviewed the following revised governance framework documents:

- Instrument and Articles
- Standing Orders
- Scheme of Delegation
- Governors' Code of Conduct
- Board Terms of Reference

The Board expressed their thanks to the Clerk for the work undertaken in drafting these documents and noted a few amendments. Observations included inconsistencies in references across the documents and the inclusion of additional matters, such as cyber security and engagement with external stakeholders. The Clerk noted these amendments, and it was agreed that the revised documents would be presented to the Board for ratification at the March meeting.

ACTION: The Clerk to update the documents and present them for ratification at the March Board meeting.

10. **Committee Meeting Minutes**

The following draft committee minutes were presented and noted by the Board:

- a. **Curriculum and Quality (FE)** held on 22 September 2025.
- b. **Curriculum and Quality (HE)** held on 22 September 2025.
- c. **Curriculum and Quality (Combined)** held on 22 September 2025.
- d. **Finance and General Purpose** held on 29 September 2025.

11. **Any other Business**

The Chair invited the Board to raise any other business. As no further matters were identified, the Chair proceeded to the confidential item and requested all staff and student governors to leave.

12. **Confidential Item**

The Chair moved on to the confidential item, and all staff and student governors left the meeting at 18:56. The confidential discussion took place with only the Principal and Independent Governors present. Please refer to the separate confidential minutes for details.

13. **Close of Business and Date of Next Meeting**

With no further business to discuss, the Chair closed the meeting at 19.24. The next meeting is scheduled for 02 March 2025, at 4:30 PM.

Minutes approved: Date: