The City of Liverpool College

Meeting of the Board held on 21st October 2025, 1.30pm

Present: Louise Barry, Saonli Basu (staff), Elaine Bowker (Principal), Tony Cobain (Chair), Paul Coyle, Cheryl Denny, Danny Harvey, Hilene Henry, Matty Hughson (staff), Suaad Hussain, Viv Lacey, Nicola O'Donoghue, Ruth Slater, Sian Taylor (Vice Chair),

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).

For part of meeting: Aamir Butt (Director of Student Support and Wellbeing) Jason Waldron (Director of Education 14-19), Tracey Etherson (HMRC), three interns at HMRC.

25.34 Welcome, Apologies, Declarations of Interest

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Saonli Basu and Chisom Akwukwaegbu were attending their first meeting since being appointed as staff governor (teaching) and student governor (president of Students' Union) respectively.

Apologies had been received from Moin Patala and the Board sent warm congratulations to his family.

Employed staff had an interest in the pay award 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.

25.35 Spotlight On: Supported Internships Partnership with HMRC

Tracey Etherson (HMRC), Jason Waldron (Director of Education 14-19) and three interns at HMRC joined the meeting at this point and introductions were made.

The Do14-19 outlined the College's supported internships for young people aged 16–25 with EHCPs. The HMRC-hosted programme, now in its third year, is the first supported internship model led by a central government department. It provides up to three workplace rotations at HMRC's India Buildings, with support from a College tutor on site; interns can continue English and maths and receive structured employability and life-skills teaching.

Tracey Etherson (HMRC) described the journey from a Liverpool pilot to a national model: successful replication in Manchester (2025) and a planned cohort in Cardiff (2026). Cross-government interest has been secured (HMCTS, Home Office, Cabinet Office, DWP), with HMCTS placements introduced from January to widen civil service exposure. The programme pursues 'value over volume' to ensure high-quality, sustainable outcomes.

Outcomes to date include:

- two interns completing the internship and subsequent 24-month fixed term contracts and now permanent HMRC colleagues;
- seven interns on fixed-term contracts across HMRC/HMCTS;
- five new interns in the current cohort;
- Employer feedback highlights productivity and reliability;

- parental testimonials emphasise increased confidence, independence and movement off benefits.

Three interns addressed the Board. [Person 1] recounted moving from low confidence to securing a permanent HMRC role, crediting on-programme coaching and interview preparation. [Person 2] – who joined at 16 – described early anxiety but then rapid growth in confidence after presenting to more than 200 colleagues, and progression to a fixed term contract. [Person 3] – spoke about managing depression, the positive impact of structured routine (including working through the summer) and the programme's strength in supporting neurodiverse learners.

Governors commended the life-changing impact and discussed broadening placements for learners preferring non-desk-based work. The Chair thanked partners and interns, noting the programme's clear alignment to the College's mission and its growing national profile.

Tracey Etherson and the three interns left the meeting.

25.36 Safeguarding: Annual Report; Training for Governors; and Approval of Policies

Aamir Butt joined the meeting.

Aamir Butt presented the Annual Safeguarding Report. Key points:

- gender split of cases remained broadly even, consistent with previous years;
- 9.1% of withdrawals were linked to mental health;
- total safeguarding/mental-health referrals increased to 708 (from 551);
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- 'Light-touch' drop-in support has expanded early intervention, with improvements to CPOMS recording of brief interventions.

The capacity of external organisations remained an issue. Governors were informed [redacted]. The VP SD&P advised that weekly multi-agency high-risk meetings continued, enabling collective decision-making and case closure.

Homelessness continued to affect students with volumes fluctuating at around 40–50 students at any time. There were restrictions on what College could do to support students and in any case, the funding required would probably be far beyond what the College could afford. Instead, the College was brokering access to emergency beds through 'ethical landlord' relationships and community partners, avoiding direct non-educational spend but supporting students.

The DoSS&WB moved on to policy updates including preparation for Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE) 2025 changes (including attendance as a safeguarding issue) and proactive duties arising from the Worker Protection Act 2024. An anonymous 'Breaking the Silence' route for reporting sexual harassment/abuse would go live on the website and SharePoint, with clear signposting to support and an option to self-identify.

Governors sought examples of when the College would withdraw students on safeguarding grounds and were reminded that the process was collective, risk-based and aimed to keep routes open for return once support was in place but typically this might happen when a student was suffering from psychotic episodes or was so unwell that trying to keep up with College was causing them more anxiety than they could deal with; governors were assured that such incidences were rare and the decisions were taken in the interests of students and/or keeping other students safe.

