The City of Liverpool College

Meeting of the Board held on 1st July 2025, 1.30pm

Louise Barry (for part of meeting) Elaine Bowker (Principal), Tony Cobain (Chair), Cheryl Denny, Danny Harvey, Suaad Hussain, Viv Lacey, Nicola O'Donoghue, Ruth Slater

In Attendance: Julie Barnes (Deputy Chief Executive), Neil Borg-Olivier (VP Curriculum Development and Innovation), Damien Kilkenny (Deputy Principal), Christine Lenderyou (Clerk), Gill Williams (Vice Principal Student Development and Participation).

25.21 Welcome, Apologies, Declarations of Interest

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies had been received from Louise Barry (for part of meeting), Paul Coyle, Matty Hughson, Moin Patala, Peter Tavernor, Sian Taylor, Athaliah Timile.

Employed staff had an interest in the budget item but none would be required to leave the room as it was not in relation to an individual or specific category of staff; all governors counted towards the quorum.

25.22 Minutes, Actions, and Matters Arising

Minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as a true record, although given the late circulation governors were asked to contact the Clerk directly if there were any inaccuracies. Progress against actions was noted.

25.23 Governance Update

The Board noted the report from the Clerk and approved the following:

- Delegation of appointment of new staff governor (teaching) to the Chair and Principal following interviews to be held on 2nd July 2025 as this would enable the Clerk to book the successful candidate on to induction activities in the Autumn term.
- Appointment of Elizabeth Akwukwaegbu (new Students' Union president) with effect from 18th August 2025.
- Approval of changes to Instrument and Articles of Government as outlined in the paper, resulting from a letter to the sector from the Department for Education.

It was noted that Mohammed Adam had completed his term as a student governor. Alena George had completed her studies and would no longer be part of the governing body but asked that her thanks be passed on to Board members for welcoming her and supporting her; in turn the Board thanked Ms George for her contributions and wished her well for the future.

25.24 Performance Dashboard

The Board was informed of some small revisions to predictions as a result of thorough analysis after the main exam season. This was particularly relevant for maths and English where the impact of increased attendance at exams had been adjusted. This mainly affected the 16-18 cohort but here was some impact on adults too with overall predictions moving to 86.7% which was 1.3% below

target. 16-18 achievement projections remained above national rates and were now on-target at 85.5%. Adult projected achievement was currently 0.1% below target. The Deputy Principal emphasised that the predicted achievement rates were all above the most recently published national rates. T level achievement was predicted to increase and while there was still areas to improve it was a welcome trajectory in the context of the move to two-year programmes generally. The final HE strategy group of the year and taken place and increased achievement was predicted, supported by evidence. Apprenticeships predictions remained consistent and showed improvement.

The DCEx advised that there were no significant changes in corporate performance from the last dashboard but the graph showing income had been amended so that it no longer cut off at £50m. Restricted cash had been stripped out but more had been received in P11 so those numbers would change again. There would be significant capital expenditure before year end which was also factored in.

Turnover and sickness was higher than the previous year for teaching although turnover for teaching remained close to the North West average provided by the Association of Colleges (AoC). When asked whether the information provided in the SharEd report (further in the agenda) indicated that terms and conditions were an issue in turnover the DCEx advised that after that paper had been produced, a further analysis had been undertaken looking at staff leaving within their first twelve months of joining and the percentage was slightly lower for SharEd staff than for support staff directly employed by the College which suggested the differing terms and conditions were not a significant factor.

The dashboard was noted.

25.25 People, Policy, Partnerships

The Principal referred to feedback from the previous week's Board strategic planning and self-assessment day and her presentation included four of the most relevant policy updates of around ten which had been made since the last Board meeting. Links to publications cited would be circulated to Board members.

[Redacted section]

Louise Barry left the meeting during this item.

