



PLUMPTON COLLEGE

CORPORATION MEETING MINUTES

Land Management room, Plumpton College, Ditchling Road, Plumpton, BN7 3AE
5.00pm Tuesday 9th December 2025

Present: Julie Dougill (Chair), Jeremy Kerswell (Principal), Paul Layzell (Vice Chair), Helen Atkinson, Scott O'Brien*, Steve Harper, Steve Webb, Donna Atkinson (Support Staff Governor), Tamara Roberts, Imogen Black (Student Governor), Sage Copper (Student Governor), Hilary Knight, Peter Boxer*, Scott McCue (Academic Staff Governor), Mark Smith* and Jade Simmons

In attendance: James Hibbert (Deputy Principal), Phaedra Tanghe (Vice Principal), Sarah Jeffers (HR Director), Paul Cook (FD), Coral Ward (Vice Principal) Laura Holt (Governance Professional)

Apologies: Shawn Town

* via Teams

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GOV/25 56/11	<u>Welcome, apologies and declarations of interest</u> The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Shawn Town. There were no declarations of interest.		
GOV/25 26/12	<u>Minutes from the Corporation meeting held on the 30th September and Strategic Planning meeting held on 11th November and matters arising</u> Members considered the minutes of the Corporation meeting held on 30 th September and the notes of the Strategic Planning meeting held on 11 th November as an accurate record of the meeting. Members noted the Matters Arising report, all items were on the agenda, scheduled or complete with the exception of the loan repayment schedule which is currently with the solicitors.		
GOV/25 26/13	<u>Chairs report and Governance Report</u> The Chair highlighted the following from the above report: the anticipated appointment of the mayor for the Sussex and Brighton Combined Authority has been delayed until spring 2028. Despite the delay, up to one third of the £38 million annual devolved funding could be allocated in each of the next two years, allowing some initiatives to		

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	progress. A governor reflected on the shifting policy environment, noting that the Southeast is now receiving increased attention for capital funds and regional investment funds, marking a positive change in government approach. - Julie attended the recent AoC Conference (Jeremy Keswell, Coral Ward, Scott McCue and Steve Harper also attended). Zoe Toole was named AoC HE Student of the Year at the conference. Action: - Jeremy Kerswell to contact Scott O'Brien regarding regional investment fund opportunities Corporation APPROVED the appointment of the staff governors for a four year term of office: - Donna Atkinson – Support Staff Governor - Scott McCue – Academic Staff Governor The Chair emphasised their roles as independent contributors to board discussions, encouraging both support and challenge. The board noted the use of the college seal for an agreement with Churchill, a summer school, as part of routine governance procedures.	JK	Jan 26
GOV/25 26/14	<u>CONFIDENTIAL ITEM</u> See separate Minute		
GOV/25 26/15	<u>Principals Strategic Priorities report</u> The Principal highlighted the following from the above report: - Strong student recruitment, with 110 students above allocation for 16–19 funding retained at RO4 (beginning of December). Due to the lagged funding model, this will positively impact funding for 26/27, and may attract some additional in year funding. However, adult education income remains a risk due to lower part-time enrolments and a changing learner profile (more funded and therefore less paying fees), though mitigations are being implemented. - The college has successfully recruited over 50 new staff since June, with only two teaching vacancies remaining. Efforts to manage workload include the project board which has been in operation for nearly a year, the impact of the work of which will be measured in upcoming staff focus groups, with governors invited to participate in upcoming sessions. - Attendance rates have improved by 4% compared to the previous year, reaching 88.5% for 16–18 year olds. New policies, cohort lead roles, and targeted interventions are credited for this progress, with ongoing monitoring and support for underperforming areas. - A new learning technology manager has been appointed to lead the digital learning strategy, focusing on staff and student digital literacy and expanding virtual and blended learning.		

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	- Preparations for the college's centenary include a series of events for staff, students, alumni, and the community, with fundraising opportunities and a dedicated budget. The programme aims to strengthen alumni engagement and support strategic projects. Governors asked for an update on farm manager recruitment. James updated the board on efforts to recruit a new farm manager acknowledging the importance of finding the right candidate. Interim arrangements can be made through Velcourt, if a new appointment is not made before the current Farm Manager leaves at the end of January. Governors asked whether there was a budget for the centenary plans. The Principal advised that there was within the marketing budget. Action: - Governors to be invited to staff workload focus groups - Principal to share details of how governors can get involved in fundraising activities - Liz Mouland to arrange a meeting with interested governors for further input regarding the centenary plans	LH JK LM	Dec 25 Jan 26 Jan 26
GOV/25 26/16	<u>Risk Register</u> Paul Cook presented the risk register, identifying adult education income as the highest-rated risk, followed by site capacity and longstanding amber risks such as farm and fire safety (both with low likelihood but high impact). A new risk related to local government change was also noted. Governors asked whether recruitment of a new Farm Manager constitutes a significant risk. James advised that assurance could be taken from the strength and stability of the farm team with experienced enterprise leads within the farm providing operational stability during the transition. Although there is some risk it is well managed. Sarah advised that 'ability to recruit experienced technical staff' is rated as green on the risk register. Action – James Hibbert to arrange to meet with Mark Smith (Link Governor for the Farm) A detailed discussion took place regarding the risk of a successful cyberattack, with assurance provided by the college regarding a clear business continuity plan, daily back up, cloud storage, and ongoing investment in IT security. The importance of testing backup recovery and maintaining vigilance was emphasised. SMT have taken on board lessons learned from a cyber-attack at another college. Action - SMT to review the cyber security risk on the risk register - Penetration testing report to be presented to Audit and Risk Committee	JH JH JH	Jan 26 Feb 26 Mar 26