The Safeguarding Children Policy Safeguarding Adults Policy; and Sexual Harassment & Sexual Abuse Policy were all approved on the basis that they met legal requirements and reflected the College's overall approach to students.

The DoSS&W turned to the training materials included in the Board pack which outlined the requirements of governors [not replicated here – available separately]. In addition to the training materials provided, governors were reminded that they could access the module produced by the Education and Training Foundation or book in for a one-to-one session with the DoSS&W. The safeguarding link governor confirmed that she would read the full KCSiE 2025. The Deputy Principal added that a follow up session would take place regarding Ofsted's new safeguarding direction where Colleges would have to proactively demonstrate how they kept students safe; this was not thought to present an issue to the College as the actions required were already embedded in the College's processes and culture but awareness of the change was required. **Action: DK/GW**

Aamir Butt left the meeting.

25.37 Minutes, Actions, and Matters Arising

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as an accurate record. The action tracker was reviewed; meeting dates had been circulated and the value added/target setting items would be addressed later in the agenda.

25.38 Performance Dashboard

The dashboard focused on finance and staffing given the time of year. Finance remained on track and the external audit fieldwork was underway. Teaching staff sickness was lower than the same point last year (noting a prior localised spike in 2024/25), while teaching turnover remained above target but consistent year-on-year.

The dashboard was noted.

25.39 People, Policy, Partnerships

The Principal reported a strong start to the academic year, highlighting smooth enrolment and positive feedback from students and staff.

<u>Pay Award Proposal</u>

The Principal and DCEx proposed:

(a) a consolidated 4% pay award for all staff from 1 August 2025 (budget had assumed 3%);

(b) removal of Grade B to uplift the lowest paid; and

(c) increasing support staff minimum annual leave to 25 days (with a staged approach to further alignment).

The context for the proposal included a strong 2024/25 out-turn, sustained 16–18 growth into 2025/26, and comparative positioning. The Association of Colleges (AoC) were recommending 4% with the caveat that this may be unaffordable for those Colleges with large proportions of adult provision; while the College was in this category, the 4% was considered affordable.

[Redacted]

Partnerships & Strategic Activity

The Principal showcased major partnership developments:

- **Construction Academy at Liverpool Waters**:
    - Delivered over summer; now operational with three large workshops and plans for modular house builds.
    - Strong employer engagement (e.g., Frank Rogers, Kimpton, Hill Dickinson) and co-branding opportunities.
    - Positive feedback from students, parents, and stakeholders; extensive media coverage and drone footage to follow.
- **Business School transformation**:
    - New delivery model with 50 entrepreneurs signed up to teach one day per week, providing a dynamic staffing model.
    - Governors noted that there had been some early teething issues as staff adapted but welcomed the innovation for employability and curriculum relevance.
- **Portfolio changes**:
    - Damien Kilkenny was now leading on all attraction functions: Business Development, Admissions, Marketing & PR.
    - Recruitment for new strategic roles was near completion, with strong candidate quality and the aim of enhancing and consolidating the College's approach.
- **Global Fighters' Association**:
    - College to design education pathways for a new union supporting combat sports professionals, addressing gaps in rights and career transition.
- **Merseyside Police partnership**:
    - Ongoing improvements [Redacted]
- **Equality & Employment Law Centre**:
    - First-of-its-kind partnership providing on-site legal advice and training for progress leaders, supporting students with justice and rights awareness.
- **High-profile engagement**:
    - Attendance at Labour Party Conference (roundtables with Skills and Energy Ministers), Liverpool Chamber 175th Anniversary, and multiple civic/business events.
- **Event sponsorship and profile building**:
    - Good Small Business Awards, Livercool Awards, Chamber Innovation Awards, RACA Adopt-a-School, Navajo Awards, Employer & Stakeholder Dinner, Changemakers Conference, Raise Up Youth Summit, John Haynes Foundation Annual Event.
- **HE Graduation evenings** successfully delivered, reinforcing progression pathways.

Policy

The Principal briefed governors on significant national policy shifts:

- **Labour Party commitment to FE**: PM pledged to make FE a "defining cause," ending its "Cinderella service" status.
- **New ambition**: Two-thirds of young people to progress to university or gold-standard apprenticeships; FE to deliver higher standards, technical excellence colleges, and qualifications linked to jobs.
- **Youth Guarantee**: Training, work support, or apprenticeship for every young person struggling to find work.
- **White Paper and Number 10 press release highlights**:
    - Target: 67% of 25-year-olds to hold Level 4+ by 2040 (currently 49%).
    - 10% to pursue higher technical/apprenticeships.
    - Guaranteed college place for all 16–18s.
    - £800m uplift to 16–18 budget in 2026–27; 14 new TECs (total 29).
    - Structured FE CPD; 100 hours face-to-face English/Maths; regional improvement teams; single funding model for Levels 4–6; new awarding powers; maintenance grants for low-income students (funded by international student levy).
- **Clean Energy Jobs Plan**: Skills funding from non-DfE sources;
- **Five new Technical Excellence Colleges (TECs) announced**: reinforcing opportunities for the College in green technologies and digital.

