

Minutes of: HCA Board of Governors

Date: Monday 3rd March 4.30pm **Location:** A10, College Road Campus

Present	In attendance
Mervyn Jones (<i>Chair</i>) Abigail Appleton (<i>Principal/CE</i>) Clive Hodgeman John Auckland Judy Balderson Kate Seekings Ellie Bunston Russell Roberts Ian Axtell Nicola Hewitt Peta Darnley Myfanwy Page (<i>Staff Governor</i>) Charlotte Semus (<i>Student Governor</i>) Rosy Miller (<i>Student Governor</i>) Collectively referred to as the “ <i>Board</i> ” and individually as a “ <i>Governor</i> ”.	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, “VP-BDSE”</i>) Tim Williams (<i>Finance Director, “FD”</i>) Abigail Boyce (<i>Clerk to Governors, “Clerk”</i>)
Quoracy: Meeting was quorate in accordance with paragraph 1 below.	Absent: Jennette Arnold, Oliver Cameron-Swan, Kate Mori and Helen Hurford.

1. **Quorum:** The meeting was duly constituted as a quorum of 14 members was present, representing 78% of the total membership. This satisfies the 40% quorum requirement set out in Article 13(1) of the college’s Instrument of Government.
2. **Governor appointments for approval:** The Search & Governance Committee has recommended Rosy Miller for the role of Student Governor for Further Education (“FE”). It is proposed that she joins the Board and serves on the FE Curriculum & Quality Committee.
Decision: Board agreed to approve this appointment.
3. **Apologies**
 - a. **Apologies for absence:** Apologies were received from Oliver Cameron-Swan, Jennette Arnold, Kate Mori and Helen Hurford.
 - b. **Declarations of interest:** there were no new declarations of interest.
4. **Minutes of last meeting**
 - a. **Approval of minutes of last meeting held on 16th December 2024:** the minutes were approved as a true and accurate record.
 - b. **Matters arising:** all actions were noted as complete or as in progress.
5. **Chair Recruitment update**
The Chair of the Search and Governance Committee provided an update on the Chair recruitment process. It was noted that the initial round of interviews did not result in a suitable appointment, and the application process has reopened with a deadline of 17th

March. The current Chair will be stepping down from Committee Chair roles, including Finance & General Purposes, and Governors were invited to express interest in the position.

Before the Principal's report, the Chair congratulated her on being awarded an MBE, with the Board joining in recognition of this achievement.

6. Principal's Reports

a. Principal's Reports

The Principal presented her report and highlighted key areas:

- **Overview:** The Principal provided an overview of recent college events since December, emphasising how these were carried out with partnerships and how such collaborations have been leveraged to inspire ambition within the institution. She also discussed the progress of alumni and student achievements, emphasising the impact of these collaborative efforts.
- **Applications 2025/26:** The Principal provided an update on application data, noting an improvement compared to the previous year. However, she highlighted the continued volatility of the market and the importance of converting applications into enrolments. She attributed the increase in applications to strengthened marketing efforts and a clearer emphasis on pathways from Further Education to Higher Education. It was acknowledged that applications from mature students had declined, though the Principal noted that mature applicants often apply later in the year, presenting an opportunity for further analysis. She confirmed that updated figures would be presented at the next Curriculum and Quality Committee meeting.
- **Professional and Curriculum Development:** The Principal outlined plans to establish a professional business cycle in FE, transitioning into HE. Efforts are focused on aligning HE processes with the FE model, with the VP-BDSE bringing together various pathways for HE development. A shift towards a longer-term, three-year planning approach was emphasised, ensuring development extends beyond the current academic year. It was noted that the primary focus is on the curriculum, but business developments are ongoing, ensuring agility in line with HCA's key strategy.
- **Access and Participation Plan:** The Principal reported that the Access and Participation Plan was approved by the OfS, reducing regulatory pressures and enabling a strategic four-year focus. She highlighted this as a major achievement, given the minimal revisions required and its importance to the OfS.
- **Partnerships:** The Principal also emphasised HCA's efforts to establish partnerships, particularly with NMITE, and to strengthen collaboration with education providers and schools.
- **External Policy and Change:** The Principal noted the Department for Education's change of focus on skills and the establishment of a new body, 'Skills England,' emphasising her commitment to staying engaged with advisory groups.

