

Finance & Employment Committee Meeting Minutes

Tuesday 1st July 2025

12:00-14:30

Principal's office, Hereford Campus

Present	Attending
Alan Layng (Chair) Julia Evans (Governor) David Williams (Principal)	Helen Trembeth (Clerk to the Corporation) Clare Perez (Director of Finance) Vicki Bushell (Director of HR)
Quoracy: Meeting was quorate.	

1. Apologies

- Ian Scott-Bell
- Toby Kinnaird

2. Declarations of interest

No new declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of last meeting

Approval of minutes of meeting held 26th March 2025. Minutes were approved as a true and accurate record.

a. Matters arising

Outstanding actions: There are 2 actions on the Action Log which are ongoing due to personnel changes.

4. Employment

a. Staff Report

Matters of interest

There has been a lower uptake than was hoped for the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), but the use of bulletins is to be introduced to promote the service. There were 28 enquiries in the 2024/25 period, with spikes in September/October 2024 and December 2024 (common at these points in the calendar). These spikes can also be linked to staff absence figures.

The counsellor service graph showed similar spikes to EAP spikes. An increasing number of people are being referred to the counsellor for stress assessment. The contract agreement is 6 sessions. A governor asked about a mental health charity at one of the award ceremonies; it was noted that there is a tendency for farmers to be reluctant to seek help - could this also apply to teachers? The Director of HR advised that EAP details are automatically sent to staff who have been on sickness absence, and following other HR events. Stress assessments and wellbeing action plans are being increased.

Staff absence

Total absence days were higher compared to the previous year. Mental health absence has increased. A governor suggested it might be useful for data to be further broken down into categories and demographics, e.g. FTEs, campuses, teams, etc.

Supreme Court ruling

The Director of HR advised that compliance with male/female for reporting will now be necessary and that policies will be reviewed and staff training given. Also, conversations will be held with individuals (e.g. regarding toilet facilities). A governor suggested that a support group for staff currently transitioning might be helpful. The Principal advised that these issues will be discussed at meetings with the Art College. It was noted that the ruling may also affect the Gender Pay Gap Report. Issues may also arise in other areas such as overnight college trips and equal pay claims.

Action: Clerk to send AoC guidance to Director of HR and Committee.

5. Health & Safety

a. Health & Safety Report

Incidents mostly involved students. The Principal reminded the Committee that forestry practices have been completely reviewed, however, the inquest for the fatality has not yet been held. There have been two unsuccessful personal injury claims in the period.

b. Health & Safety Committee meeting minutes

Points of interest

Interviews for the North Health & Safety Adviser will be held on 3rd July. The new South Adviser has been doing some overtime to cover the vacancy in the meantime.

The Health & Safety policy has been revised. Campus-specific policies will be introduced. All Health & Safety policies will be reviewed in the new academic year. There may be some potential for the new HR team member to have capacity to support Health & Safety – this will be reviewed once new team members are settled in.

A governor asked about consistency of employment policies across the staff base. The Director of HR advised there is a push to reduce discretionary decision-making and to ensure robustness around process-adherence to achieve fairness and equality.

6. Finance

a. Management Accounts

Indications are that the College will be slightly down on budget, although some adjustments are still to be made and the position is close to what was expected. Hourly paid agency staff have been a notable expense, however this is being addressed.

A governor asked if the budget for teaching will be easier to predict, changing from a focus on teacher hours delivered by curriculum, rather than by budget. The Principal and the Director of Finance advised that this was the case, improvements would evolve over time.

b. Draft budget 2025/26

Around £2.4m additional 16-18 programme funding has been allocated for 2025/26, which is a 14% increase overall. The adult skills budget will decrease, but a paper will be submitted for sub-contracting (although this may ultimately not be required). A governor asked if the intention is to bring this more back in-house. The Principal confirmed that this is desirable, and efforts are being made around this.

£33m in income predicted for 2025/26. The budget is built on the proposed staff pay award.

A governor asked about operational cost projections. The Director of Finance advised this is based around 4% increase in non-pay costs. Cashflow includes capital expenditure.

