

Hills Road Sixth Form College

Minutes of the Corporation Meeting: 11 September 2024 (Ordinary Business)

Members Present Kevin Taylor (Chair of the Corporation), Jane Sterling (Vice-Chair of the Corporation), Bruno Cotta (Parent Member), Paula Heaney, Anthony Omo, Katie Paton (Staff Nominee Member), Carrie Anne Philbin (from Agendum 6), Jonathan Russell, Charlotte Southgate (Student Member), Alison Taylor, Jo Trump (Principal), Evren Uygun (from Agendum 8).

Governance Services Robert Smith (Governance Professional)

In Attendance Ian Pryer (Deputy Principal), Saira Hanif (Vice-Principal: Finance & Operations), Ali Kirkman (Assistant Principal: Curriculum Development), Tim Lomas (Assistant Principal: Student Progression & Support), Theo Gregory-Rabie (Student Observer)

1 Apologies for Absence & Quoracy

Apologies for absence had been received from the following members of the Corporation: Adrian Clark, Mark Dawe, Emily Fletcher, Richard Westcott.

The meeting was quorate.

2 Declarations of Interest

The interests of Adrian Clark and Kevin Taylor in Cambridge University Press and Assessment were noted.

It was also noted that matters concerning the College's business relationship with Cambridge University Press and Assessment are operational, and therefore within the area of responsibility of the Principal, not the Corporation.

This minute is deemed to apply to all future meetings held in the year, whether of the Corporation, committees or *ad hoc* groups formed by the Corporation, which are attended by the said members, and future reference will be made to it as and when needed.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meetings: 15 May 2024 and 26 June 2024

The amended minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2024 were received and noted.

It was also noted that the draft minutes of the meeting held on 26 June 2024 had received approval by the Chair of the Corporation for circulation.

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 June 2024 were approved as a correct record of the business transacted and *prima facie* evidence of the proceedings to which they relate.

4 Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Previous Meeting: 26 June 2024

Minute 10: it was noted that members of the Corporation are required to confirm in writing to the Administrative Assistant (Governance) that they have viewed the Safeguarding Training Video 2024 and have no questions in its regard.

Minute 21: it was confirmed that the College IT Department had made induction videos available to members online, and that the remaining videos will be prepared during the first half of the current term.

There were no other matters arising except as reported elsewhere in these minutes.

5 Chair's Action Report

The following matters were reported by the Chair of the Corporation, namely that he had approved:

on 17 July a Cadman invoice for £150,342.43 including VAT, which falls within the already-approved budget for the works;

on 10 August a further Cadman invoice for £136,692.24 including VAT, which falls within the already-approved budget for the works.

He also reported that he had been informed that reserves levels (as at 28 July 2024) fell temporarily below the threshold for notification, but that it was a timing issue affording no cause for concern.

6 Principal's Update

A written update was received.

Matters were noted in relation to the following:

Pay and Funding 2024-25
Long Road MAT Consultation Response
Examination Results
Progression and Destinations
Admissions Update (2024 entry)
New Term Dates
50th Anniversary Year

In relation to Pay and Funding 2024-25 it was specifically reported that, for sixth form colleges who are not academies, no additional funds will be made available by the DfE to fund extra pay costs, thereby creating an inequity between teachers in such colleges and their peers in schools and academies, all of whom are employed on teacher (as distinct from lecturer) pay scales. The National Education Union (NEU) has notified a dispute with the Secretary of State over the issue and is balloting its members for strike action.

Long Road SFC's response to the MAT consultation was provided as an appendix to the Principal's written update.

In relation to Progression and Destinations, it was reported that final data will be included in the College Self-Assessment Report 2023-24.

In relation to Admissions 2024, it was reported that, at the time of writing the report, 1,520 students (2023: 1,476) had passed through both stages of the College's enrolment process. The planned enrolment target at the October census date is 1,467.

It was noted that 2024-25 marks the College's fiftieth anniversary year, and that a range of events (including on 11 March, 1 April and 19 July 2025) are planned in celebration. Further details are currently shown on the College website, but members asked that they also be circulated so that they can arrange to attend as many as possible.