Governors welcomed the strategic positioning opportunities and noted the need to influence Treasury and Metro Mayors on adult funding, given its absence from current proposals. Governors were supportive of the College bidding for TEC status in areas of expertise.

25.40 Curriculum, Quality and Student Performance

The Principal drew governors' attention to the key headlines which would be explored further during the meeting:

- Changes to the Ofsted regime
- Strong outcomes for 2024/25
- 2025/26 had started well and had saw a further increase to student numbers
- The introduction of Inclusion Boards
- Focus for Academic Studies would be on retention, achievement and Value Added; there were encouraging signs so far.
- Persistent staffing issues in discrete areas, with innovative approaches being deployed.

The Deputy Principal advised that the information provided was the forerunner to the Self Assessment Report which would come to the next meeting. For the first time since the pandemic the College was able to access the tools which enabled comparison to other colleges; with that information now available measurement would move from the national rate to measuring against

the 17 colleges rated outstanding, including two locally. Governors were pleased to note that the College compared well to Outstanding colleges.

Headline results 2024/25:

- Overall College achievement was +1.1 percentage points (pp) above national and +1.0 pp above two local Outstanding colleges, despite significant 16–18 growth.
- Adult achievement had increased by 1.4% and was above national rates by the same margin and comparable with all other Outstanding colleges.
- Work-based learning improved by +9 pp year-on-year to national rates, despite complex standards and long durations.

Retention had declined for all ages by 0.9% and had fallen 0.1% below the national rate but remained above the average for the city region. The fall had mainly been driven by poor retention in A-levels (two-year programmes) and this pattern was similar across the city region with the College's retention actually being higher than the two Outstanding colleges in the region. Adult retention had maintained at 93.2% which was in line with national rates but there were few colleges offering the same scale of adult provision; in the city region the College received 25% of the funding for adults and had a very low proportion of non-regulated provision (less than 6%).

[Redacted]

Governors explored gaps between student groups and sought assurance on improvement strategies.

- **Gender**: No significant gaps in achievement between male and female students.
- **Ethnicity**: Variability persists, but progress was noted—students in 16 of 18 ethnicity groups achieved above national benchmarks (up from 10 groups in 2023/24).
- **Socio-economic**: No significant gap between students eligible for free school meals and those who are not.
- **Disability/Learning Difficulty**:
    - A gap of 4.8 percentage points emerged: students with a learning difficulty/disability achieved at 83.3%, compared to 88.1% for peers without.
    - Achievement rates vary by type of difficulty:
        - Below 80% for students with dyscalculia, social/emotional difficulties, or moderate learning difficulties.
        - Above 88% for students with physical disabilities, vision/hearing impairment, or severe learning difficulties.

Governors questioned what had driven the achievement gap for students with disabilities or learning difficulties and were advised that the gap reflected high volumes of students without EHCPs who required support. The College was strengthening early identification and intervention through inclusion boards and specialist partnerships. The VPSD&P's remit would ensure more proactive support and monitoring.

In response to a question around whether ethnicity gaps were narrowing consistently governors were informed that progress from 10 to 16 groups above national benchmarks showed improvement, though variability remains. Targeted curriculum and pastoral strategies continue.

Governors highlighted the reference to other Board reports regarding gaps between students and were reminded that this was covered in both the Self-Assessment Report and Single Equality Scheme.

It was suggested that Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs) for the year were presented by risk theme rather than by school:

(i) exam-based provision;
(ii) two-year Level 3 programmes;
(iii) digital provision;
(iv) intensive intervention courses.

The proposal reflected what had been suggested to the Board at the end of 2024/25 and would cover more provision than the previous school-based QIPs.

Decision: The thematic QIP approach was endorsed.

Annual Learner Voice and Complaints Report

Governors were informed that student voice mechanisms now spanned surveys, the Students' Union conference, qualitative feedback and triangulation with complaints. Survey response rates have risen from c40% to the mid-60s; the FE Commissioner indicated >50% as a positive benchmark. Qualitative feedback and Students' Union channels provided rich intelligence for action planning.

