



PLUMPTON

COLLEGE

CORPORATION MEETING MINUTES

Stokes Board room, Plumpton College, Ditchling Road, Plumpton, BN7 3AE

5.00pm Tuesday 17th March 2026

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

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: Helen Atkinson and Mark Smith

* via Teams

Minute no.		Action by whom	Action by when
GOV/25 56/23	<u>Welcome, apologies and declarations of interest</u> The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Helen Atkinson and Mark Smith. There were no declarations of interest.		
GOV/25 26/24	<u>Minutes from the Corporation meeting held on the 9th December 2026 and matters arising</u> Members considered the minutes of the Corporation meeting held on 9 th December 2026 as an accurate record of the meeting. Members noted the Matters Arising report, all items were on the agenda, scheduled or complete. Discussion took place regarding the following actions: - The OGB loan agreement will be updated and bought back to the next Corporation meeting. - Meeting to be scheduled with Scott O'Brien and Jeremy Kerswell - Meeting to be scheduled with the Farm Link Governor - Penetration testing to take place following the network installation project	PC JK JH JH	Jul 26 Apr 26 Apr 26 Sep 26
GOV/25 26/25	<u>Chairs report</u> Chair highlighted the following from the above report: Opportunity for All Schools White Paper – implications for colleges		

Minute no.		Action by whom	Action by when
	- Richard Freeman – Sussex and the City podcast - Socio Economic Impact Framework – to be incorporated into the next iteration of the Annual Review - JD completed a learning walk with the Principal visiting several sessions and speaking with students. - JD observed a staff feedback session on the impact of changes introduced by the college to reduce staff workload which was led by SMT - New Ofsted reports published Action: LH to circulate Social Economic Impact Framework Examples to all governors	LH	Mar 26
GOV/25 26/26	<u>Search and Governance Committee Report</u> Members noted the draft Minutes of the Search and Governance meeting held on 27th January 2026. Paul Layzell (Search and Governance Committee Chair) advised that a couple of key members of Corporation are approaching the end of their term of office and highlighted the need to retain skills and have a smooth transition. <i>Paul Layzell left the meeting</i> Corporation APPROVED the appointment of Paul Layzell for a second four year term of office <i>Paul Layzell rejoined the meeting</i> Corporation APPROVED the appointment of Steve Harper to the Search and Governance Committee		
GOV/25 26/27	<u>Principals Strategic Priorities report</u> The Principal highlighted the following from the above report: - Overall good financial position with the cash position improving and predicted EBITDA of 7.5% (30% colleges hit 6% EBITDA last year). - Student experience continues to move in the right direction, and 16-19 achievement rates are on the right trajectory. - Consultation on a new strategic plan will commence in the autumn term - Staff survey results were very pleasing - Strategic Partnerships including the new partnership with Homewood School. - Centenary celebrations including the centenary exhibition, centenary ball and podcasts. The Principal outlined changes to the staffing structure in response to growth and the retirement of a member of SMT summer 26. Governors questioned what the financial impact would be of the new structure. The Principal advised that the net impact was negligible, and it was agreed that this would be discussed in more detail under the budget principles item. Discussion took place regarding the need for the Executive team focus on leadership and not being too operational. The changes to the staff structure will step towards achieving this. Governors sought assurance, which was provided by the HR Director, that roles have been benchmarked.		