7 Non-Financial Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

The following KPIs were noted:

Teaching Staff Retention 4.48% (target $\leq 7.5\%$);

Support Staff Retention 12.77% (target: $\leq 10\%$);

Staff Recruitment (two advertisements repeated due to failure to fill the required hours, three where successful candidates had refused the position, and two posts re-advertised where recruitment had been otherwise unsuccessful);

Student Attendance 93% – prior year 91.9% (target 94%); and

Budget/Forecast: as reported under Minute 12 (meeting: 26 June 2024).

Members agreed that the staff recruitment KPI had served only a limited purpose, and the report is accordingly to be discontinued.

8 Examination Outcomes 2024

A report prepared by the Deputy Principal was received and considered.

It was noted that in terms of achievement measured by points per A Level and by % of grades at A*-B, the College's results are ahead of where they stood pre-pandemic in 2019, but that added value is somewhat lower than 2022 and 2023 outcomes when grades for students relative to their prior attainment at GCSE are compared with those of students at other sixth form colleges, though added value overall remains positive by almost one tenth of a grade.

It was also noted that final data are not yet available since the appeals process is continuing. It is a reasonable expectation that the final results will show some small improvement by comparison with those currently reported.

A feature of the results had been a fall in the proportion of A* grades in a year when they increased nationally, which has impacted on added value scores and constitutes an area to be explored as a priority in the current year. It was suggested that 2023-24 had been a truly exceptional year in terms of students' examination performance, and that a slight reduction in performance had, on reflection, not been entirely unexpected.

A new feature of the Six Dimensions reporting service this year is a decile analysis showing the relative performance of subjects in the context of other results in the sixth form college sector on the basis of added value progress. A measure is also provided for whole college performance. The College is placed in the top 80% in terms of progress and added value. Some of the individual subject data, however, support the College's thinking behind action plans to address weaker relative performance.

Male students had out-performed their female counterparts in terms of value-added, both nationally and within the College. There is some evidence to support the observation that assessment based solely on final examination performance favours male students.

Good progress had been observed by students from ethnic minority backgrounds. More detailed analysis of these outcomes shows that black students, who had been a subject of particular focus had closed the progress gap significantly. However, having made advances in supporting students in receipt of free college meals (FCM) to make good progress in the last few years, it had been disappointing to see this group's outcomes fall back in 2024. This latter will be the subject of close scrutiny and priority action in the 2024-25 year.

Strongly encouraging retention data had rewarded the effort put into supporting student wellbeing. The provision of fast-track programmes and supported sets in Maths had afforded viable progression routes from Year 12 to Year 13.

Outcomes in the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) had shown a gratifying improvement, bearing testament to the work devoted to increasing the supportive intervention and messaging to students and parents about the benefits of the qualification. It was queried as to whether the additional resources applied to the EPQ, by both staff and students, might have contributed to the slight reduction in high-end A level outcomes, but it was acknowledged that, short of withdrawing the EPQ for an experimental period, it is impossible to test the proposition.

It was further noted that teaching departments are now finalising their Department Development Plans, which include reflecting and responding to their results. Heads of Department will then have a Department Development Plan meeting with relevant members of the College Strategy Team and the Curriculum Director for the subject. Link governors will be invited to join these meetings for their department, which meetings are scheduled to commence from the week beginning 16 September.

Wider college themes, notably around increasing A* grades, will also be part of whole college planning and work in Curriculum and Guidance leadership. Additionally, five departments have been identified as needing action plans for one or more subjects to help identify support and challenge to address a declining trend in outcomes or, in one case, to sustain and build on progress made.

Teachers and tutors have also received their own personal dashboards showing the outcomes for classes they have taught. These have been provided ahead of professional development reviews, so that colleagues and their line managers can reflect upon successes and identify areas for development.

The Student Member and Observer offered their perspectives on the EPQ, including that the timing of its conclusion at the very beginning of Year 13 does not lend support to the hypothesis that it adversely impacts A level performance at the year's end. The meeting concluded that:

in the context of the 5% entry typical of the sixth form college sector, the College is unusual in entering all students for the EPQ, and it would be helpful to emphasise this distinction in documents and reports intended to be viewed by external assessors; and

the value of EPQ is reflected in its longer-term outcomes (e.g. university degree class, and career choices), which should also be emphasised to all relevant parties, where appropriate.

It was noted that a full analysis of the final results (including re-graded outcomes following appeals) will be set out in the College Self-Assessment Report, to be brought to the next meeting of the Corporation.

9 Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)

Members received and considered an end-of-year report (2023-24) prepared by the Deputy Principal.