- **HCA170:** A Governor praised the Principal for the success of the HCA170 public events. The Principal acknowledged that student attendance had been low and that efforts were being made to encourage greater participation. A Student Governor noted that the opportunity to engage directly with speakers was a key factor in attracting students. The Principal recognised that while opportunities for engagement exist, they were offered to specific student groups. The VPFE added that many students find it difficult to attend due to travel distances and work commitments. A Governor suggested hosting events online to improve accessibility, while another proposed recording them so they could be used for discussions with students at a later date. The Principal emphasised the significant networking opportunities these events provide for students. It was also recognised that these events play an important role in promoting the college.

- b. Report on KPIs and objectives 2024/25:** The Principal reviewed the KPI data, in particular the HE Level 4 retention into Level 5. It was noted that the OfS sets a threshold of 80% for retention under Condition B3, below which institutions may be considered at regulatory risk. However, the college has set a more ambitious internal target of 94%, reflecting its ambition to achieve TEF Gold and prioritise student success. As a result, this KPI remains marked as red to ensure it continues to be a key priority.

The Principal provided an update on the postponement of the business case development for the Fashion, Business, and Retail diploma, the Principal outlined the additional steps required before its launch. She noted that engagement with schools and colleges remained on track and expressed confidence in the recruitment team's ability to deliver.

The Principal also reported that the objective concerning staff reward had been flagged as red, with further discussion scheduled under item 8. The Chair suggested that the objectives should also be discussed within the relevant committee meetings. The VPHE commented that the OfS has lowered its B3 threshold for progression, based on graduate outcomes data, to just above 50%, which both eases pressure on universities and reflects wider challenges across the sector. The Chair concluded by informing the Board that the OfS had invited Chairs to a meeting, which they had accepted.

- c. Risk Register:** The FD reported no changes to the Risk Register. The FD noted recent reports concerning Cardiff University's financial situation, that had just appeared in the national press and its potential impact on University of Wales Trinity Saint David ("UWTSD"), which ratifies HCA degrees. The FD informed the Board that the significant issue at Cardiff University did not impact UWTSD. They are two separate organisations. However, UWTSD had been undergoing a number of restructuring exercises over a number of years to deal with financial challenges and the merger of several institutions.
- d. Milestone Map:** The Principal presented the new Milestone Map. It was noted that the approach focuses on course replacement and growth, allowing for more accurate modelling of student accommodation, estate strategy, and student numbers. The map is being developed as an iterative process, moving towards a more detailed timeline. This is expected to support more effective planning, prioritise key developments such as the main hall refurbishment, and assist the leadership team in decision-making.

A Governor raised the issue of sustainability, particularly regarding financial sustainability. The Principal highlighted cost-saving measures, including grant applications and short courses. A Governor suggested exploring alternative funding for sustainability, which the Chair and Principal agreed should be included in the strategic map. The Principal emphasised the need for a financial model to support these efforts.

The Milestone Map was deemed a strong draft, with further refinement by the SLT and more Governor input later. Governors debated including themes like marketing, TEF Gold, or student outcomes, leaving the matter with the SLT.

- e. **Equality and equity:** The Principal presented the recommendation from the Curriculum and Quality Committee and the December Board to change the term in EDI Reports from "equality" to "equity," reflecting its growing external use. The AoC Charter was outlined, along with its sign-up process, which will first go to the Academic Board for consultation. Signing up would require HCA to self-assess against the charter's principles, offering a chance for reflection. It was proposed to adopt the charter while maintaining internal terminology. Governors unanimously supported this approach.

7. Finance Update (*December 2024 Management Accounts*)

The Finance Director ("FD") presented a presentation and this report and highlighted some key points:

- **Update on Management Accounts:** The FD reported that HE figures were impacted by withdrawals. The provision for more withdrawals was very small. 5 additional withdrawals would exceed it. Adjustments were made due to legislative changes on holiday pay for Term Time Only staff. While some positive movement was noted, some income figures were estimates and included funding to cover increased National Insurance cost (£40K) and increased FE funding (£30K).
- **Funding Delays and Implications:** The FD noted that delays in funding could affect the next financial year, especially if there are cuts to the Department for Education budget.
- **Staff Costs and Financial Management:** The Principal confirmed that staff costs had been tightly managed. The Board acknowledged the financial challenges and recognised the ongoing focus on marketing and recruitment to improve the financial position.
- **FE Sector Funding Update:** A Governor requested an update on FE sector funding. The FD confirmed additional funding is expected in April, but the main allocation for 2025/26 due in February has not been confirmed, which is impacting the budgeting process.
- **National Insurance Grant Status:** A Governor inquired about the National Insurance Grant. The FD explained that allocations would be based on historic figures and would not cover the full amount, although an estimated figure had been included in the accounts.
- **Overall Financial Outlook:** The Chair reiterated that this remains a challenging year and emphasised the importance of recruitment, exploring additional income

streams, and planning for the future. However, opportunities for HCA to improve its financial position were acknowledged.