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GOV/25 26/17	<u>Curriculum Quality and Skills</u> Paul Layzell provided a summary of the recent Curriculum, Quality and Student Support Committee meeting. The Committee received an update on HE, with discussion taking place regarding the start date of courses in September and whether this was responsive to the needs of the industry that the college serves. The committee received a detailed update from the Director of Animal Studies and were assured by the progress made. Coral also presented papers on teaching and learning and quality. Corporation noted the draft Minutes of the Curriculum, Quality and Student Support Committee meeting held on 10th November and the Annual Report of the TAFG Academic Committee for 24/25. Coral reported improvements in attendance across provision types, with targeted interventions for English, maths, and disadvantaged learners. New policies, additional staffing, and the cohort lead role have contributed to these gains, with ongoing analysis to ensure sustainability. Governors asked whether the Curriculum Administrator roles have had an impact on the workload of Curriculum Leads. Coral responded that they had. Each division was using the administrative support strategically. Governors asked for more details on the English and Maths deep dives. Coral explained that the deep dive provides data to enable data informed decisions. The deep dive will include focused learning walks, collecting staff and student voice and looking at marked work and feedback. Governors asked about the 10% threshold for difference in attendance for English and maths compared to vocational attendance. Coral advised that nationally 75% of colleges have English and maths attendance between 70 – 79%. The college set the 10% threshold. A governor advised that during her link meeting discussion took place regarding the link between lower attendance and students who started later. Coral agreed that there is some anecdotal evidence regarding this. There is some work to do for next year regarding inductions for these students to ensure that they have the best start. Coral advised that there is a new tracking document that consolidates all data on the teaching profiles of all individual staff, so the college can track their entry qualification, training and the details of learning walks. This is then triangulated with student attendance. Overall, it is allowing managers to take an informed, evidence based holistic view of all teaching staff to better enable targeted support to be provided. Standardisation processes for learning walk observers are being implemented to ensure consistency. The self-assessment report, developed with external input from Landex and a current Ofsted Inspector, rates the college as 'good' overall with 'outstanding'		

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	elements in personal development, adult learning, apprenticeships, and high-needs provision. The QIP focuses on attendance, achievement, and retention, with divisional plans aligned to college priorities. Julie Dougill, Paul Layzell, Helen Atkinson and Jade Simmons all attended the SAR validation panel meeting and were assured by the challenge at the meeting and felt confident of judgements the grades in the report. At the validation meeting the college was advised by the Ofsted Inspector to separate the High Needs students from the general inclusive learning approach. The SEND Link Governor will follow up on progress on the action to reduce the achievement gap between LDD and on LDD learners. Phaedra advised that project work is underway to analyse barriers faced by disadvantaged students, with recommendations for process changes and targeted support to be presented to the Senior Management Team. Discussion took place regarding aligning the college self-assessment process and judgments with the terminology in the new Ofsted framework. Members noted that the imminent residential inspection will take place under the social care common inspection framework, using the outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate terminology. Corporation APPROVED the whole college SAR and QIP Student governors provided feedback on class sizes, new teachers, and adaptations to oversubscribed courses including splitting classes.		
GOV/25 26/18	<u>Finance and Resources</u> <u>Finance and Resources Committee meetings</u> Helen gave an overview of the Finance and Resources meetings held on 7th October and 2nd December. Helen highlighted low cash days in hand and the need to review reserves targets, with calculations provided for required balances to have 25 days and 40 days cash in hand. Discussion took place regarding the definition of cash reserves and the need to manage the dynamic position that the college needs to operate in a balancing financial health KPI's with the need to build cash reserves. The board agreed to revisit cash and reserve policies at the next Finance and Resources meeting alongside the budget principles. Corporation noted the Minutes of the Finance and Resources Committee meeting held on 7th October 2025 and 2nd November 2025. The Annual Report of the Finance Committee for 24/25. <u>Period 3 Management Accounts</u> Paul Cook presented the period 3 management accounts including reforecast, noting a slight increase in total income, shortfalls in adult education and higher education, and staff costs below budget. The college maintains a contingency fund		