Actions were specifically reported in relation to:

*Quality of Education;
Leadership and Management; and
Personal Development, Behaviour and Attitudes*

The positive impact of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) on staff performance was particularly noted by members.

It was also noted that QIP reports in 2024-25 will adopt the revised format previously approved by members.

10 Business not taken

11 Strategic Planning

Members received and considered a review of the Strategic Plan 2020-24. Achievements were particularly noted in relation to student admissions (particularly, measures to favour entry from local CAP schools and from more disadvantaged cohorts), staff development (notably, creating and embedding a culture of coaching, training and development), the College's enhanced digital capability, estate developments for the benefit of both staff and students (including improved site security), research initiatives, and environmental and work/life balance measures.

The impact of the public health emergency during the period of the Plan was noted, as was the College's robust response to its challenges.

Members also received the "slides version" of the Strategic Plan 2024-28, which had been approved at the meeting held on 26 June 2024.

An important element in the 2024-28 Plan is greater staff diversity (not just ethnic diversity), and various measures were discussed in this regard. The need for a clear definition of "diversity" was emphasised, including effective ways to measure and recognise its achievement.

12 Survey Reports: Staff, Student and Parent

Members received and considered a report on the Staff Survey 2024, noting in particular that:

a response rate of 59% had been attained (2023: 60% - typical sector range 50-70%);

of the 11 questions asked, the percentage of staff who strongly agreed or agreed with each question improved in all cases;

the most improved scores were for the questions: 'The College is well led and managed', 'I feel a sense of belonging to the college community' and 'Leaders are considerate of my workload and wellbeing', which all improved by 6%;

the safeguarding question 'Safeguarding arrangements are effective at the College' improved by 5% and had the strongest agreement of all questions at 99%; and

the lowest scoring question was 'I have a clear understanding of my career or promotion path', albeit this too improved by 1%, with 67% of staff agreeing.

With regard to teachers and tutors, it was noted that:

compared with 2023, the trend is positive in results across all questions, showing a 6% positive movement overall; and

the most significant year-on-year improvement is 'I feel a sense of belonging to the college community,' which increased by 12% and 'The College is well led and managed' which increased by 10%.

With regard to support staff, it was noted that:

despite ongoing challenges with support staff retention, support staff responses scored better across all questions;

the most improved score is 'Learners are supported to develop positive attitudes to learning and work'; and

the two questions eliciting lower positive responses were 'Managers are considerate of my workload and well-being' and 'I would recommend working here'.

With regard to leaders and managers, it was noted that:

leaders and managers had seen the most improvement across all the questions, with a 10% increase in their score in total; and

two questions received a more than 20% increase, they are 'Managers are considerate of my workload and well-being' and 'I am provided with relevant professional development to allow me to become more effective in my role'.

Members also received and considered reports on the student surveys and the Parent Survey 2024, noting in particular that:

Year 13 whole college feedback shows a mixture of trends with some improved responses and some lower, but with the majority very positive;

Year 13 curriculum feedback is very positive overall, but some subjects show responses below the college average, a number of which correlate with 2024 examination outcomes that are also below the college average;

the Year 13 Parent Survey shows continued strong positive responses in a significant number of areas, with two slightly lower responses in relation to developing personal and social skills, and in relation to enrichment and extra-curricular activities;

Year 12 whole college feedback is largely positive but there is a continued challenge around Future Ready and seeing the Extended Project as a route to being an independent learner; and

Year 12 curriculum feedback is consistently strong in nearly all areas, but with more to do in terms of teachers developing the understanding of skills.

Members discussed the College's approach to extra-curricular activities, with the distinction between College-led and student-led opportunities being clearly delineated by the Student Member and Observer who emphasised the support available for student-led initiatives. Members noted actions being taken by the College in response to concerns arising from the surveys.

There was some discussion, including input from the Student Member, of the Future Ready Programme, with the following points being made:

its benefits are not immediately apparent to participants; and

Year 12 students will have had widely differing experience of the programme's content at their 11-16 school, which may lead to some students having to repeat elements previously provided.

13 Safeguarding Policies

The following policies, reflecting changes in relevant guidance, were received and approved:

Safeguarding Policy

Child Protection Policy and Procedures

Safeguarding Adult Learners Policy

Staff Recruitment Policy (referencing safe recruitment)

Managing Abuse Allegations Against Staff Policy

Prevent Policy

14 Staff Grievance Policy

A revised policy was received and approved.

