



1660 PRELIMINARY PROCEDURAL MATTERS

1660.1 Attendance, Apologies, Welcome & Order of Business

Present: Nick Buckland (Chair)
Gareth Dace
Paula Davies
Nick Day
Patience Egbo *(From Item 1660.3)*
Kathryn Hardwidge *(On Teams)*
Sophia Howard *(On Teams) (Until Item 1660.3)*
Leah Markee
Tony Medhurst (Principal)
Cecilia Mutuma
Mary Pooley *(On Teams)*
Charlotte Simmonds
Joshua Temile
Mia Young

In Attendance: Sabrina Ahmed Qureshi *(Item 1660.3 only)*
Shachi Blakemore *(Item 1662.1.2 only)*
Jayne Chaplin (Clerk to the Corporation)
Andrew Clare
Angela McLean

Apologies: Anatoliy Strembitskyy

Joshua Temile was welcomed to his first meeting and introduction were undertaken. It was **RESOLVED** for Item 1662.1.2 to be taken as the first Item of business.

1660.2 Declaration of Interests & Confidential Items

A Declaration of Interest was received from Tony Medhurst in his capacity as a Director of CK Assessment & Training Ltd (Part 2 Agenda)

Based on the commercially sensitive nature of the matters for discussion, it then was **RESOLVED** for those Items forming Part 2 of the Agenda to be taken as confidential Items of business.

1660.3 Board Development Session – Ofsted Briefing

Patience Egbo Joined the meeting. Sophia Howard left the meeting

A presentation was received on Ofsted and key changes to the Inspection arrangements, notably a more collaborative approach and focus on context, and the standards and criteria for inspections outlined in its Further Education and Skills Inspection Toolkit, particularly highlighting:

- a. The replacement of previous judgments with a new inspection report card:

- i. Comprising a five point grading scale and a wider range of evaluation areas
 - ii. With safeguarding as a stand-alone area, to be judged as either 'met' or 'not met', and new evaluation areas for 'inclusion' to help break down barriers to learning and "well-being" to support and promote leader and staff well-being
- b. The circumstances in which new 'categories of concern' would trigger monitoring inspections, confirming this would include if Safeguarding was graded 'not met'

After exploring how the changes had been received, particularly in the FE sector, questioning and discussion included expectations and implications for:

- c. Governance, noting consideration to be given to the extent to which governors know and undertake their statutory duties and support and challenge Management effectively to be assured of an accurate understanding of the College context and improvement actions identified and prioritised appropriately
- d. The next College inspection and the extent to which it was prepared and where focus was required, noting the action underway and to be taken. Whilst confirmed to be within scope, only inspected in May 24, members were advised it was hoped to be later in the inspection cycle

The Director of Quality & Learning Innovation and the Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality were thanked for their informative briefing.

The Director of Quality & Learning Innovation left the meeting

1660.4 Minutes of the Last Meeting & Matters Arising

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 October 2025 were approved as a correct record and the application of the Chair signature was authorised. Observing topics to be covered on the agenda and now concluded (Minute 1658.2.2a refers) it was confirmed that there were no further Matters Arising on which to report.

1660.5 Chair's Update

Reflecting on escalating global tensions, and the pace of economic, national and local government developments generally and for the Sector in particular, the need was emphasised to remain sensitive to the mental health and well-being of students and staff, and to keep up to date and responsive to changes.

1661 STRATEGY & POLICY

1661.1 Principal's Report & College Accountability Statement

Accompanied by the monitoring report for the Strategic Plan 2022-27 and after observing those matters considered elsewhere on the Agenda, the report was summarised. There was particular discussion of:

- a. Recent College activities, particularly noting:
 - i. Overall attendance at Open Evenings in 2025 had increased on 2024.
 - ii. In the context of the forthcoming Corporation Conference in January 26, the examples of some information provided to curriculum teams to support their planning processes and to inform other activities