8. Marketing and Recruitment report

The Vice Principal of Business Development and Student Experience (“VP-BDSE”) presented a presentation and this report and highlighted some key points:

- **Digital Marketing:** The VP-BDSE highlighted successes and challenges in digital marketing, noting its increasing cost and competitiveness. It was noted colleges are investing heavily, using click monitoring and data analysis to assess impact.
- **Outreach and Recruitment:** The Board was informed that outreach and marketing improvements are progressing well, with positive feedback on the new team and open day format. While applications are ahead of target, conversion to enrolments remains a priority. The UCAS tariff has been adjusted to sector norms, and the focus is on fewer, higher-quality open events.
- **Prospectus and Branding:** It was noted that the value of the FE prospectus remains strong, and consistent branding across marketing platforms is a priority. The UCAS stand has been redesigned as an interactive experience to enhance professionalism.
- **HCA Visibility in Hereford:** A Governor raised concerns about HCA’s visibility in Hereford. The Principal confirmed that the focus is on exhibition spaces rather than costly billboards, considering budget constraints and value for money. QR codes are being used for marketing, though future plans for marketing in the city are influenced by the budget.
- **Course Branding and Printed Materials:** The VPHE stressed the need for clear course branding on physical assets. Governors acknowledged the effectiveness of printed materials, such as posters in high-traffic areas, and noted that marketing efforts are showing positive results.

9. Staff Wellbeing Strategy

The Principal presented this report and highlighted some key points:

- **Staff Survey and Action Plan:** The Principal presented key data from the staff survey, noting improvements in critical questions. An update on the action plan was shared, with a focus on staff development. It was noted the strategy is up for renewal next year, and new sector guidance recommends a standalone mental health strategy, which will be brought to the Board.
- **Staff Development and Training:** The importance of staff development in meeting students' evolving needs, including mental health, was acknowledged. It was clarified that training should not be confused with staff development, and this distinction has been addressed in some of the development days.
- **Staff Wellbeing and Communication:** Contradictory responses were noted in the survey. The Principal confirmed plans for a repeated staff wellbeing pulse survey and ongoing efforts to strengthen staff communication. A Governor asked about identifying which teams were most affected, and the Principal explained that team-level data might compromise anonymity.

- **Team Meetings and Staff Engagement:** The Chair asked about regular team meetings. The VPFE confirmed weekly meetings, with staff contributing to the agenda. Challenges with smaller teams, particularly fractional staff, were discussed, with virtual meetings not always viable. The VPFE and VPHE assured the Board they're aware of teams with communication issues.
- **First Aid and Mental Health Training:** A Governor raised concerns about low uptake of first aid and mental health training. The Principal explained that the two-day course may not appeal to all, though feedback from those who completed it was positive.

10. Assurance Reports and Self-Assessment Reports

The following reports were presented to the Board and the following reports and points were noted:

- Remuneration Report 2023/24:** The Chair reminded the Board that he acted as Chair for the Remuneration Committee in April 2024, despite this being outside the Committee's Terms of Reference. It was noted that this was a one-time exception made for operational expediency. The Chair confirmed to the Clerk that the Principal's pay, discussed at the Committee, was presented to and approved by the Board on 13th May 2024. It was noted that the Remuneration Report will be updated to reflect it received Board approval.

ACTION: The Clerk will update the Remuneration Report to reflect the Board's approval in May.

- FE Self-Assessment Report 2023/24:** This report was noted by the Board and clarification was provided on some abbreviated terms.
- HE Academic Monitoring Report 2023/24:** This report was noted by the Board.

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 18:30. 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 adjourned the meeting at 19:08. The next meeting is scheduled for Monday 12th May 2025, at 4:30 PM.

Minutes approved: Date: