

## **REASEHEATH COLLEGE BOARD**

### **BOARD MEETING**

**Minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2024 at 9.30am**

**Committee Room, Reaseheath College**

Present	Ash Austin (independent) Claire Blanchard (independent) Malcolm Burns (associate) Jan Chillery (independent) Marcus Clinton (principal) Jane Cowell (independent) (Chair) Chris Gaskell (independent) Mike Gorton (independent) Gary Crowe (independent) ( <i>item 5.2 onwards</i> ) Phil Gibbon (staff) Peter Green (independent) Elizabeth Harrison (independent) ( <i>item 1 to item 9.4 inclusive</i> ) Summer Lakin (student union president) Angela Potter (independent) Eunice Simmons (independent) Liz Watts (staff) Paul Weston (independent)
Attending	Eli Broadhurst (student, student union vice president/apprenticeship rep) Graeme Lavery (vice principal, finance and resources) Paul Spearritt (vice principal, curriculum and quality) Jackie Schillinger (head of governance)

#### **PART A unless stated**

item	Content
<b>1.</b>	<b>Opening Items</b>
1.1	Apologies were received and accepted from Jared Erskine and Sean Houlston. Associate member Alastair Taylor had also sent his apologies. The meeting was quorate and remained quorate throughout. There were no declarations of interest made to the meeting.
1.2	RESOLVED: The minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2024 were approved as a correct record.
<b>College Strategy - Enrich: Deliver an experience that inspires people to be their best self, launching and shaping careers for both learners and staff.</b>	
<b>2.</b>	<b>Student Union Annual Report</b>
2.1	Student Union Annual Report: The Student Union (SU) president presented the SU annual report, reporting progress against the SU strategy. She explained the mission is for all Reaseheath students to be heard and feel part of a community by the SU creating the Reaseheath Experience. The SU aims to do this by four main strategic objectives:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusivity: Providing a sense of belonging, with something for everyone</li> <li>• Collaboration: Working with transparency between student, staff and governors</li> <li>• Engagement: Ensure cross campus promoting for widespread involvement</li> <li>• Excellence: Challenging ourselves and striving towards an outstanding service.</li> </ul> <p>The SU president reported on the targets and success measures against each of these areas, with the key successes so far being:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SU reps in all departments and halls. Gaining widespread engagement and feedback</li> <li>• Attainment of Tik Tok and increased social media presence</li> <li>• SU attendance at course rep, governor and sustainability meetings, including the governor strategic planning away days in February 2024 feeding directly into the college strategic plan 2024-27</li> <li>• Apprentice students increased involvement in activities.</li> </ul>
2.2	<p>Governors asked questions to find out whether there were any issues that prevented the SU achieving its objectives, whether any further support was needed and what the key priorities were for 2024-25. Assurance was sought and provided that enough resource was available as the student life team was now fully staffed following a transition period before the new student life officer started in post. The key priorities for the SU to work on in the spring term from this discussion were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusivity - increasing engagement in enrichment activities.</li> <li>• Collaboration - SU meetings with department managers: regular meetings, gathering themes, promotion of student life activities by managers, every department engagement in RAG.</li> <li>• Excellence – termly SU led student survey and feedback process ‘you said we did’.</li> </ul>
2.3	<p>The SU constitution and annual reporting was reviewed for annual approval. The SU constitution had been amended, with the rationale explained: To reflect a change to the student governor roles, as agreed by the board to clarify that the SU president is expected to be a member of the board now that the post is a sabbatical post which allows the president to be available to attend daytime meetings and provide the central input to board business. This leaves two roles because the board constitution allows for a maximum of three student governors. These roles are the two SU vice presidents for HE and FE. The apprenticeships vice president whilst not a formal member of the board attends the relevant meetings to provide SU input. There was also some minor updating. The SU financial summary was recorded in the annual financial statements. A governor suggested an addition to the pre-election criteria which was agreed.</p>
2.4	<p>RESOLVED: The Board received the SU annual reporting and approved the SU Constitution, with thanks and commendation to the SU, including the vice president/apprenticeship representative and the president for their valuable input to meetings and board business.</p>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Safeguarding, Prevent and Wellbeing Annual Report</b>
3.1	<p>The vice principal curriculum and quality (designated safeguarding lead) presented the annual assurance report. The meeting took substantial assurance from the annual report. It was noted that the recent Ofsted inspection had judged safeguarding to be effective. Governors asked questions to test several areas including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The safeguarding lead governor provided his observations on the good progress on the embedding of CPOMs system at the college. He sought and received assurance that</li> </ul>

	<p>any attendance concerns are coming through and that the attendance monitoring process escalates any concerns appropriately in CPOMS.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governors endorsed the level of assurance but asked whether the college had sufficient resource allocated to this area due to the high level of need evident. The vice principal gave assurance that despite being a heavy caseload, it is manageable within the resource available and the wider support teams could be further developed to support the central safeguarding team.</li> <li>• The SU apprenticeships rep asked what would be done to prepare the students for the planned lockdown procedure practice drills. The response was that the college would ensure students were prepared and that it was likely some smaller areas of the college would be trialled first, after the new audibant system is in place, expected by the end of January.</li> <li>• Governors asked whether the college is confident that students know what to do if they have a concern, with the recent pulse student survey evidence of positive assurance, alongside the See It Say It system and the ten minute lesson takeovers to test understanding. Positive assurance could also be taken from the Cheshire East audit and the Ofsted positive outcome, both of which involved speaking to groups and individual students on their understanding of how to raise concerns.</li> <li>• Governors asked whether the system enables the college to target interventions to support groups or curriculum areas. It was confirmed this should be increasingly possible under the CPOMs system and this element will be developed. Governors agreed this should be used going forwards.</li> <li>• Governors asked whether there were more support needs or specific issues with residential students as opposed to day students. The vice principal and designated safeguarding lead said that there were no differences evident from the data. He considered this an area of real strength in college provision, with the safeguarding and wellbeing resource and residential services team very alert to and focused on support needed in relation to mental health, including risk of self-harm and suicide ideation.</li> <li>• Governors clarified the training needs for the board and agreed that the education and training foundation safeguarding and separate in depth prevent modules aimed specifically at governors were appropriate as supplemented by the governor annual training in September each year. They agreed that the safeguarding lead governor would additionally undertake the government prevent modules levels 2 and 3.</li> <li>• Governors reviewed the risk exposure score and risk appetite and concluded that the current risk exposure was a tolerable position within the risk appetite of 'averse' and the continued embedding of the CPOMs system with its increased reporting capabilities should mean the risk exposure should reduce further. This would be monitored at the next termly safeguarding report.</li> </ul>
3.2	RESOLVED: Substantial assurance was taken from the annual Safeguarding Prevent and Wellbeing report on the continued management of the college's safeguarding and prevent responsibilities and wellbeing support.
4.	<b>Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy</b>
4.1	Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy: The principal presented the policy for annual review and approval. He noted that at the current time the executive were not recommending any changes. The chair of the finance and general purposes committee explained that the committee had reviewed the policy and the draft annual report at its recent meeting. She

	confirmed that the committee recommended the policy for approval whilst there is further work to be done on evidencing impact in the annual report. She added that committee recommended that the policy be approved currently, and the annual report be presented to the next meeting of the board in March once there has been time to incorporate the committee's suggestions. A governor noted that it may be useful to consider alongside the report in March any further changes to the policy needed at that time, and she suggested that the college might consider if a socio-economic characteristic needed to be included as it may become relevant if any future changes were brought in by the government.
4.2	RESOLVED: The Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy was approved with approval for the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report to be made to the March 2025 meeting.
<b>5.</b>	<b>Health and Safety Annual Report</b>
5.1	Health and Safety Annual Report: The vice principal finance and resources presented the annual report for assurance and for approval of the health and safety policy. He explained that the revised health and safety policy had been drafted with input from external health and safety specialists, incorporated the recommendations from the independent audit and had been reviewed by the governor health and safety task and finish group. Governor members of the group confirmed that they recommended the policy for approval.
5.2	RESOLVED: The Health and Safety Policy was approved.
5.3	Governors asked questions on the health and safety annual report and raised challenges that resulted in actions required on the following key areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Executive needs to report examples of impact from its monthly executive agenda item on health and safety monitoring, to show how things have been picked up and actioned. For example, some defective equipment was found, and the board needs to see how this has been picked up quickly and to see that culture change is being driven.</li> <li>• Board level report needs a compliance assurance list on the statutory reporting items in a further section of the report, for example on asbestos management.</li> <li>• The audit committee should see the statutory reporting dashboard at its termly meeting within its legal and regulatory risk remit.</li> <li>• The health and safety link governor should check the dashboard on the statutory items and that the process is happening.</li> <li>• The wording should be tightened up to provide more precise wording on compliance levels.</li> </ul>
5.4	RESOLVED: The task and finish group oversight of the health and safety action plan reported partial assurance at this stage of the year, with further evidence from management and the RSM internal audit this year, as well as the link governor visit programme sought before a board review in the summer term.
<b>6.</b>	<b>Chair's Report</b>
6.1	The Chair provided her report. She praised the positive response to the Ofsted improvement actions by leaders and staff to drive consistency of teaching and learning across the college. She reported on her meeting with the senior independent governor to set the chair's objectives, provided for the board to review, with the focus on clarity on what the board is doing to take the strategic plan forwards. She requested any feedback now or as the year develops. A member noted there was a heavy workload in the role and supported the aim for the objectives to be collective to the board.

6.2	RESOLVED: The board supported the chair's objectives as appropriate for the collective board, supporting the focus on building cohesion and understanding with new members and on clarity of board impact on achievement of the strategic plan.
<b>7.</b>	<b>Principal's Report</b>
7.1	<p>The principal presented his report, which included the college strategic key performance indicators and strategic risk review. Governors asked questions on how the executive would be driving the strategic plan including the improvement actions identified, and growth, with the following actions agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Driving the strategic plan via the realignment of leadership roles to provide clarity without additional resource cost. This included the assistant principal role structure realigned: a curriculum and quality role across all curriculum areas; a specific student experience role; a land-based and sustainability role to develop agri-food and the farm; higher education and adult skills in the dean's role; and apprenticeships, business hub and schools' partnership together in one role.</li> <li>• A save and invest approach to achieve growth, with targeted resource focused on teaching and learning.</li> <li>• Teaching and learning key performance indicators must be very clear and central for the board at the whole college level.</li> <li>• The board quality and standards and higher education committees must review and feedback before formal approval sought for the quality key performance indicators.</li> </ul>
7.2	RESOLVED: The college key performance indicators to be reviewed by the board quality and standards and higher education committees before brought for formal approval at the March 2025 board meeting.
7.3	RESOLVED: The curriculum skills and stakeholder committee report was received and the committee terms of reference approved.
	<b>College Strategy – Enable: Actively drive completion of the Strategic Plan through clear operational actions and deliverables and enhance operational ways of working (processes and systems)</b>
<b>8.</b>	<b>Audit Committee Report</b>
8.1	<p>The Audit Committee Annual Report was made to the meeting, including the external audit completion report and the internal audit service annual audit opinion. The committee chair reported these make up the assurance reporting to the board to enable the board to approve the statement of corporate governance and internal control in the annual accounts. He noted that the committee unconfirmed minutes from its recent meeting had also been provided for information. The board considered the reporting and agreed assurance levels on strategic risk areas. The board took substantial assurance from the audit committee report that there were no significant issues arising up to the date of preparation of the report and no significant matters of internal control included in the management letters and reports from auditors or other assurance providers. Actions agreed by the board were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safeguarding risk to be considered by the audit committee termly, based on the last report to the board, and by exception to audit if any issues emerge which increase risk exposure, when it considers overall risk profile. The full safeguarding report to continue to be made to the full board.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The health and safety task and finish group to report into the audit committee following its meeting in January on assurance on progress against the college health and safety action plan.</li> </ul>
8.2	RESOLVED: The board gained substantial assurance from the audit committee annual report opinion that for the financial year 2023-24 the corporation had in place adequate and effective assurance arrangements, framework for safeguarding, framework of governance, risk management and control processes for the effective and efficient use of resources, solvency, and the safeguarding of assets.
<b>9.</b>	<b>Finance and General Purposes Committee Report</b>
9.1	<p>The Finance and General Purposes Committee Report was made to the meeting by the committee chair. The board took substantial assurance from the external audit on a clean audit of the financial statements, strong financial management and robust management accounts reporting evidenced by the bridge report comparing management accounts to statutory accounts. The annual review of the financial objectives showed that the college had met all objectives except for the 1% of turnover surplus and the debt service cover covenant. Governors sought and received positive assurance that the bank was providing a covenant waiver. The committee confirmed it had considered the financial objectives for 2024-25 and it recommended them for approval. Good progress on capital projects/bids was reported. Review of the human resources reporting showed a generally stable picture on key data.</p> <p>Actions agreed by the board were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update on bank covenant waiver to be provided in January with the formal waiver to be in place for the March 2025 meeting of the committee.</li> </ul>
9.2	RESOLVED: The Financial Statements for the year to 31 July 2024 were approved and the Chair and the Principal were authorised to sign the statements and the College to submit the ESFA Financial Record, and the terms of the management representation letter were approved.
9.3	RESOLVED: The recommendation from the Finance and General Purposes Committee to approve the Financial Objectives for 2024-25 was accepted and the Financial Objectives are approved.
9.4	<p>Part B item: Management Accounts. The finance and general purposes committee chair confirmed that the committee had considered the management accounts at its recent meeting and reported partial assurance on meeting budget targets and a heightened risk exposure in the current year. Whilst there was no issue on financial sustainability, the committee also considered an elevated risk exposure due to the need to secure growth to maintain EBITDA in the medium to longer term. The vice principal finance and resources reported progress made on income targets to period 4. Governors asked questions and made recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Query on whether moving to a four-day timetable had a positive impact on accommodation income. There had been some impact, and the enhanced student life offer had increased engagement, which it was hoped would also attract people in.</li> <li>Recommendation to be alert to any opportunities on adult education income from the impact the devolution white paper which could produce skills funds in the current financial year.</li> <li>Action for the curriculum skills and stakeholders committee to pick this up and a short guide for governors on the devolution white paper was requested.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mitigation of current year budget variance required. Finance and general purposes committee to monitor and report to board on progress to mitigate variance at next meeting.</li> </ul>
9.5	<p>Part B item: Capital Projects Report. The report was received for information and assurance on the continued good progress on current projects. The finance and general purposes committee had raised the issue of lack of clarity on future government capital funding and any loan facility. It highlighted that this could impact the financial strategy to support the Lord Woolley student learning space planned project and mean the college needed to rely more on its currently available resources. Governors made several key points and recommended an action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Good to see the range of activity, which was well managed and had resulted in high-quality buildings and value for money sound investment over a good length of time.</li> <li>Good progress in the right direction on de carbonisation and reducing energy costs, and the college should see the difference in next year's carbon reporting due to the air source heat pump project.</li> <li>Pleasing to see the improvements on the farm, with the investment in technology but also evidently smarter, cleaner and well managed, which had put the college in a good place from which to build excellence.</li> <li>The zoo had also had significant investment and had been transformed.</li> <li>The college should promote the story of all this for external stakeholders via some storyboarding and similar promotional pieces to raise the profile of all the excellent work that had gone on to transform these areas of the college to prospective students but also more widely to external stakeholders.</li> </ul>
	<b>College Strategy - Engage: Provide a high quality, robust and responsive curriculum to meet the needs and interests of our students, employers, community, and national skills priorities, supporting people to develop transformational personal, social, and technical skills.</b>
<b>10.</b>	<b>Quality and Standards Committee Report</b>
10.1	<p>Quality and Standards Committee Report. The committee chair reported assurance that college performance data metrics had moved forwards in all indicators including attendance, in all but one curriculum area, providing evidence of the positive impact of the Reaseheath re-set. Student survey data was very strong. The committee reported that the college's quality improvement plan 2024-25 would incorporate the Ofsted improvement action plan. The committee gave its commitment to enhanced monitoring of the impact of teaching learning and assessment quality improvement. It would continue to monitor performance data closely to ensure the quality improvement plan has the intended impact.</p>
10.2	<p>RESOLVED: The board agreed enhanced monitoring by governors to support the quality improvement plan to include a clear view of the college's 'Reaseheath Way' expectations of teaching learning and assessment with triangulation gained from link visits with aide memoire prompts, learning walks with managers and the quality team, and by curriculum area managers contributing to special meetings focused solely on teaching learning and assessment.</p>
10.3	<p>RESOLVED: The draft College Further Education Quality Improvement Plan was received, incorporating the Ofsted improvement actions with the final plan to be presented for approval at the board meeting in March following additional scrutiny by the quality and standards committee.</p>