- iii. The recent Managers' Forum Activity, which included an activity involving the use of three questions reported on previously from a part of a Cabinet Office event for public sector leaders attended in November, highlighting some similarities in the local and College level responses, demonstrating alignment of local and corporate vision and focus
 - iv. Student Focus Groups, highlighting examples of the diverse nature of College students and their respective experiences, confirming whilst feedback was positive overall, the learning points being taken forward
- b. The overview of Policy and Local updates, especially:
- i. The publication of the Education and Skills White Paper, the outcome of the Curriculum and Assessment Review and the consultation on Level 3 and 2 reform, highlighting key changes, notably for the College, the significance of Level 2 reform
 - ii. Discussion of local government reform and the roadmap to devolved adult funding from 2027 at meetings with Hertfordshire Principals and the University of Hertfordshire although the potential impact was acknowledged of recent pauses in mayor elections elsewhere
- c. Progress in implementing the objectives in the Strategic Plan 22-27, advising members of work underway looking at the impact of the College in the local community, which would be reported on at the appropriate time

After observing the local Hertfordshire context and national curriculum/post 16 strategy/policy were topics at the forthcoming Corporation Conference, the Principal was thanked for an interesting and informative report.

1662 PERFORMANCE, PLANNING & COMPLIANCE

1662.1 From Committees

Following review by the respective committees, reports and recommendations were presented from:

1662.1.1 Search & Governance Committee, 17/12/25

After observing topics appearing elsewhere on the agenda (Minute 1662.1.4aii refers), the Committee Chair provided an overview of the business considered and the Committee's recommendations, particularly:

- a. Following the (online) reappointment for the period October to December 25 pending conclusion of recruitment activity, discussions regarding the departure of Charlotte Simmonds, next steps and longer term succession planning considerations in anticipation of the departure of the current Chair of the Corporation now commencing his second and final term of office. Then explaining:
 - i. With interim arrangement in place, proposals for Nick Day to become Chair of the Resources Committee and for Mary Pooley to continue as Vice Chair of the Corporation with Cecilia Mutma now unable to take on the role after a change in work commitments

- ii. Following the latest recruitment process, one candidate with professional expertise in finance was recommended for appointment as Board member and member of the Audit Committee. Chiz Onuora was reported to be locally based with extensive professional expertise in Banking and Finance and Board level experience, including from related voluntary roles, all of which had been considered complementary to and would enhance the Board's overall composition.
- b. The plans proposed for the Board's forthcoming Annual Conference

After review and on the recommendation of the Search & Governance Committee, it was **RESOLVED** to:

- c. **APPROVE** the **APPOINTMENT** of:
 - i. Nick Day as Chair of the Resources Committee and Mary Pooley as Vice Chair of the Corporation for the remainder of the 25/26 academic year
 - ii. Chiz Onuora as Business Member for a term of office of four years and as a member of the Audit Committee for 25/26

1662.1.2 Audit Committee, 09/12/25

After observing those items on the Agenda (Minutes 1662.1.3a and 1662.2.3b refers), an overview was provided of the business considered, drawing members' attention to the reviews scheduled to commence in the Spring term in line with the annual Audit Plan, and confirmation of the Committee's satisfaction with and its confidence in management's approach to and the implementation of audit recommendations.

(a) Financial Year-end 31.07.25

Shachi Blakemore, Buzzacott, joined the meeting

Accompanied by the Post Audit Report and the Letters of Audit Representations, the Consolidated Report & Financial Statements were presented following review by the Audit and Resources Committees, noting:

- i. From the Resources Committee, confirmation of an audited financial position for the year-ended 31 July 2025 of an audited "operational" surplus for the year of £1,870,000 (24 – 1,506,000), excluding movements on the defined benefit pension liability and other non-recurring items
- ii. Confirmation from Buzzacott of an unqualified audit opinion for the College Group highlighting in the Post Audit Report:
 - Fulfilment of the one advisory point raised in 2023/24 regarding Cyber Essentials Certification and no areas had been identified for 2024/25
 - No indication of material misstatement in the recognition of income and in respect of audit adjustments and unadjusted misstatements, only clearly trivial misstatements remained unadjusted
 - Accounting policies, estimates, and disclosures were unchanged subject to noting the restatement of the College only reserves as at 1 August 2023 to reflect impairment of goodwill in relation to CK Assessment and Training Ltd.

After advising that whilst always reflected correctly in Group consolidated figures, adjustment now was needed for this to be also reflected in the College only reserves, no impact on the Group or consolidated position was confirmed. The adjustment was noted to be technical in nature, disclosed as a restatement to College reserves in the Financial Statements, including the accounting policies

- No indication of income materially misstated due to invalid ILR data and no evidence of management override of controls or concerns regarding related party transactions
- Accounting estimates appeared reasonable and Capital Works appropriately treated
- Consolidation was considered appropriate and accurate and testing had been undertaken to ensure breaches of Bank loan covenant had not occurred
- Satisfaction in the Regularity conclusion reached

iii The representations in the Letter of Audit Representations to be standard in nature

iv From the Audit Committee:

- In its Annual Risk & Assurance Annual Report, confirmation of the opinion of the Internal Audit Service that the College had an adequate and effective framework for risk management, governance, and internal control
- Its assessment of the adequacy of the current and future sources of funding or support for the College needs over the coming twelve months from the date of approval of the Financial Statements; and its conclusion that no further disclosures were required in the Financial Statements regarding the College's ability to continue as a going concern
- In its Annual Report, confirmation that it was satisfied overall with the standard and management of control procedures within the College and could give to the Board the necessary level of assurance

After clarifying points of detail and following review and on the recommendation of the Audit and Resources Committees, it was **RESOLVED** to:

- v **APPROVE** the Consolidated Report & Financial Statements for the year-ended 31 July 2025 and to **AUTHORISE** signature by the Chair of the Corporation and the Principal & Chief Executive; and
- vi **CONFIRM** the representations contained in the Letters of Audit Representations and to **AUTHORISE** signature by the Chair of the Corporation and the Principal & Chief Executive.

Shachi Blakemore, Buzzacott, left the meeting

1662.1.3 Resources Committee, 10/12/25

After observing those items appearing elsewhere on the Agenda (Minute 1662.1.2 refers), an overview was provided of the business considered. Reports then were presented comprising:

- (a) **2024/25 Year-end**
See Minute 1662.1.2a

(b) 2025/26 Financial Year to Date

i. Financial Report (October 25)

In the context of the Financial Plan agreed at the Board in July 2025 setting a target operating surplus for the College of £423K, the position to October 25 was confirmed to be £212K ahead of budgeted expectation.

The key variances were summarised, particularly highlighting:

i Income:

- The positive impact of increased funding rates, further income anticipated with student numbers ahead of expectation and confirmation from the DfE of funding for NI contributions for the period April 25 – March 26
- The provision made in respect of adult funding advising members of a potential shortfall with early indications of full time numbers down against target, confirming the position would be revisited in January 26

ii In the context of the overall positive position, proposals for investments in staff via one-off payments in July and December 26, subject to a positive outturn at the financial year end, and in future proofing projects, including the development of AI, Cyber-security and the College estate and infrastructure

After then providing clarification to some further points of details, the year-to-date position was noted.

(ii) Sub-Contracting Update

Progress with the College Apprenticeship, AEB, Programmes of Study sub-contracted provision was reported to be on profile with no contract variations proposed, the position was considered in more detail, particularly:

- i. Following the rise in the rate of funding previously advised with an increase of £58,616, confirmation of an amended contract value for CK Assessment & Training Ltd of £643,304 for Programmes of Study
- ii. Questioning and acknowledging the rationale for the request for a procurement exercise to be undertaken January/February 26 for non-devolved adult skills funding

On the recommendation of the Resources Committee, it was **RESOLVED** to:

- iii. **APPROVE** the request for a procurement exercise to be undertaken January/February 26 for non-devolved adult skills funding for programmes of a maximum 100 learners and at value of £100k from College allocation

(iii) Financial Regulations

The updated College Financial Regulations were presented.

The changes to ensure continued compliance with the DfE Accountability Agreement and associated Financial Handbook and Guidance were summarised, noted mainly to concern explanatory text, document titles and financial thresholds and approval requirements aligned to updated regulatory requirements.

In the context of discussions of the current financial position and the threshold requirement for investments in the Regulations, members then were advised of the Committee's approval of a short-term waiver request to maintain compliance whilst options were being explored for alternative arrangements.

On the recommendation of the Resources Committee, it was **RESOLVED** to:

- **APPROVE** the revised Financial Regulations

1662.1.4 Quality Standards & Business Planning (QSBP) Committee, 03/12/25

After referring to those items appearing elsewhere on the Agenda (Minutes 1662.1.3b and 1662.2.2), the Committee Chair summarised the business considered, particularly highlighting:

- Its briefing focused on employer relationships and commercial development, particularly new provision, a sector-based Work Academy Programme (SWAP) aligned and responding to the needs of and in partnership with the DWP
- Year to date performance measures showing modest improvement in Retention and Attendance rates compared with the same period in 24/25, and the latest Internal Quality Reviews completed

Follow review by the Committee, reports then were presented comprising:

(a) 24/25 Self- Assessment Report & 25/26 Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)

(i) The College

The proposed profile of Grade 2 for the key judgements, the strengths, areas for improvement and the rationale for the overall grade profile were reviewed

After thanking those members who had joined the various SAR Validation Panel meetings, and on the recommendation of the QSBP Committee, it was **RESOLVED** to:

- **APPROVE** the College 2024/25 Self-Assessment Report and 25/26 Quality Improvement Plan.

