OAKLANDS COLLEGE

Minutes of the Full Corporation Meeting

Held on 15 December 2025, 5:00pm–8:00pm, SA Campus, Immersion Lab

Present

Name	Role/Title
John O'Sullivan	Chair of Corporation
Deborah Caviel	Corporation Member (staff)
Simon Caunce	Corporation Member
Jean Fawcett MBE	Corporation Member
Chris Ford	Corporation Member
Philip Fulton	Corporation Member
Vince Glover	Corporation Member
Rob Birkett (via Teams)	Corporation Member
Andrew Slade	Corporation Member & Principal & CEO
Mairi Watson	Corporation Member
Richard Whitehead	Corporation Member

In attendance

Name	Role/Title
Susannah Glover	Director of Governance
Michelle McColl	Chief Finance Officer
Stephen Horrobin	Interim Finance Consultant
Barbara Jones	Executive Director of People and Culture
Jacqueline Page	Deputy Principal, Curriculum, Performance & Student
David Lambert	Chief Technology & Infrastructure Officer
Rob Metcalfe	Vice Principal Safeguarding, Quality & Student Experience

1. Welcome

1.1 The Chair welcomed all to the meeting

1.2 Apologies for absence were received from Claire Dolan, Sarah Furley and Sophie Sispera.

1.3 The meeting was confirmed as quorate.

1.4 No declarations of interest were received.

1.5 No requests for urgent business.

2. Minutes of Previous Meetings and Matters Arising

2.1 Minutes of the meetings held on 22 September 2025 and 2 July 2025 were reviewed and approved as an accurate record.

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2.2 The action log was reviewed; two actions completed and closed; one action regarding Western College feedback deferred for review against governance covenants.

3 Post-16 White Paper – Presentation and Q&A

3.1 Emma Meredith, Director of Skills Policy and Global Engagement at the Association of Colleges, gave a focused presentation on the Post-16 White Paper. She explained that the White Paper placed colleges at the centre of the government's skills strategy, with a strong emphasis on employer engagement, regional partnerships, and collaboration between further and higher education. Key proposals include the creation of Technical Excellence Colleges, reforms to qualifications at Levels 2 and 3, and a drive to make colleges "anchor institutions" in their communities.

3.2 Both opportunities and challenges in the White Paper were highlighted. Whilst there was a positive focus on raising standards and supporting young people, she noted gaps such as limited attention to adult education and funding for staff pay. Governors discussed the practical implications, including the need for colleges to adapt to new accountability measures, the impact on student support, and the importance of responding to ongoing consultations. It was confirmed that the AoC was working with government to clarify implementation timelines and would share further information on devolution and sector readiness.

4. Principal's Report

4.1 The Principal's report highlighted the College's significant achievements and ongoing challenges. He thanked staff and governors for their hard work and resilience, especially given the volatile funding and policy environment. The Principal reported positive engagement with stakeholders, including productive meetings with the FE Commissioner's team and local authorities, which reinforced the College's growing reputation and collaborative approach.

4.2 While there have been notable improvements in finance, IT, MIS, and estate management, it was emphasised that significant effort is still required to maintain and build on this positive momentum

4.3 The Principal also shared positive feedback from local leaders, noting that the College's profile had risen significantly. Despite these successes, he emphasised the need for continued vigilance in managing funding uncertainties and adapting to policy changes, ensuring the College remained agile and focused on delivering high-quality outcomes for students and the community.

5. Strategic Goals, KPI Dashboard, Annual Operating Plan

5.1 A detailed update was given on the College's strategic goals, KPI dashboard, and annual operating plan. Most of the College's key performance indicators (KPIs) were currently on track or exceeding expectations. The report highlighted that the College had set ambitious targets for growth and quality, and recent performance data showed positive trends in student retention, achievement rates, and satisfaction.

5.2 However, the presentation also acknowledged areas of pressure, for example around adult funding and achievement rates. Whilst the College was well-positioned overall, it was crucial that these risks were managed. The KPI dashboard was being used actively to monitor progress and identify any emerging issues early.

5.3 Governors enquired into the rationale behind the development of a multi-academy trust and the options around establishment. It was confirmed that there would be a number of options available which would be scoped out. There was significant expertise in the Executive team to support this. The benefits of establishing a MAT were explained and it was described as an excellent opportunity for the College.

5.4 The annual operating plan was reviewed, with a focus on aligning operational activities to the College's strategic priorities. The board discussed the importance of regularly reviewing targets and adapting strategies as the external environment evolved. It was agreed that the upcoming Strategy Day in May would provide an opportunity to revisit the College's strategic direction, assess progress against KPIs, and ensure that the College remained agile and focused on delivering its core objectives.

5.5 It was reported that the income target was set at £48 million for next year although caution was urged around this figure due to external funding pressures and changes in the operating environment. The target was set ambitiously to reflect growth aspirations, but current funding constraints—particularly reductions in adult education funding - may make achieving £48 million challenging.

5.6 It was noted that for future Governor meetings, discussions of KPIs and the AOP would form a greater focus on the agenda.

6. Corporate Risk Register

The Interim Finance Consultant presented the Corporate Risk Register, confirming that while there were no significant changes since the previous review, it remained a critical tool for monitoring both strategic and operational risks. Governors stressed the need to better align the risk review cycle with board and committee meetings to ensure the Corporation always considers an up-to-date register. They also highlighted the importance of linking the register to the College's strategic plan and maintaining regular updates informed by leadership and committee feedback. The board ***APPROVED*** the updated register.