<b>11.</b>	<b>Consent Agenda</b>
11.1	RESOLVED: Approval of the increase to the UCR Higher Education Tuition Fees by £285 per year to £9535 in line with the maximum fee cap, for all new students from 2025-26 academic year.
11.2	RESOLVED: Approval of the Remuneration Committee Annual Statement for 2023-24.
11.3	There were no items for escalation to the strategic risk register that had not been covered in the meeting.
11.4	There was no other business reported to the meeting.
11.5	The dates of the next meetings were confirmed as 31 January 2025 strategy and development day and 28 March 2025 board meeting.
<b>12.</b>	<b>Governance</b>
12.1	<p>Governance Report and Development Plan. The head of governance had reported progress against the plan at the November meeting and development session and now presented the reviewed plan for approval. She highlighted that the plan reflected the aim to develop governance to drive college improvement and reflected the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good progress in 2023-24 but these priority areas remain relevant for 2024-25.</li> <li>• The college post Ofsted improvement plan and the focus on governance oversight of teaching learning and assessment is a priority for 2024-25.</li> <li>• The plan aims to dovetail with the Chair's objectives as reported to the meeting.</li> <li>• Map governing business and terms of reference to college improvement and strategic plan: Excite, Engage, Enrich and Enable.</li> <li>• Improve understanding to support governor oversight of teaching learning and assessment with the January governor day to focus on governors' role in appropriate challenge and questioning including via the existing link visits and learning walks.</li> <li>• Enhanced quality and standards committee monitoring on manager accountability for teaching learning and assessment with specific deep dive sessions added to check teaching learning and assessment progress in curriculum areas covering theory and practical delivery.</li> <li>• Continue sharp focus on data monitoring in 2024-25.</li> </ul>
12.2	RESOLVED: Approval of the governance development plan for 2024-25.

The meeting closed at 12.15pm

Approved as a correct record 28 March 2025

Jane Cowell, OBE (Chair).