<u>Industrial Strategy</u>

The strategy had been published in the last week and gave a clear indication of which sectors the government was prioritising. Notably creative industries were included, and there was a chapter on skills too. There seemed to be many opportunities for the College, although some challenges with regards to specific areas of provision. One area listed was defence which wasn't an area the College had historically had much involvement with but was clearly increasingly important from a skills perspective. The Deputy Principal added that he had recently attended two events at Westminster and there was a clear focus on defence. It was put to the Principal that the College would need to carefully balance the needs and views of its students when considering the extent to which the College engaged with the defence strand of the strategy; the Principal clarified that she understood the focus would be on transferrable skills and sectors such as technology, manufacturing and digital and the College was always careful with regards to how it was perceived.

For possibly the first time in many years there was a chapter on skills within the industrial strategy. The chapter included a strong focus on colleges, recognising their good work although there was acknowledgement that there had been reductions in adult education and apprenticeships. The approach outlined was one of alignment and simplification. There was some overlap with the spending review and it seemed as if there would be investment in funding and staffing although this could be dependent on condition of buildings and how quickly certain areas could be move in to.

Technical Excellence Colleges (TECs)

TEC's were a manifesto commitment from the Labour party. Governors noted that the bidding processes seemed incongruous to the concept of anchor institutions. The application process was outlined.

Objectives included boosting skills provision, delivering high quality teaching practice and curricula, collaboration with colleges and independent learning providers, CPD for teachers, brokering partnerships with employers, diversifying workforces and clear progressions to employment.

When asked if there was clarity on the sectors TECs would span and whether Colleges could bid for more than one the Principal advised that full details were not known yet but it was likely construction would be one of the largest. In answer to a question around whether the College had the resources and facilities to support a bid the Principal outlined what was currently in place and agreed with a governor's point that there would be a developmental aspect with the College anticipating and responding to requirements.

Referring to the objective around diversifying workforces one governor highlighted that it was essential to understand barriers, giving the example of cultures they were familiar with holding certain professions in higher regard. The governor also cited the importance of people from those communities being able to see examples of people building a respectable career from the trades and advised that she was able to provide links to small businesses operating in that area. Governors agreed that there had long been a perception issue with some careers and that while this had started to shift in recent years there was still work to do with regards to messaging.

The Board endorsed the College's intention to bid.

Ten Year Infrastructure Plan

The plan was encouraging and again overlapped with several policy areas.

16-18 in year growth

The DfE had acknowledged there would be demographic growth in the next academic year and it was clear that some in year growth would be funded but as yet there were no firm commitments to how much. Governors were reminded that in the current year the College had accepted an additional 800 students but in year funding had not been confirmed until March and it was later still before it had been received. It was likely that the College would again accept additional students in September and the associated risks would need to be managed. The increased funding rates for 16-18 and the lack of increase to adult funding rates continued to be an issue for the College to manage.

25.26 Curriculum, Quality and Student Performance

Some points had been covered under the Performance Dashboard.

Student Performance and Quality Improvement Plan

Quality Improvements Plans (QIPs) for the four schools under enhanced monitoring in 2024-25 were provided (Academic Studies; Digital, Media and Expressive Arts; Foundation Studies and Work Based Learning).

Achievement rate projections were above national rates due to intervention work and improved English and Maths exam attendance although as mentioned earlier, predictions had been revisited so that exam attendance was not given disproportionate influence. Governors were reminded that the target for 16-18 achievement was to marginally increase on a position of strength in the previous year, in which outcomes were also above national benchmark, and should also be seen in the context of (a) the impact of two-year A Levels on overall retention for the first time in recent years, and (b) the growth in 16-18 student numbers being concentrated in lower level provision where students had more barriers to learning and were at greater risk of withdrawal. Adult projected achievement was forecast as 0.1% below target and 0.1% above national benchmarking. The VPCDI highlighted that headline benchmarks were not always like-for-like for the adult cohort, given the weighting of ESOL in the College's mix of provision and the aspirational nature of the ESOL offer with the majority being regulated, qualification based provision while elsewhere in the sector there were high levels of non-regulated ESOL provision.

As reported at the last board meeting, the drop in retention rates among 16-18 learners, (largely driven by second-year A Level student retention) would see an impact on achievement rates, but increased pass rates would partially mitigate.

