



STRATEGY, GOVERNANCE AND SEARCH (SG&S) COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Part I Meeting

Held on Zoom on Tuesday 3 March 2026 at 5pm

Present:	Jo Croft	Chair of Governors & Interim Committee Chair
	Sam Foley	Chair of Resources Committee
	Tony Haines	Chair of Audit Committee
	Gillian May	CEO and Group Principal
	Signe Sutherland	Chair of Quality & Curriculum Committee
	Ian Thomson	Governor
Apologies:	Paul Britton	Governor
	Rob Lewis	Senior Independent Governor (SIG)
	Karen Griffiths	Acting Deputy Group Principal
	Gary Dixon	FE Principal
In attendance:	Sinead O'Donoghue	Sixth Form Principal
	Tracy Reeve	Group Director of Governance

MINUTE

ACTION

No

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received as shown above. The meeting was chaired by Signe Sutherland as Jo Croft (interim Chair of SG&S Committee) was online from abroad and was concerned about an unreliable internet connection.

2. Notification of Any Other Urgent Business

There was no other business notified.

3. Declarations of Interest

No Member declared a conflict of interest with the agenda.

4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on 18 November 2025

The Minutes of the previous meeting held on 18 November 2025, having been previously circulated to members, were **AGREED** as an accurate record and the Chair's approval would be recorded.

All Members were agreed.

5. Matters Arising from the Previous Meeting held on 18 November 2025

The meeting NOTED a report from the Group Director of Governance which confirmed that all matters arising had been actioned or were on track for timely completion.

➤ Data dashboard update

The meeting discussed progress with a clear Data Dashboard for governors. The Group Principal and CEO (GM) expressed her dislike for the example infographic page which had been cited as good practice in a recent AoC webinar. She thought it was over simplified and childlike and was not in line with the need for governors to understand the detail of performance. The Group Director of Governance (TR) informed the meeting that this format for an aide-memoire had been commended by Ofsted and was not presented as a substitute for detailed ongoing monitoring or governance challenge. GM conceded that the infographic format might be useful with parents or non-teaching staff. Governors (AH) reminded the meeting of the availability of the DfE finance dashboard which governors could access but it was agreed that there did need to be a curriculum efficiency diagnostic tool to match the finance data dashboard.

NOTED

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**6. Evolving Governance role**

The meeting considered a paper which supported a strategic discussion on how the Board's role should continue to evolve in light of the direction set out in the Further Education and Skills White Paper and the updated College Oversight, Improvement and Intervention framework from the Department for Education.

The paper invited governors to consider:

- Whether current governance arrangements at WFCG provided sufficient early warning and assurance
- How the Board evidenced alignment to local skills priorities
- Whether governance processes were sufficiently robust and agile in a more intervention sensitive environment.

GM reminded the meeting that this paper had been drafted at the request of SG&S Committee (November 2026) when Governor Tony Haines had highlighted the changing focus of DfE intervention. The meeting noted that the direction set out in the Further Education and Skills White Paper and the updated Department for Education College Oversight, Improvement and Intervention framework would shift governance expectations in three ways:

- Stronger integration of quality, finance, and local skills contribution
- More explicit regional oversight via Regional Improvement Teams (RITs); these would be co-ordinated by the office of the FE Commissioner (FEC).
- Clearer and earlier intervention triggers, including a Notice to Improve

Governance would now be judged not just on compliance but on early grip, system alignment and resilience. The Board's role would need to move beyond reviewing historic performance towards governing for resilience and early intervention. Governors would be increasingly expected to ensure that risks were identified and addressed before they became formal triggers for regulatory action. The meeting agreed that the strong risk management process and the clear Risk Register at WFCG which was regularly reviewed and linked to the strategic priorities of the Group provided strong assurance for governors.

GM highlighted that FE colleges would now be judged in the context of their contribution to local skills needs and the wider system. Governance would therefore require greater awareness of place-based responsibilities and strategic partnerships. There would be a need to stay ahead of local risks for example the impact on Adult Skills Funding if there was a change of leaders at the next local government elections. There was evidence of new Reform councils removing ESOL provision in other areas.

The meeting agreed that governance challenge would need to be forward looking rather than reactive. Effective governance would now depend on predictive oversight: identifying emerging pressures, testing assumptions and maintaining early grip on quality, financial sustainability and control. A big element of this new oversight regime would also look at governor training and support. The meeting agreed the importance of colleges being self-aware and having a timely conversation with DfE when issues were identified. This acknowledgement of risk and failure was key to good governance. GM flagged the strong risk register and board assurance framework in place at WFCG which identified key risks in relation to the key triggers for intervention.

