

Hills Road Sixth Form College

Minutes of the Corporation Meeting: 26 March 2025 (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, Jonathan Russell, Matthew Smalley (Staff Nominee Member), Charlotte Southgate (Student Nominee Member), Alison Taylor, Jo Trump (Principal), Evren Uygun, Richard Westcott.

Governance Services Robert Smith (Governance Professional)

In Attendance Ian Pryer (Deputy Principal), Saira Hanif (Chief Finance Officer), Rachel Hooper (Chief Operating Officer), 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.

The meeting was quorate.

Ali Kirkman and Tim Lomas (Vice-Principals) were unable to be in attendance.

2 Declarations of Interest

Reference is made to Minute 2 of the Corporation meeting held on 11 September 2024, the circumstances of which continue to apply.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting: 5 February 2025

It was noted that the draft minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2025 had received approval by the Chair of the Corporation for circulation.

The minutes 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: 5 February 2025

There were no matters arising except as reported elsewhere in these minutes, or for the initial attention of committees.

5 Chair's Action Report

The Chair reported that he had, on 18 March 2025, approved the following payments in relation to examination fees:

AQA: £287,479.45 (invoice dated 29/01/25)

OCR: £280,468.50 (invoice dated 25/02/25)

6 Audit Committee Report

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2025, approved by the Independent Chair of the Committee for circulation to members, were received, together with a report on its business.

The following documents were also received:

the Board Assurance Framework (BAF) following review by the Committee; and

the internal audit service report "Safer Recruitment".

In the absence of the Independent Chair of the Committee, the Vice-Chair of the Committee reported that:

BAF9 (failure to be ready to respond effectively and in a timely way to changes in the structure of further education, including responses to the increasing numbers of potential students and their location within Cambridgeshire) does not, in the opinion of the Committee, require amended scoring at this time, since it remains an active focus of interest for the Corporation as the College moves towards academisation;

the specially commissioned internal audit review of Safer Recruitment had resulted in strong assurance being given in relation to College practices and procedures; and

the Independent Chair of the Committee had received confirmation from Buzzacott that they would be prepared to continue as the College financial statements' auditor for the further period from 1 August 2024 to 31 August 2025.

The Corporation approved the appointment of Buzzacott as the College's financial statements' auditor for the additional period noted above.

7 Principal's Update

A written update was received and considered.

It was reported that:

Ofsted will inspect the College over a four-day period from 1 April 2025;

support staff (Unison) members nationally had voted to accept the staggered pay deal of 3.5% September to March and 5.5% April to August;

the 2025-26 per capita funding rate had been fixed at £5,026.00;

following receipt of 2,737 complete applications in January, the College had progressed 2,482 to Guidance Meetings in February, and plans to make 2,109 offers from which, at typical offer to enrolment rates, should yield close to 1,519 Year12 students at the census date in October, taking the College close to 3.000 student overall;

Other matters were reported in relation to Year 13 Progress, Government League Tables for A Level Results (2024), Safeguarding, and the College's Fiftieth Anniversary Celebrations.

The Corporation offered particular congratulations on the huge success of the talent-packed Corn Exchange Showcase Evening on 11 March.

8 Key Performance Indicators (Non-Financial)

The improved trends in the indicators for staff retention and student attendance were noted and discussed.

In particular, focus was given to the sustained improvements achieved by the guidance team since the introduction of the new attendance policy in September 2023 when compared against previous years and against the sector. Congratulations were extended to those who have worked to achieve this.

9 Academisation

A report prepared by the Deputy Principal was received. It was noted that:

staff had been advised of the positive decision of the Regional Director, and the news had been well received;

a draft consultation document had been created (attached as an appendix to the report), with a revised timeline for the consultation process having been drawn up to accommodate the exact nature of DfE and legal requirements;

Stone King (Solicitors) had been appointed to provide legal advice to the College as it follows the academisation process, and are currently drawing up Articles for the new Trust;

the first meetings of Trust members and the Board of Trustees had taken place;

a new finance system had been installed, providing the College with a chart of accounts compliant with academy sector rules;

most of the land owned by the Corporation had now been confirmed as registered with the Land Registry, though there remains a query over one strip of land across the Luard Road playing fields - solicitors at Eversheds have been engaged to help in this regard, but the process is being retarded by industrial action at the Land Registry; and

legal advice on the TUPE process is being sought, and appointment letters for staff joining in August 2025 had been amended to ensure that appointees are aware of the College's conversion to academy status.

Members made suggestions as to how questions in the consultation document might be differently framed.

The Chair reported that Trust members had begun to consider the future composition of the Board of Trustees to achieve the right balance of skills, and also how future committees of the Trust might be configured. The skills analysis referred to in Minute 16 below would assist this process. The Principal had been appointed as an *ex officio* member of the Board of Trustees, effective from today's date, joining the five existing trustees of Hills Education Trust Limited.

10 East-West Rail (EWR) Project

A paper prepared by the Chief Operating Officer was received and noted.

It was reported that Carter Jonas, the College's professional advisers in this regard, are quantifying the impact of the works on College resources.

There is broad alignment between the College, the rugby club and the Trustees of both the Conveyance and the Deed about next steps, with a joint position statement being drawn up to allow the COO of the College to represent all interests in her liaison with EWR.

11 Quality Improvement Plan

An updated iteration was received and discussed.

It was noted that a further update will be provided to those concerned with the forthcoming Ofsted inspection.

In relation to Quality of Education, the following matters *inter alia* were reported:

significant progress had been made in terms of departmental staff working through support plans attending subject specific CPD or visiting other centres to share ideas and gather good practice; and

mock examination outcomes had been affected by cautious marking and grading with a view to encouraging students to make the increased investment needed to optimise their examination performance potential.