Minute no.		Action by whom	Action by when
	Action – Staff Structure to be added to the agenda of the Finance and Resources Committee Sage Copper outlined Student Union activity including pairing with the Sussex Air Ambulance and the SU plans for the College Open Day in partnership with the Charitable Foundation. Discussion took place regarding the Funding Audit. An in-depth discussion had taken place at Audit and Risk Committee. It was agreed that this committee will also monitor the action plan.		
GOV/25 26/28	<u>Lease of Farmland</u> This item was brought forward on the agenda. James Hibbert advised that the College is finalising leases for three parcels of neighbouring land (totalling 85 hectares) with varying tenures, including a five-year rolling lease and annual rolling agreements, supporting grazing and arable activities. Landowners approached the College due to its positive reputation, and plans include biodiversity improvements and pond restoration, aligning with community interests. The Board endorsed the strategic decision to lease more land inline with the Farm Strategy. Action – Corporation to approve leases for the tenancies of the three parcels of farmland once documents are ready, following farm board approval.		
GOV/25 26/29	<u>Post 16 Capacity Fund</u> Jeremy and James presented data showing a 60% increase in FE numbers over nine years, a six-fold rise in apprenticeships, and substantial growth in HE intake, positioning the College as a leading provider in the region. The College is facing physical site limitations due to increased demand, with applications for the next academic year up by 26% compared to the previous year, prompting urgent consideration of how to accommodate more students. James outlined plans to increase capacity for September 2025 by creating 5 additional learning spaces and balancing site users across each day of the week by improving timetable efficiency and changing staff work patterns. James and Jeremy outlined plans for a £5 million bid to the DfE Post-16 Capacity Fund, detailing projects including the rebuild of a stockyard, adaptation of the sports hall, indoor covered space for students and creation of a new estate road. Governors asked for the timeline of the project. The bid is due by 17 April, with feedback expected in July and a two-year window to spend the funds. The college is aiming for completion by September 2027.		

Minute no.		Action by whom	Action by when
	Members were assured that the college had done all it could to sweat the assets as much as possible to make the most of existing space before considering the rebuilding of the stock yard. The college endorsed the submission of a £5m bid to the post 16 capacity fund. <i>James Hibbert left the meeting</i>		
GOV/25 26/30	<u>Audit and Risk Committee report</u> Members noted the draft Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held on 10th March 2026. Scott O'Brien reported on the Audit and Risk Committee's activities. Alliot's, new external auditor, attended the meeting. Members were assured by improved partner visibility and experienced management, enhancing the College's audit assurance. Further to a discussion with the external auditors, the committee made a recommendation to Corporation to amend the internal audit programme to include fraud and HR/payroll. The college is in the process of tendering for a new internal audit supplier. The committee noted the content of the Health and Safety internal audit. Corporation APPROVED the amendment of the Internal Audit Programme to: • Fraud • HR & Payroll system		
GOV/25 26/31	<u>Risk Register</u> Paul Cook presented the Risk Register. The risk register has been updated, with adult education fee income identified as the top risk, and ongoing work to mitigate and monitor strategic and operational risks. Governors commended Paul on the mature cyber security risk expression following governor feedback at a previous meeting. It really captures the core of the issue. Governors reflected on the demise of other Land Based colleges and the need to consider risks facing the sector. The FE sector is constantly changing and constantly evolving. It is important that leaders and governors are proactively looking ahead to be responsive to those changes and mitigate the risks. Governors acknowledged that things changes can change quickly. Governors asked whether consideration had been given to the risks due to the global situation. Paul Cook assured governors that SMT do keep abreast of events that are outside of the college's control. The outlook for inflation is really important in the budget planning process as it has a big impact on staffing and expenditure. This combined with the new announcement of below inflation increase in funding rates is challenging.		

Minute no.		Action by whom	Action by when
	Governors asked whether Curriculum reform would be added to the Risk Register. There have been a number of announcements in the last week, including curriculum changes and 0.55% increase in the funding base rate, that will be reviewed by SMT, it is likely that there will be changes to the Risk Register as a result. A governor highlighted that there will be some changes to the Cyber Essentials framework with effect from 26th April. A Risk Appetite Workshop is scheduled on 21st April to assess individual and collective risk appetites among board members, supporting future strategic planning. Action: LH to send out the online risk appetite questionnaire to board members and SMT	LH	Mar 26
GOV/25 26/32	<u>Operational Development Plan</u> Jeremy Kerswell advised that good progress has been made against most priorities. Progress on developing the CPD strategy for 2025-27 has been impacted by capacity constraints in the HR team, however from March an additional member of staff joins the team. Progress on the centenary vineyard has been slower than anticipated due to the need to secure data ownership and IP.		
GOV/25 26/33	<u>Curriculum Quality and Student Support</u> Members noted the draft Minutes of the Curriculum, Quality and Student Support meeting held on 10th November. Julie Dougill highlighted the professional discussion regarding attendance and retention at the meeting. Coral presented comprehensive reports on teaching, learning, assessment, and KPI analysis. Teaching, learning, and assessment are improving, with professional relationships identified as a strength and targeted CPD addressing areas needing development, particularly adaptive practices, to ensuring consistency. A new Learning Technology Manager, is leading the adoption of a preferred VLE platform to replace Teams, enabling blended learning and alleviating site capacity pressures. Attendance is up 3% year-on-year, retention remains positive, and predicted achievement rates are around 86%, with targeted interventions in areas such as motor vehicle. Governors commended SMT on the 3% increase in attendance and asked what would be needed to increase this by 1-2% more and is this in the budget? Coral responded that this comes down to the impact of attendance. We know that there		