15 Investment Policy

A revised policy was received and approved.

16 Critical Incidents Policy

A revised policy was received and approved, and the attendant Protective Security and Preparedness Plan noted.

17 Business not taken.

18 Anti-Bribery and Corruption Policy

A revised policy was received and approved.

19 Reserves Policy

A revised version of the policy, including two amendments requested by members, was received and approved.

20 Governor Link Scheme

A revised guide to the Scheme was received, together with a schedule of links for the 2024-25 year.

A member volunteered to fill the 'Economics & Business Studies' gap. It was agreed that the 'Extended Project' gap would be further considered.

It was agreed that, from 2024-25, a schedule of Scheme activities be maintained by governors through provision of an online facility for their use on GovernorHub.

21 Governance Professional's Announcements

The Governance Professional formally welcomed Alice Adams to the role of Administrative Assistant (Governance), which she took up on 15 August 2024.

In addition, he advised members that an election is in progress for the office of Staff Nominee Member of the Corporation, and that the successful candidate will be appointed at the meeting to be held on 6 November 2024.

22 Dates and Times of Remaining Corporation Meetings 2024-25

The following approved dates and times were noted:

Wednesday 6 November 2024 (6.30pm)

Tuesday 10 December 2024 (6.30pm)

Wednesday 5 February 2025 (6.30pm)

Wednesday 26 March 2025 (6.30pm)

Wednesday 14 May 2025 (6.30pm)

Wednesday 25 June 2025 (6.30pm)

23 Any Other Competent Business

Under reserved business, the following reserved minute of the 26 June 2024 meeting was approved for release into the ordinary business minutes:

Barclays Bank Loan Covenant

The following matter was reported by the Principal to the Chair of the Corporation on 18 June 2024.

It was reported that the following covenants (i.e. conditions) apply to the loan facility, namely that:

operational gearing will be <5:1; and

available cash-flow as a % of debt servicing cost (also known as debt service cover) will be >100%.

Both conditions are calculated annually by the financial statements' auditor for inclusion in the auditor's statement within the College's accounts.

An email received from Barclay's Bank (dated 12 June 2024) states that the College is in breach of the debt service cover loan covenant in the 2022-23 year, but that the Bank is content to allow a waiver.

The alleged breach arises because Barclays, whilst including movement in the pension fund (over which the College has no control), do not include additional grants received (such as the additional capital funds received

for the study centre *et al*) in their definition of new cash from operating activities. Given the scale of the capital spend last year, excluding this grant income appears to place the College in a technical breach position.

The College's external auditor, Buzzacott, advised that the loan covenant may be variously interpreted and that, whilst the original loan documentation excludes *deferred* capital grants released to income, it does not explicitly exclude or include other grants received. The auditor advises that it is standard practice in the sector for such grants to be included in such circumstances, and that he had been confident to state in the published accounts that the College had fulfilled its loan covenant.

A meeting on 20 June with the bank and the auditor resulted in the former adjusting the covenant calculation for the 2022-23 year to exclude capital expenditure, it having been successfully argued that the College is undertaking an exceptional level of site development to allow for the effective delivery of its mission.

The bank conceded that the wording of the covenant is ambiguous, not least because it could be demonstrated that the ESFA, in calculating compliance with the covenant, excludes capital expenditure. The bank's relationship manager agreed to revert to the internal compliance team at Barclays and have them accept a 'letter of compliance' from the financial statements' auditor for 2022-23, instead of relying on a waiver, thereby confirming acceptance the auditor's interpretation of the calculation.

It was also agreed that the arrangement will be confirmed by the bank, in writing, as applying to the 2023-24 year, and subsequently.

Under reserved business at this meeting the Chair had noted that Barclays conceded that the approach taken by the College and its auditors is valid.

A list of actions arising from the meeting is set out on the following page.

Actions Arising from the Minutes of the Meeting

<i>Minute No.</i>	<i>Person(s) Responsible</i>	<i>Action(s) Required</i>
4	Independent and Parent Members of the Corporation.	Confirm to the Administrative Assistant (Governance) that the safeguarding training update video has been viewed.
6	Principal	Circulate advance notice to independent and parent members of 50 th anniversary events during 2024-25.
7	CST	Discontinue the recruitment KPI report.
20	Administrative Assistant (Governance)	Provide a facility on GovernorHub for members to record Link Scheme activities.