The meeting discussed the new oversight regime which would be driven through Regional Improvement Teams (RIT); these would be led by FEC staff but also involve DfE staff and representatives from other relevant public sector bodies. These oversight teams would be more diagnostic and more visible moving forward working alongside college management. The RITs would be light touch when colleges were performing well with more day-to-day involvement being triggered in relation to areas of poor performance. GM reminded the meeting that her new role as one of the Deputy FECs would involve heading up a RIT. GM emphasised the importance of contacting the FEC Team and DfE contacts as soon as any areas of poor performance were identified. A recent example of this at WFCG was when the college self-reported the issue with apprenticeship performance date 2024-25 before it was known externally. This had resulted in a really useful support health check visit on apprenticeships from the lead FEC specialist who was on site for two days. SS confirmed that she had spent approximately an hour with this FEC specialist who had provided great advice

for the college in securing improvement in apprenticeship improvement. She had sought confirmation from SS on the governors' engagement and how well they understood the challenges in relation to the provision. SS highlighted the recommendations around the need to secure better data on apprenticeships e.g. she expected to see attendance reports for apprenticeships the same as for the mainstream 16-18 provision. GM commended this very valuable consultancy which had provided a strong catalyst for change; the college now had a clear action plan for improvement. The meeting noted that the detailed report and an overview of the improvement actions would be taken to the Quality & Curriculum Committee on 5 March. This FEC led report was not in the public domain but the college would report back on progress via the new RIT.

The meeting discussed the need to demonstrate how provision contributed to local skills and the challenge on securing current labour market data. GM confirmed that anecdotal evidence suggested that all colleges were struggling to get the necessary level of forward looking granular data. GM informed the meeting that the Thames Valley Principals were seeking support from AoC to get better data and had agreed to commission RCU to do some work on economic impact at a cost of £1,500 per college. This data was necessary to inform the updated College Annual Accountability Agreement 2026. SS suggested asking Jobcentre+ for data but GM informed the meeting that this data was fragmented unless it could be sourced from the Department of Work and Pensions.

The meeting talked about the evolving need to focus on the Group structure as WFCG was still operating in silos to some degree. There was an urgent need to look at consistency across the whole Group which was currently being actioned by the SLT. GM reminded the meeting that the new intervention regime would be discussed during the Group's annual strategic conversation with DfE which was to be held at the end of March.

The meeting commended the useful paper and agreed that there would be a lot to think about in terms of the demands of the FE Skills White Paper and the impending curriculum reform.

The SG&S Committee:

- i) NOTED the evolving expectations of governance within the college oversight regime.***
- ii) SUPPORTED the proposed shift in governance emphasis towards early intervention, regulatory readiness and system alignment.***

6.1 Letter from new FE Commissioner (FEC): February 2026

The committee also noted a recent letter from the new FE Commissioner, Ellen Thinnenen (10 February 2026) which outlined the Technical and Vocational Qualification Reforms and the Post-16 Education and Skills agenda. This was supported by a paper which highlighted the potential strategic, financial and regulatory implications for the College and provided assurance that reform alignment was being considered within curriculum planning and strategic decision making.

The meeting noted the current uncertainty around how the wholesale changes to the technical and vocational qualifications would impact FE Colleges. The introduction of new V Levels was due to be confirmed soon but the meeting noted that these smaller qualifications were likely to be popular for delivery within school sixth forms as part of a mix and match offer alongside A Levels. The larger T Levels had not settled yet or recruited well so it was currently a slightly confusing landscape.

The meeting went on to consider what this curriculum reform would mean from the perspective of governance and oversight and what changes might be required in governance practice. Important factors moving forward were agreed as:

- The need to ensure that national skills priorities were embedded into the Group's strategic planning. This would include the need to focus resources against key skills priorities so that resources were not spread too thinly. Curriculum planning must clearly align provision to skills priorities.
- This would place ongoing importance on employer involvement in curriculum design and delivery. Any example of curriculum not being tailored to employer requirements could have a negative impact very quickly.
- Course design would need to enable clear progression routes.