Minute no.		Action by whom	Action by when
	is a direct correlation between attendance and achievement. But we know we've got some students that are active enrollers that for whatever reason, they're not attending to our expectation, but we know are still on target to achieve. Whilst we want the best attendance, because it's going to give our learners the best possible chance of success, our learners do come with a lot of barriers that impact their attendance (distance travelled, financial etc) but this is not necessarily impacting their learning. The college has put substantial resource into increasing attendance and it has only increased by 3%, however without those interventions it is likely that attendance would be much lower. Governors asked what the biggest thing that the college is doing now to improve attendance. Coral advised that it was getting the right student on the right course for 26/27. Governors asked what training was in place for staff to achieve this. Coral advised that this is in place, as part of the interview process staff find out more about the student. There are more courses being opened up for students who are not yet ready for a full 3-day mainstream programme with a bespoke programme. Coral presented the Landex Peer Review Report highlighting the strengths and areas for development. The report provides validation of the college's own self-assessment. Governors asked whether it would be beneficial to complete an audit on the teaching excellence framework. Coral advised that in addition to the Landex Peer review, the college has signed up to an external quality review as part of the AQR. Coral advised that revised business planning models and cohort lead roles are being implemented, with a major curriculum advisory panel event scheduled on 19th May to facilitate stakeholder engagement and curriculum planning. <u>Learner Destination data</u> Paul Cook reported high learner response rates at 83%, with positive destinations consistently between 90-92%, supporting curriculum planning and highlighting sector strengths. Destination data is used in marketing and curriculum planning, with targeted interventions in curriculum areas with lower destination data. Governors asked whether the responses are anonymous or whether the college is able to follow up responses with students, particularly where they have indicated that they would be interested in further study. Managers confirmed that they are able to follow up individual responses. Governors asked about how the college prepares students for next steps, and shows them opportunities at the end of their course. Coral advised that this something that the college tries to do throughout the year, part of curriculum intent is showing them what is available. Within the work experience module, they are taught and assessed on career opportunities.		

Minute no.		Action by whom	Action by when
GOV/25 26/34	<u>Finance and Resources</u> Members noted the Draft Minutes of the Finance and Resources Committee meeting held on 3rd March 2026. Steve Webb advised that the committee had a detailed discussion regarding cash days, the committee recommends that the college works towards a target of 25 cash days as soon as possible, without impacting student experience. Discussion also took place regarding maintaining OGB as a subsidiary company. The committee had an in depth discussion regarding the period 6 management accounts and budget principles. The committee were assured by the level of detail behind the budget principles. The committee were pleased to see the positive financial position, and trajectory, of OGB halfway through the year and noted the positive contribution it makes to the curriculum and student experience at stammer. <u>Period 6 Management Accounts</u> Paul Cook presented the P6 Management Accounts. The College is ahead of budget in EBITDA generation, maintaining a 7.5% margin, with cash reserves targeted at 25 days and ongoing efforts to rebuild financial buffers. Half-year results show positive trends, with staffing costs trending down due to vacancy factors and adult education fee income reduced for realistic forecasting. The DfE financial health rating remains 'good'. Discussion took place regarding potential clawback following the funding audit. Whilst the amount is not yet known, an amount is captured under risks. Governors asked whether vacancies were spread and whether any particular area is impacted. There are some resourcing challenges in Agriculture, but apart from that they are spread across the college. There was a challenge recruiting in the catering team and maths teachers at the beginning of the year, but appointments have now been made. Governors asked whether the Wine Skills courses are funded. Jeremy explained that the courses are utilising tailored learning that has allowed the college to reduce the fee intervention which has led to an increase in enrolments. Governors asked how the courses will be staffed. There will be a combination of core staff and associate lecturers. <u>One Garden Brighton</u> Members noted the Minutes of the OGB Board meeting held on 25th February 2026. Paul Cook advised that the stammer campus is increasingly full, with most classrooms full. The café is busy in the week as customers recognise the offer. Trading has been better than expected over the winter period. There is huge potential with the Sussex butterfly garden opening in May. The garden is now an RHS partner garden. Risks are being monitored by the Board. <u>Gender Pay Gap Reporting</u>		