7. Link Governor Scheme and Committee Membership

7.1 The Link Governor Scheme was being relaunched to strengthen governance and ensure governors had meaningful oversight of key areas. Governors would be consulted in January about their areas of interest and allocated to specific College functions. Each link governor would work closely with a senior leader, allowing for deeper engagement and insight into College operations. The scheme was designed to be flexible, with governors and SLT agreeing on the best approach for collaboration.

7.2 Governors stressed the importance of participation in activities such as learning walks and student events – it was crucial to enhance understanding of the student experience. The Director of Governance and Chair would finalise allocations and clarify responsibilities, for a January relaunch ***(ACTION SG/JO).***

8. Chief Finance Officer Briefing

8.1 The Chief Finance Officer reported that the College's financial position had improved, with a stable cash balance and a positive, unqualified audit results. She highlighted substantial progress in clearing outstanding audit actions and strengthening internal controls. A major focus was the implementation of a new finance system, which had been delayed until early 2026. Interim staff would support the transition, allowing the core team to concentrate on learning the new system. Greater Governor involvement in the project, utilising expertise within the Corporation would take place up until implementation.

8.2 The CFO emphasised that getting the rollout right was a priority, to ensure robust financial management. She also noted ongoing efforts to build team capacity, improve processes, and strengthen links with other departments. The Corporation discussed risks associated with system change and agreed that maintaining strong controls and assurance during the transition is essential. Overall, the CFO's briefing reflected a positive trajectory for the College's financial management, with continued attention to risk and process improvement.

9. Reports from Committees

A Curriculum & Quality Committee

9.1 The Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) were reviewed and were recommended for approval, reflecting strong performance in most curriculum areas. It was noted that the roll out of the SAR process to cross College areas had been a success and had contributed to the understanding of improvements across the College. Several cross-College areas were graded as outstanding. The committee noted improvements in a number of areas, as well as positive trends in student achievement and retention rates. However, challenges remain in areas such as GCSE English and maths which were being addressed through targeted actions although these reduced achievement rates was in the context of much higher student numbers this year – previous years had seen lower ability students placed on functional skills which meant no progress measures. Legacy apprenticeship achievement rates were also flagged as a concern. Low retention rates for care leavers was also being looked into by the Committee. The SAR was ***APPROVED.***

9.2 The safeguarding report showed high incident reporting, attributed to better recording and a proactive approach to student welfare. Governors enquired as to what safeguarding reporting numbers were to be expected in a College such as Oaklands and it was confirmed that trends were in line with sector benchmarks. Overall, robust quality assurance and a strong focus on continuous improvement was reported. The student representative praised the strong safeguarding culture, particularly the emphasis on mental health

B Finance & Resources Committee

9.3 The Finance & Resources Committee reported that the College's financial position was stable and in line with budget expectations, despite lower cash reserves due to ongoing capital investments. The committee focused on the rollout of a new finance system, agreeing that a cautious approach – prioritising data quality and staff training – was essential to avoid disruption. The committee also noted progress in improving financial processes, strengthening internal controls, and integrating data with other departments.

9.4 Risks associated with system change were discussed, with an emphasis on maintaining strong controls throughout.

C Audit Committee

9.5 The Audit Committee reported strong progress in clearing outstanding audit actions, with only seven remaining. Both internal and external auditors were praised for their solid performance and sector expertise. Periodic auditor rotation had been discussed and it had been agreed to develop a proposal for future tendering, balancing best practice with operational needs. The committee reviewed its annual report and terms of reference. The overall update reflected robust oversight of risk, compliance, and assurance, with a commitment to continuous improvement in governance. The Audit Committee had reviewed and recommended the annual accounts a repot (subject to minor typographical changes), the letter of recommendation and the regularity self assessment.

9.6 The External Audit report was noted

9.7 The annual reports and accounts were ***APPROVED***

9.8 The Letter of Representation was ***APPROVED***

9.9 The Audit Committee Annual report was noted

9.10 The Regularity Self Assessment was ***APPROVED***

9.11 The Corporation confirmed the College as a going concern. The Corporation confirmed there were no significant post balance sheet events to report, other than the ongoing land transaction, which was already disclosed and discussed.

D Estates & Infrastructure: Updates on major projects and estate maintenance.

9.12 The Estates & Infrastructure Committee reported substantial progress on capital projects, with major new facilities – including the construction centre, high performance sector, and Immersion Lab – now completed and operational.

9.13 The committee also reported on maintenance and refurbishment needs in older buildings, supported by a clear schedule and prioritisation process. Health and safety management has improved significantly, with a dedicated group and campus champions in place, and a notable reduction in outstanding compliance actions.

9.14 The committee continued to oversee the development of the estate strategy, balancing new investments with ongoing maintenance, and was advancing digital transformation projects to modernise infrastructure and support teaching and learning. Overall, the update reflected strong progress in estate development and health and safety.

E Search, Governance & Remuneration:

9.15 The Search, Governance & Remuneration Committee reported that senior postholder pay recommendations were reviewed and agreed, based on benchmarking data and sector guidance and best practice.

9.16 The committee was actively recruiting to fill governor vacancies, with interviews for new and associate governors planned for January and was considering the use of co-opted governors for committee roles.

10. Policies for Approval

10.1 The Risk Management Policy was ***APPROVED***

10.2 Counter Fraud Policy was ***APPROVED***

10.3 Conflict of Interest Policy was ***APPROVED***

10.4 Safeguarding Policy was ***APPROVED*** subject to the updating the named officer

11. AOB

Governors were reminded of the importance on undertaking mandatory training.

The meeting was closed.