- Important to focus on the Group's Annual Accountability Agreement and ensure that it accurately reflected and responded to the economic impact and shared data. There would be a need for better regional collaboration in order to inform curriculum planning.
- The ongoing pressure on funding would necessitate oversight on ensuring that curriculum efficiency and margins were good enough. Governors agreed that attendance at Quality Review Boards by governors was a really useful tool to inform these discussions.
- The defence of creative industries as the strategy to down-skill creative industries developed, this would enable people access jobs with lower qualifications.
- There would be an enhanced role for FE colleges as a focal point in local communities. Their role in promoting general social mobility and the wider work done e.g. in relation to ESOL would be key. The meeting discussed the inherent tension between this increasing role and the downward pressure on adult funding which was forecast to get worse over the next few years.
- There would be a need for governing bodies to stay very up to date on the changing environment and to adopt a forward-looking mode of operation. Board time needed to be spent spotting problems coming over the hill and using best practice tools to resolve these where needed. This would have to be a new focus for college corporations as in the past FE governance had focussed on looking back to review performance and monitor historical data. However, the compliance aspects of the FE sector would not allow Boards to let go of this under the current regime.

The meeting commended this useful paper. Governor (AH) confirmed that the sector was expecting a clear announcement on the proposed curriculum reform very soon. Politically this announcement would herald curriculum transformation. There was likely to be some change for 2027-28 delivery with a wholesale implementation in September 2028. The meeting agreed that it was crucial for there to be some clarity on what would need to be delivered from September 2027. The details of any defunded qualifications would also become clearer. The meeting talked about how this curriculum reform would impact all aspects of college operations. The impact on financial forecasting would be seen to some extent in the CFFR 2026-27 with a massive impact on the following year. There would also need to be a clear focus on marketing and meeting learner demands as well as providing information and guidance in schools. On a technical level the college would also need to ensure that it had access to the new qualification specifications on a timely basis; SLT would need to drive this forward. FE College Boards would need to work with SLT and think clearly about change management. AH suggested that the ongoing focus would need to be looking at applications as this would be the first place to identify if the curriculum was not meeting learner demand.

The letter from the FE Commissioner and the paper on governance practice was NOTED and RECEIVED.

ACTION: Take to the Board for discussion (18 March 2026).

6.2 DfE guide to effective practice in strategic planning

The meeting noted this guidance which had been issued by DfE in late November 2025. GM highlighted that WFCG had contributed to the good practice suggestions in this document. WFCG's risk management process had been used as an example with evidence of mapping strategic priorities against risks. The importance of governing bodies and the SLT in framing strategic planning for colleges with the need for clear planning, presenting, implementing and monitoring. GM cited the positive example of clear timebound actions being used in the performance management process across WFCG. The ongoing governance challenge at WFCG facilitated regular review of progress against the Group's strategic objectives.

The DfE Guidance was NOTED and RECEIVED

6.3 WFCG Strategic Plan 2024-29 update

The Group Principal and CEO (GM) presented a RAG rated version of the Strategy Map 2024-29 which reflected progress made at the mid-year point of the 2025-26 academic year. Governors noted that the College continued to make strong progress across its strategic priorities, with growth evident in 16-19, apprenticeships and full-cost provision. GM highlighted that the correct number of additional retained learners for 2025-26 at the end of the six-week census period was 115 (not 62 as shown in the report). This would generate lagged funding for 2026-27 and take income to circa £55m; this had risen from £42m at merger (August 2022) so this was agreed as strong growth. GM confirmed that the annual financial forecast (CFFR)

for 2026-27 would be completed on a prudent basis and would not assume any further growth above this confirmed lagged funding. The meeting was reminded that the Group had been unable to secure the additional commissioned places and funding via Slough Borough Council to take up the opportunity to introduce the 14–16 school full-time provision from September 2026 and would therefore defer this until the funding could be agreed and secured. Governors agreed that this was a disappointing position to be in given the significant local need which had been identified. Another key challenge remained in relation to adult funding, which was expected to be subject to a 10% cap on growth.

GM also highlighted the Apprenticeship achievement rate which remained an ongoing challenge. The meeting was reminded that the lead on apprenticeships with the FE Commissioner's Team was providing advice to the Apprenticeship Team at WFCG as discussed earlier in the meeting.