Attendance was currently 0.8% higher than last year's outturn and would potentially slightly increase once final register work was completed. English and Maths attendance remained higher than last year's outturn position by 2.3% for Maths and 2.6% for English, which was a strong indicator of the positive impact of devolving English and Maths timetabling and line management to curriculum Heads of School this year.

The VPCDI advised that exams posed an element of risk to predictions. When results were available the College would closely review how accurate predictions had been. In response to a question from a newer governor the Principal advised that entry requirements to A level programmes were lower than most sixth forms within the city but had been carefully designed to ensure that they were at an appropriate level. Structure and programme delivery needed to be strong enough to support students to achieve. While the College would not compete with selective sixth forms on A* and A grades, it should be capable of competing on distance travelled. The Deputy Principal suggested that future updates put more of an emphasis on value added. **ACTION: EXEC**

[Redacted]

The risk status for the final update for 2024/25 had reduced for two of the schools under enhanced monitoring. Work Based Learning has changed to low risk and Foundation Maths and English is at medium risk, with a realistic expectation that will change to low risk pending exam results. Academic Studies and Digital, Media and Expressive Arts would continue to be monitored in 2025/26, albeit under the themes of two-year programmes and exam-based programmes, rather than at school level, as part of prioritising risk at provision type moving forward. The Board agreed with the VPCDI

that the school of Digital Arts and Expressive Media had demonstrated remarkable improvements such as having the highest attendance at English and maths exams but there were still some embedded issues to resolve.

The VPCDI shared the strategic themes suggested for the following year's QIP which had been discussed at the Performance and Quality Committee the previous week. Themes mapped across the organisation: digital across college; exam provision (in year results, strategic approach etc); two-year programmes (including Applied Science, Construction, Digital, Health and Social Care) and schools with a Notice to Improve where improvement had been stubborn. This approach had been discussed at the Performance and Quality Committee and governors agreed that it was proportionate and appropriately targeted.

Governors sought more detail on the Notice to Improve for schools, with the Deputy Principal explaining that it was based on something which had been in place prior to the pandemic but had been adapted to that it was more flexible and responsive, so schools would not necessarily be under an NtI long term which was particularly useful for a short-term isolated issue. When asked how it would remain relevant and meaningful the Deputy Principal highlighted the time- bound and focussed approach, along with the process being owned by the entire Executive team rather than being purely a quality function.

There was consensus from the Board that foundation English and maths moving off the QIP was an astounding achievement given the volumes and risks involved. The Chair commented that the QIP by necessity focussed on what needed to be improved but this meant positive movement didn't always receive the same emphasis and he suggested that it could be helpful to have the reasons for the targets to be restated. The Executive team agreed on the importance of setting aspirational targets while showing nuance, and highlighted that more precise target setting had been possible since achievement rates across the sector had been published again following cessation during the pandemic; the example was provided of Access to HE which was the best in the country but without that context, setting a target to remain at the same level seemed counter-intuitive. It was agreed that the first QIP of the year would come with an explanation of targets and the DfE dashboard would also be provided for governors. **ACTION: EXEC**

25.27 Finance and Corporate Performance

Risk:

Governors were referred to the minor changes listed in the cover report.

Management Accounts – Period 10

The report was accepted as read, although the DCEx drew out key points but there were no significant changes from the last meeting. Financial health was likely to outturn as a very strong Good or possibly Outstanding but the DCEx provided this update with caution given the potential for movement. The Board discussed whether there was any tangible difference between Outstanding and Good and were not aware of any particular advantage. Expectations may need to be managed with stakeholders as the financial health score could give a misleading perception that the College had more cash available than the reality. The EBITDA had increased but cash days were low compared to sector benchmarks and the DCEx drew the Board's attention to the large amount of points the College got from the healthy borrowings ration which would become less relevant over time. The Principal also highlighted some of the investments requiring funding which had been discussed at the previous week's strategic planning event. The financial position had enabled the

College to make a £400 payment to each member of staff (pro-rata for FTE) in the July payroll as discussed by the Board at the strategic planning event and this had been warmly received by staff.

The accounts were noted.