In relation to Leadership and Management, the following matters *inter alia* were noted:

a Condition Report and a first draft Capacity Report to support a CIF bid had been received from the College's professional advisers;

a Development Director is now in post; and

further work had taken place to finalise the September 2025 staggered lunch timetable, providing a route to increased student capacity.

In relation to Personal Development Behaviour & Attitudes, it was noted that student attendance continues to improve.

In relation to Meeting Skills Needs, the following matters *inter alia* were noted:

students are being actively helped to reflect on the impact skills they are developing;

student learning in two curriculum areas is being enriched through use of Virtual Reality; and

the College is taking active steps to optimise its use of AI through further staff and student training and development.

12 Departmental Quality Visit: Classics & Latin

A report was received for information. It was noted that:

the two subjects (Classical Civilisation and Latin) had made significant progress since the previous Quality Visit;

teachers' expertise and care for students is very high and clearly demonstrated; but

further progress is still needed in relation to feedback and assessment in both subjects; and

in Latin, there is still progress to be made in relation to effective sequencing of lessons, inclusivity of resources, and hence optimised student progress.

Measures to address current issues are being taken forward.

13 Strategic Planning Report

An update with an associated timeline, prepared by the Chief Operating Officer, was received for information.

It was noted that a further report will be received at the meeting to be held on 14 May 2025, with a working model to be demonstrated at the meeting on 25 June 2025. The system is intended to go live from the start of the 2025-26 academic year.

14 Management Accounts 2024-25 (to Period 6: 31 January 2025)

A report, prepared by the Chief Finance Officer, was received and considered.

It was noted that:

the year-end surplus is forecast to meet the approved budget;

capital expenditure is projected to meet the relevant approved budget;

the year-end cash position is forecast to show a £24,000 inflow though, with the c£700,000 bank loan repayment included and offset by the additional pay grant receivable, this will become a c£315,000 outflow;

cash in hand days will remain above target;

the Financial Health Category is forecast to be 'Good' at the end of the year – the College will notify the Department of Education (DofE) about the forecast cash outflow for the 2024-25 period following the loan repayment (this cash outflow, a result of exceptional circumstances, is now a limiting factor in the revised calculation of Financial Health);

the Free Reserves position in January was £1.386,000 (i.e. below the threshold of £1.500,000).

In the context of the DfE's revised method of calculating financial health, members reflected that the new criteria might act as a disincentive to the application of reserves for investment, and that the Department will need to be made aware at the earliest opportunity of mitigating circumstances having a bearing on their operation.

15 Gender Pay Gap

A report, prepared by the Chief Finance Officer was received for information.

It was reported that the average/mean gender pay gap in the UK for 2024, is provisionally estimated by the Office for National Statistics to be

13.1%, and that this had been gradually declining over the years during which data has been collected.

The College gender pay gap for the average/mean hourly rate of pay is considerably below the UK average, showing a slight increase from 8.4% (March 2023) to 9.3% (March 2024). Whilst lower than the national average, it is unlikely that the gap will be eradicated completely since support staff salaries are generally low and, when combined with term time and part time hours (which are particularly attractive to female applicants with caring responsibilities), the effect is to perpetuate the differential.

The College gender pay gap for the median hourly rate of pay is 24.6% (2023: 23.23%).

The College's gender pay gap compares favourably with a sample (2023 data) of other high-performing sixth form colleges.

16 Nominations Committee Report

Draft minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2025, approved for circulation by the Committee Chair, were received for information together with a report of the meeting by the Committee Chair.

On the recommendation of the Committee, members authorised a skills analysis of independent members of the Corporation to be conducted following the meeting, and the Governance Professional was asked to circulate the necessary online pro forma.

In the context of the Corporation's dissolution on 31 August 2025, and on the recommendation of the Committee, reappointment of the following members was approved, as shown below:

Carrie Anne Philbin: from 1 August 2025 to 31 August 2025.

Evren Uygun: from 1 August 2025 to 31 August 2025.

Charlotte Southgate (Student Nominee Member): from 26 March 2025 to 22 July 2025.

17 Corporation and College Policy Schedule

An updated iteration of the Schedule was received for information.

It was agreed that, since the Corporation will be wound up on 31 August 2025, the existing Bye Laws of the Corporation be extended to that date.

It was similarly agreed that approval of the Disciplinary & Capability Policy (Staff Appointed Directly by the Corporation and the Governance Professional) and the Grievance Policy (Staff Appointed Directly by the Corporation and the Governance Professional) be extended to 31 August 2025.

18 Governance Professional's Announcements

None.

19 Dates of Governing Body Meetings 2025-26

It was reported that the following dates had been formally approved by the Board of Trustees (Hills Education Trust Limited):

Wednesday 17 September 2025 (6.30pm)

Thursday 6 November 2025 (6.30pm)

Wednesday 10 December 2025 (6.30pm)

Wednesday 4 February 2026 (6.30pm)

Wednesday 25 March 2026 (6.30pm)

Wednesday 13 May 2026 (6.30pm)

Wednesday 24 June 2026 (6.30pm)

16 Dates and Times of Remaining Corporation Meetings 2024-25

The following approved dates and times were noted:

Wednesday 14 May 2025 (6.30pm)

Wednesday 25 June 2025 (6.30pm)

15 Any Other Competent Business

It was reported that the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) will be dissolved on 31 March 2025, with its functions being absorbed into the Department for Education.

This is anticipated to have a limited impact on the operations of the College.

Action Arising from the Meeting (by reference to the above Minutes)

*Person(s)
Responsible*

Action(s) Required

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| 6 | Chief Finance Officer | Inform Buzzacott of the Corporation's approval. |
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