Significant progress had been made against priority five; financial health had improved significantly with the Group now generating a small operational surplus and much improved EBITDA. GM reminded the meeting that the financial health grading of "Good" for 2024-25 had been confirmed by the DfE and the forecast was on track to be at the top-end of this grade for 2025/26 with a DfE point score of 240 (the previous forecast for 'Outstanding' financial health had now been amended). GM highlighted that in the January 2026 management accounts all areas of revenue were ahead of budget.

GM highlighted the ongoing focus on the quality aspect which would need a very close focus as the College had not yet gone through an Ofsted inspection under the new regime. There was a lot of ongoing continuous personal development (CPD) being undertaken at all levels of management including both of the Principals undertaking Ofsted nominee training. SLT had identified an ongoing need to iron out any inconsistency across the group which would be a key factor that Ofsted would now look at. The acting chair (SS) sought clarity on how progress and consistency was measured across the four distinct sites. GM confirmed that this was measured by looking at student outcomes, quality of Teaching and Learning, and feedback from learning walks. This would all be supplemented by in-year data on attendance and retention and progress against individual learner plans. GM confirmed that the Deputy Group Principal and two Principals were working hard to ensure more consistency between the FE and Sixth Form monitoring.

GM highlighted other areas of progress which included the Digital Strategy and ongoing improvements in Information and Guidance and Safeguarding. Additional resource was now being provided to support neuro-diversity and mental health across all of the colleges. Other key areas for focus would continue to be maintaining close links with employers to ensure that the WFCG curriculum offer was relevant. The wider stakeholder management agenda would become ever more important.

The meeting was pleased to note that there were no priorities rated as 'red' all were 'green' (achieved) or 'amber' (on track for completion). GM suggested that a new CEO might have a new format for the College Strategic Plan and it would need to be revised for 2026-27 in light of any new CEO's strategic vision for WFCG.

Progress against the WFCG Strategy May 2024-29 was NOTED.

7. **Biennial review of WFCG governance documents**

The Group Director of Governance (TR) presented a revised Code of Conduct for Corporation members and Terms of Reference for the sub-committees of the WFCG Corporation for biennial review.

7.1 **Code of Conduct for Corporation Members:** TR informed the meeting that these had been updated to reflect the latest version of the Eversheds LLP template (19th edition 2025). Changes made include deletion of references to the ESFA and insertion of the DfE and the Secretary of State Education and there were also some titular changes to accurately reflect the current WFCG structure.

7.2 **Committee terms of reference:**

TR confirmed that the Terms of Reference had been reviewed against best practice guidelines (Audit Committee) and some changes made to reflect changes to job titles at WFCG.

MINUTE

No

ACTION

TR confirmed that these key documents would be brought back for biennial review in March 2028 or earlier if legislative or good practice changes occurred.

The Code of Conduct and Terms of Reference were APPROVED as presented and would be RECOMMENDED to the Board for approval (March 2026).

(All Members were agreed.)

8. **Governance Summary Report**

8.1 **Board Membership**

The Director of Governance (TR) presented a paper which detailed the Members of the Corporation with cessation dates and sub-committee membership. Governors were reminded that the current Board membership of TWFCG was determined at 22 members and there were no vacancies.

The meeting noted that the induction event for the six newly appointed governors would take place on 9 March 2026 at BCA. SG&S Members noted the agenda for this half-day induction event which included briefing from a number of members of the senior leadership team as well as safeguarding training.

The meeting was reminded that Ian Thomson (IT) would be retiring from the WFCG Board on 31 March 2026; his first term of office was due to expire on 31 July 2026 but he was leaving slightly earlier to allow the recent recruitment of new governors. IT had served as a governor at BCA and WFCG for the last 10 years and his contribution to the Board would be missed. However, TR reminded the meeting that IT would remain as a co-opted member of the Capital Development Steering Group (CDSG) which was overseeing the land sale at Honey Lane on the BCA campus.

The meeting recorded a vote of thanks to IT for his considerable contribution to BCA and WFCG during his tenure as a governor.

8.2 **Use of the College Seal**

The meeting noted that there had been no use of the WFCG seal since reported to the last Corporation meeting in December 2025.

The Governance update report was NOTED and RECEIVED.

9. **Any Urgent Business**

9.1 **WFCG Annual Accountability Agreement 2026-27**

TR informed the meeting that she would need to timetable an additional strategy Governance & Search Committee in May 2026 to enable them to consider the draft Annual Accountability Statement for 2026-27.

NOTED

There had been no other urgent business notified.

The meeting closed at 6.15 pm

Chair.....

Date.....