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	and is focused on rebuilding cash reserves. The EBITDA and operating surplus remain in line with budget. Discussion took place regarding the DfE format for Management Accounts. It was agreed that at a link meeting, the Finance Director and Link Governor will review the college Management Accounts and consider incorporating some of the DfE dashboard and visual elements into the college's management accounts for 26/27. <u>One Garden Brighton</u> Corporation noted the Minutes of the OGB Board meeting held on 26th November 2025, attended by Helen Atkinson, Julie Dougill and Hilary Knight. Paul Cook gave an overview of the financial performance year to date, staffing and events planned in December. Corporation noted the positive results year to date and thanked Paul and his team for all of their work. <i>David Hoose (Mazars) joined the meeting.</i> <u>Centenary Vineyard Project</u> James outlined the Centenary Vineyard project, including external funding, phased approach, research and teaching potential, and stakeholder involvement. Governors asked what the potential value for learners is for having the centenary vineyard. James advised that the vineyard would be more accessible to students as it is walking distance from the main campus, the vineyard will be set out as a training vineyard and the integration of technology provides research opportunities. Governors asked whether the vineyard is relevant to students future workplace. The interest from commercial partners is such that they would want students to be familiar with the technology. Governors asked whether consideration had been given to whether the project could be a distraction from other capital projects. The Principal advised that Viticulture is one of the college's strategic priority areas. The UK wine industry is facing challenging times, the level of research and technology that will be applied will hopefully play a pivotal role in productivity and sustainability, retaining the college's position as a leading education provider. Tamara Roberts outlined the value of the project to industry and was supportive of the project. Discussion took place regarding balancing student learning, commercial ambition and research and development. A good balance has been achieved on the college farm and Senior Managers are confident the same can be achieved for wine. Governors were mindful of the earlier conversation regarding building cash reserves, and a detailed discussion took place regarding the college's cash contribution to the project, which is small and included within the budget. Governors also sought assurance regarding external funding. Funding is		

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	guaranteed, there is no risk of clawback and has been awarded specific to the project so could not be claimed should the college choose not to proceed with the vineyard project. Discussion took place regarding the flexibility afforded by the phasing of the project. Corporation APPROVED the centenary project Action: - Paul Cook and Helen Atkinson to consider the format of the Management Accounts for 26/27 - Cash reserves to be considered alongside the Budget principles at the Finance and Resources meeting.	PC/HA PC	Mar 26 Mar 26
GOV/25 26/19	Audit David Hoose (Mazars) reported a clean external audit opinion, with ongoing emphasis of matter regarding One Garden Brighton's net liability position. As reported to Audit and Risk Committee and Finance and Resources Committee on 25th November, there was very little to report in terms of new internal control recommendations and no potential adjustments to the numbers that would change the results of the group. Discussion took place regarding the emphasis of matter in relation to One Garden Brighton. The clean audit opinion was noted. Governors asked what would be needed to remove the emphasis of matter. David Hoose advised that a letter of support from the college, guaranteeing the liabilities would be required, however this cannot be provided without DfE approval, or alternatively evidence of sustained profitability over a few years. Discussion took place regarding the repayment plan for OGB at Risk and Audit Committee. <i>David Hoose (Mazars) left the meeting.</i> Scott O'Brien gave an overview of the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held on 25th November including the procurement of external auditors and internal auditor tender process and timing. Corporation noted the Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held on 25th November 2025. Corporation APPROVED the recommendations from Audit and Risk Committee: - To approve the internal audit programme for 25/26: - Fraud - Asset Management - To approve the appointment of Alliot's as external auditors for a three year period (total cost £105,146) Corporation APPROVED the Annual Report of the Audit Committee for 24/25		

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	Corporation APPROVED: • Final report and financial statements (incorporating the auditors report and auditors regularity report) and Financial record • Final report and financial statements (One Garden Brighton) • Plumpton College Letter of Representation • One Garden Brighton Letter of Representation • Regularity Letter of Representation Corporation noted the Regularity self-assessment questionnaire		
GOV/25 26/20	<u>EDI Annual Report</u> Sarah presented the annual EDI report. Sarah described EDI campaigns such as 'We Are Plumpton' and Black History Month, the establishment of staff and student EDI committees, and the opening of a multi-faith room. The college maintains its status as a disability-confident employer and has distributed financial support to students in need. The report identified underrepresentation of non-white students and staff compared to the local population, with plans for targeted outreach and campaigns. Governors suggested incorporating social mobility metrics in future reports. Discussion took place regarding reaching ethnic minority populations. Corporation noted the EDI Annual Report.		
GOV/25 26/21	<u>Fixed Assets policy</u> Members noted the proposed changes to the Fixed Asset Policy (previously called capital policy). Corporation APPROVED the Fixed Asset Policy		
GOV/25 26/22	<u>AOB</u> On behalf of Corporation, the Chair thanked Hilary Knight for all her work as a governor over the last 4 years, in particular her time and commitment to One Garden Brighton.		

Signed Chie. K. Doran Date 17.03.26