2025/26 Budget

The draft budget had been presented to the Group Finance Committee but since then notification had been received that an allocation would be higher but there were also some additional management roles incorporated. The original draft had included vacancies for support staff at 8/12 but this had been increased to 10/12 in line with teaching staff vacancies. An additional £50k had been allocated for contingency. The amendments had not changed the bottom line. The budget would generate a strong financial health score.

Income had increased by a predicted £1.6m from the high level draft and this was largely due to additional 16-18 funding and forecasting 100% delivery of ASF as per the curriculum planning review. If less than 100% was delivered it should be possible to offset with reduced delivery costs. The detailed curriculum plan had indicated that some additional post – including progress leaders - were required.

The DCEx highlighted that the triannual revaluation of the Merseyside Pension Fund would take place at the end of March; currently the College received a £775k credit but as the revaluation was outside of the College's control and could be affected my economic factors between now and then, the DCEx had assumed that the credit would end in March so staff costs had been adjusted to reflect that, with the in year impact being £225k. Governors were asked to note that one effect of the revaluation could be increased costs to the College. Pay awards had also been included.

Governors acknowledged that the budget would generate a very strong financial health score but accepted the Principal's warning that close management would be required. An additional 400+ 16-18 students had been assumed but with no additional in-year income. If additional in year income was received then the financial health score would be Outstanding. The DCEx confirmed that the narrative included all points suggested by Annex A of the financial handbook as well as risks and sensitivities for lower income and higher expenditure (which would still generate a financial health score of Good).

The Board approved the budget for 2025/26.

Write Off Bad debts

The Group Finance Committee had reviewed the proposals within the report and recommend approval to the Board. The total figure was slightly lower than the provision in the budget. The DCEx confirmed that a debt collection agency had been used for business debts and this had been particularly useful in collecting co-investment payments from employers.

The Board approved the write off of bad debts as outlined in the report.

Modern Slavery and Anti-Trafficking Statement

The report was similar to last year in that there were a very small number of business critical organisations where the College hadn't been able to secure a statement but an exemption had been applied and there were no concerns that the companies involved would be in breach of the requirements of the policy.

The report was noted and the statement approved for publication.

Subcontracting Report and Supply Chain Fees Policy

The detailed report was accepted as read. Key points included that the Adult Skills Fund (ASF) was being forecast as delivered in line with the budget, with some allocation moved between partners. The achievement rate for adults was forecast at 97% and 16-18 was forecast at 96.4%. [Redacted] Delivery would be capped so as not to exceed 25%. Tenders for 2025/26 had closed and should be awarded in the coming weeks.

The report was noted and the policy approved.

SharEd Update

The report was accepted with governors noting it was largely business as usual. The Principal added that the Executive team wanted support staff to feel as valued as curriculum staff and part of that was validation regarding quality of the service provided. Measures of quality would differ between departments but all agreed it was important to have assurance with regards to the service provided and that praise was given where due.

25.28 Committee Minutes

The draft minutes of the Group Audit Committee, Group Finance Committee and Performance and Quality Committee were presented for information.

The Board endorsed the judgment of Audit Committee members regarding the plans for external and internal audits.

The Board discussed the need to increase membership of the Group Finance Committee. Governors were asked to contact the Clerk if they had details of suitable candidates and recruitment would continue to be a priority for the Remuneration and Governance Committee.

25.29 Business Cycle 2025/25

The Clerk advised that the cycle presented the minimum basis for business and may be subject to change, not least due to the newly created VP Student Development and Participation post. Governor views had been taken into account via a survey regarding preferred days and times, plus presenting draft versions to committees. Review of the College strategy had been included on the cycle. The Board approved the business cycle and the Clerk would issue meeting invitations accordingly. **ACTION: CL**

25.30 Any Other Business

The Chair updated the Board on the annual strategic conversation which had taken place recently. The conversation had been very positive, particularly with regards to Work Based Learning.

25.31 Confidentiality of Items

Items which were commercially sensitive/subject to consultation or referred to third parties/individuals would remain confidential.

25.32 Date and Time of Next Meeting

TBC – see business cycle.

The Principal left the meeting at this point.

25.33 Confidential Session

[Redacted]

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and drew the meeting to a close.