Minute no.		Action by whom	Action by when
	Paul Cook presented the annual gender pay gap report. The median gender pay gap continues to decline, reflecting improvements in recruitment, starting salaries, and development opportunities for staff. The College's gender pay gap is in line with or better than other land-based colleges, with ongoing efforts to remove barriers and improve balance. <u>Budget Principles</u> Paul Cook presented the budget principles. Discussion took place regarding the affordability of an inflation-linked cost of living award for staff with the announcement of a funding rate increase of only 0.55% and uncertainty around inflation rates. It was agreed that this would need to be reviewed. Governors were also mindful of the gap in salary between FE teaching staff and schools teachers. It was noted that some staff will also receive an increment award. It was agreed that a vacancy factor for staffing should be reintroduced at a conservative level. The contingency factor will be reduced in 26/27. The principles set a pathway to 25 days cash to provide resilience. Corporation note the aspirational target of a 40 cash days. It was acknowledged that inflation has a big impact on the budget and this will be kept under review. LGPS employer contributions are reduced, reflecting scheme surplus, while TPS rates remain unchanged, supporting overall cost management. A governor suggested investigating the college's position in terms of the surplus within the LGPS scheme and investing in professional advice when the scheme is revaluated, it may be possible to further reduce the college contribution. The financial impact of staffing changes presented by Jeremy Kerswell earlier in the meeting were outlined. Discussion took place regarding the challenges of modelling with so much uncertainty and the danger of adding too many layers of prudence resulting in too much caution in the budget, consideration may be given to increasing the contingency instead. At the Finance and Resources Committee discussion took place regarding how much of the contingency had been spent in the last 3 years. Jeremy advised that the contingency has not been spent in the last 3 years. It was noted that this the first phase of the budget setting process and that changes may need to be made in response to external events and announcements. APPROVED Corporation approved the Budget Principles for 26/27		
GOV/25 26/35	<u>Policies</u> Risk Management Policy was reviewed by Audit and Risk Committee Corporation APPROVED the Risk Management Policy OGB Financial Regulations and OGB Probationary policy were reviewed by Finance and Resources Committee. Corporation APPROVED the OGB Financial Regulations and OGB Probationary policies		

Minute no.		Action by whom	Action by when
	Corporation reviewed the OGB complaints policy. Jeremy advised that some small changes had been made to better align the policy to the college complaints policy. Corporation APPROVED the OGB complaints policy SMT requested that the Admissions Policy was brought back to a later Corporation meeting. <i>Tamara Roberts, Imogen Black, Sarah Jeffers, Phaedra Tanghe, Paul Cook and Coral Ward left the meeting.</i>		
GOV/25 26/36	<u>CONFIDENTIAL ITEM</u> See separate Minute		
GOV/25 26/37	<u>Recommendation from Search and Governance Committee</u> <i>Julie Dougill left the meeting</i> Corporation considered the recommendation from Search and Governance Committee to extend Julie Dougill's term of office to ensure continuity and allow time for a thorough appointment process for her successor. Corporation noted this would extend her term of office beyond the normal term, but felt that this was in the best interest of the college. Discussion took place regarding a successor. Corporation APPROVED the extension of Julie Dougill's term of office by seven months to July 2027 <i>Julie Dougill rejoined the meeting</i>		
GOV/25 26/37	<u>AOB</u> Corporation noted Shawn Town's resignation as a governor and formally thanked him for his valued contribution to the Board.		

Signed Julie K. Dougill Date 07.07.26