Music was a notable area of concern in 2024/25 due to staffing disruption and absence; a new team was in place and early signs were that there was increased stability. In response to a question around overlaps in intelligence and how issues could be progressed outside of complaints alone, governors were advised that complaints were monitored alongside other sources of feedback and where necessary, cases were escalated to senior leaders or Exec. The Head of Quality and Pedagogy meets monthly with the Insight team to review overlaps and gaps. The Board noted the progress and emphasis on continuous improvement.

25.41 Finance and Corporate Performance

The Principal stated that the main headlines were an Outstanding financial health grade for finance last year and significant capital investment over the summer, along with increased student numbers for 2025/26 and a forecast of a very good financial health score. Areas for improvement included business support functions improving their understanding of customer needs and responsiveness plus the exams function generally to ensure that the changing needs of the College's cohort were being met as far as reasonably possible and that the College was able to meet the demands of awarding bodies.

Management Accounts – Period 12

2024/25 out-turn: The DCEx advised that the College achieved an Outstanding financial health grade (250 points). Key drivers included in-year 16–18 funding of +£1.6m (2/3 of growth funded), adult growth (+£0.4m via ASF), NI grant support, and total income c£3m above budget. Pay costs were

higher than budget (notably the pay award), partly offset by vacancies; non-pay broadly tracked budget with higher exam fees/furniture (volume-driven) offset by lower utilities. Cash days were c60; staff costs were in the high-60s % of income (excluding subcontracted delivery). External audit fieldwork has raised no significant issues to date.

2025/26 in-year: Enrolment was strong. The R2 return indicated adult income was ahead of prior year; HE was c£0.3m adverse to budget. Based on current enrolments and prior withdrawal patterns, 16–18 growth could be c300 learners; if funded at 50% in-year, this would yield more than £1m additional income. Period-2 management accounts would be provided in the next cycle.

Risk

The risk register was updated to reflect: strengthened ALS controls (reducing residual risk), portfolio changes (new roles/lines), and inclusion of the Economic Crime & Corporate Transparency Act. A discussion was held around the rating for cyber risk and the changing nature of threats. While the SharEd Board and Audit Committee had received assurances from the Director of IT, it was agreed that the wider Board would benefit from a session on cyber risk to ensure they were comfortable with the risk ratings and approach. Governors also requested a review of financial sustainability scoring to reflect the improved 16–18 outlook and policy signals – possibly separating by income stream. The Board noted that sector-level comparisons can be distorted by inconsistent treatment of restricted cash in external metrics; internal reporting will continue to exclude restricted cash for decision-making clarity.

Actions: CL/JB (to schedule a Board cyber-risk briefing with the Director of IT);
JB (to review financial risk scoring/assumptions)

Health and Safety Annual Report and Approval of Policy

After challenges recruiting to the Health and Safety officer position the College had adopted a consultant model from January 2025, strengthening independent challenge and best-practice insight. Internal audits identified the need to tighten documentation compliance (no material safety concerns identified). There were two RIDDOR-reportable incidents (vs one in the prior year). Increased reporting of accidents and near misses across College and nursery was being driven to support learning. The Health & Safety Policy was presented with minor changes including updating roles and responsibilities.

Decision: Health and Safety Policy was approved; the Annual Health and Safety Report was noted.

SharEd Update

The SharEd update showed business-as-usual. Following lessons learned from the summer exam series, SLAs/KPIs and customer-feedback mechanisms (IT/Estates/Finance) will be strengthened. An Estates survey will launch post-half-term; IT/Estates questions will feature in the student survey; Finance was running user focus groups to identify issues and potential improvements. Governors appreciated this widening of perspective but asked that they were included in the 'One College, One Mindset' newsletter so that they could keep abreast of events in the College; the Deputy Principal understood this had already been put in place but would check. **Action: DK**

25.42 Use of the Seal 2024/25

The report was self-explanatory. While there had been no applications of the seal in 2024/25, the seal had been applied in August 2025 in relation to a matter heavily discussed at the end of the previous academic year so had been included in the report for completeness.

The report was noted.

25.43 Committee Minutes

Draft minutes of the Group Audit Committee were received for information. Items discussed included the Economic Crime & Corporate Transparency Act context and Health & Safety internal audit.

25.44 Any Other Business

[Redacted]

25.45 Confidentiality of Items

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

25.46 Date and Time of Next Meeting

9th December 2025, 1.30pm

Staff and student governors left the meeting at this point, along with Senior Post Holders (excluding the Principal)

25.47 Confidential Session

[Redacted]

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