(ii) 2024/25 Corporation Self-Assessment Report

Highlighting the contribution of the Corporation towards the leadership and management in the College SAR, the key strengths were confirmed along with those areas identified for improvement to form the focus of attention for 25/26

On the recommendation of the QSBP Committee, it was **RESOLVED** to:

- **APPROVE** the Corporation 24/25 Self-Assessment Report and the 25/26 Quality Improvement Plan

1662.2.2 Compliance

1662.2.1 Annual Reports - Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI)

Presenting and confirming how the College met the public sector general and specific equality duties, along with its key achievements in 24/25 and priorities for 25/26, on the recommendation of the QSBP Committee, it was **RESOLVED** to:

- **APPROVE** the Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Annual Report.

1662.2.2 Policies: Malpractice & Maladministration

Responding to a requirement of the Joint Council for Qualifications, a new Malpractice & Maladministration Policy was presented, outlining the College approach to and arrangements for responding in such circumstances.

On the recommendation of the QSBP Committee, it was **RESOLVED** to:

- **APPROVE** the Malpractice & Maladministration Policy

1662.2.3 Termly Updates

(a) Health, Safety & Welfare (Safeguarding, Prevent & SEND)

In the context of the Corporation's overall responsibility for ensuring the sufficiency of the measures in place for the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, the second report of the autumn term was presented, accompanied by a progress report on the College Mental Health Action Plan.

After expressing continued confidence in and providing assurance regarding College arrangements and the monitoring of activity, recent developments were summarised. Review and discussion included:

- i. The increased safeguarding referrals but decrease in welfare referrals and the further analysis showing more complex and harder to close cases:

- Advising that questioning confirmed the removal of the category of records in the data table was to allow a truer reflection of the workload, and that appropriate and timely action and management of caseload was confirmed but that workload remained the subject of monitoring and review
- Noting within the report, the data highlighting students categorised as Child in Need, on a Child Protection Plan, Looked After or Care Leavers, and the requests received
- Highlighting how Mental Health issues continued to account for c.44% of referrals with focus on education and early intervention ongoing. Then explaining, by department, where higher and lower than expected numbers of referrals remained the subject of monitoring and action as appropriate, notably events around mental health in Electrical and Construction with a predominance of male students less likely to raise issues, particularly around mental health

Considering further student awareness of the College arrangements, the support available and confidence in raising concerns, there was discussion with the student governors who shared where further enhancements could be made. Expressing appreciation for and emphasising the importance of their observations and feedback in facilitating improvements to the learner experience, it was proposed for the Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality to meet with the student governors to explore the ways in which current arrangements could be enhanced further

- ii. External relationships, confirmed to be positive with the College culture and arrangements considered to be a strength

- iii. The overview of the strategies and activities promoting, responding to and addressing issues regarding safeguarding, Prevent and British values

Following discussion, the report was noted.

(b) Risk Management

Presented after review by the Audit Committee, the updated Risk Register was noted.

(c) Health & Safety

Presented for information purposes, the Minutes of the most recent meeting of the Health & Safety Committee were noted.

1663 OTHER BUSINESS & DATE OF NEXT MEETING

1663.1 Any Other Business: Member Departure

As the final meeting for Business member Charlotte Simmonds, on behalf of the Corporation, the Chair offered the Board's thanks for her professional insight and invaluable contribution at Board and Audit Committee meetings. Members then extended their best wishes in her future endeavours.

1663.2 Dates of Next Meetings

Friday 23 January 2026 (Annual Conference – at Ware)

Wednesday 25 March 2026

Wednesday 3 July 2026

With the business forming Part 1 concluded, the meeting moved to the Part 2 confidential agenda at this point.

Signed:



Dated: 25 March 2026

Nick Buckland OBE, Chair of the Corporation