A governor asked The Director of Finance if she has any concerns and she advised that Pound Farm and animal care will require large capital expenditure. There are 300 hectares at Pound Farm, mostly owned (some rented). The Principal advised that the planning for the Farm would be reviewed. The Principal would like the campus to be an exemplar low-carbon, environmental site.

The paper was approved.

c. Letter from FE Commissioner – Financial Benchmarks

Discussion around the letter, in particular, the desired balance of cash days and reserves.

d. Governing Body Financial Dashboard

No questions.

e. Updates to the College Financial Handbook

The Director of Finance noted that the updates largely concern audit.

f. Governing Body Financial Dashboard

No questions.

g. CEFSS

No significant changes. The curriculum planning start date has been brought forward, which has helped with budget preparation. The Principal noted employer plans need some improvement. Consistent reporting mechanism is needed for staff utilisation. MIS reporting improvements are being reviewed. Learner retention needs to be improved – the Principal is in touch with another college to discuss possible approaches. More work is being done around progression rates. SMT benchmarking: the Principal understands that a number of CMT are in the top salary quartile.

The Principal noted the usefulness of the report and that active engagement with the Department of Education is beneficial.

7. Estates & IT

a. Capital projects update

Although many projects are coming to an end, there is still the Capital Transformation Funding going up to 2028 and it is yet to be decided how this will be spent. There will be a new Condition Survey in September.

The Principal questioned the amount of the Low-carbon Centre East. The Director of Finance advised it was £1.2m (some of the total was from other funding sources, including college reserves).

b. Cyber Essentials

The Director of Finance outlined the Cyber Essentials action plan; this must be completed by 31/03/2025. The plan is on track. A governor asked if the College can be externally assessed. The Director of Finance advised this is not an insurance initiative, but a Department of Education initiative; there will be an internal audit next year. A governor asked if any colleges have been affected by cyber-attacks. The Principal cited some examples.

8. Annual Operating Plan 2024/25 (progress report)

No questions.

9. Policy review/update

a. Business Continuity Plan

This was an audit action for the governors to be informed. A governor asked if there was a paper copy or an unconnected device in the event of a cyber-attack. Insurance company does hold copy.

To be shared with the Board for information.

Action: Director of Finance to provide printed copy to be held in Executive PA's office.

b. Fees Policy

To be recommended to the Board for approval.

c. Subcontract Policy

To be recommended to Board for approval.

d. Menopause Policy

Some minor changes to the policy. A governor asked if this falls into same category as mental health in terms of a potential reluctance to discuss. The HR Director confirmed that it will; the hope is that this encourages women to seek help.

To be shared with the Board for information.

e. Staff Wellbeing Policy

Some minor changes to the policy – to be shared with the Board for information.

10. Scheme of Delegation review

Each committee has been reviewing.

The Principal noted that there are some individual items which need to be reviewed, and also some additions/removals/clarification.

Action: Clerk to ensure that each committee reviews the Scheme of Delegation (to be added to autumn agendas so Committees can make recommendations).

Action: Director of Finance to review financial regulations in relation to links to Scheme of Delegation.

11. BAF Review

This is the top 15 risks in the Risk Register by committee. The committee was happy with the content.

12. Annual Committee items

a. Election of Chair and Vice Chair – 2025/26

Volunteers were invited for Chair and Vice Chair – although there were none, there may be potential for new candidates in 2026/27. The current Chair indicated his willingness to continue. The Committee agreed to nominate Alan Layng to continue as Chair of Finance and Employment Committee.

b. Finance & Employment Committee's Self-Assessment 2024/25 (updated)

The Chair has updated the Self-Assessment to reflect current dates and current practices. The Committee needs to first review the Self-Assessment as it was not ready for review prior to the meeting.

Action: The Committee to review the updated Self-Assessment.

c. Review of Terms of Reference (reviewed, but no changes proposed)

The Committee needs to first review the Self-Assessment as it was not ready for review prior to the meeting.

Action: The Committee to review the updated Self-Assessment.

13. Any other business

None.

14. Date of next meeting

Thursday 20th November 2025 at 14:00.

Signed:



Date: 06/01/2026