REASEHEATH COLLEGE BOARD
Minutes of the meeting on Tuesday 16 December 2025 at 10am
FE Lecture Theatre, Reaseheath College

Present	Jane Artess (independent) Ashley Austin (independent) Claire Blanchard (independent) Atlas Brigden (student) *(item 7 onwards)* Eli Broadhurst (student union president/student) *(item 3 onwards)* Charlotte Brooks (student) *(item 3 onwards)* Jan Chillery (independent) Marcus Clinton (principal) Jane Cowell (independent) (Chair) *(apart from item 1)* Gary Crowe (independent) Phil Gibbon (staff) Mike Gorton (independent) Peter Green (independent) Elizabeth Harrison (independent) *(items 1 to 6 inclusive)* Martin Mellor (independent) Eunice Simmons (independent) Paul Weston (independent) *(via Teams)*
Attending	David Hoose, Forvis Mazars *(via Teams item 6 only)* Alastair Taylor (external, chair of h&s task and finish group) *(item 7 onwards)* Graeme Lavery (vice principal, finance and resources) *(item 3 onwards)* Paul Spearritt (vice principal, curriculum and quality) *(item 3 onwards)* Vanessa Rhodes (executive director of people and culture) *(item 7 only)* Sharon Yates (assistant principal, business hub) *(item 3 onwards)* Jackie Schillinger (head of governance)

PART A unless stated

1.	**Governor business: Senior Independent Governor recommendations on Chair performance and objectives**
1.1	Senior Independent Governor recommendations (in the absence of the Chair): The Senior Independent Governor reported on the Chair's performance review, including feedback on progress on objectives in 2024-25 and from the survey sent to governors and the college executive team. Proposed objectives for 2025-26 were presented for approval. The objectives were based on Praesta "What makes a great Chair in the public sector".
1.2	In discussion, members supported the feedback of good progress on the objectives covering 'good governance', 'the levers of the chair are applied appropriately and effectively', 'board performance is regularly reviewed', and 'investment in relationships is effective.' Key Strengths over the year were identified as: • Strong knowledge and experience which results in strong governor leadership, ensuring that governors of the college are heard and are supported in challenging the college on its performance both internally and externally. • Chair is felt to do an excellent job and has gone out of her way to find out how the college works. High visibility around the college over the last year. • Her preparation for each meeting is felt to be exemplary, and meetings are well chaired. • Chair is described as an outstanding individual, her ability to communicate in an effective, simple, down to earth, yet informative manner is first class.

	Key opportunities for development were identified as: • Forward focus and help to identify themes or issues on the horizon (governors inevitably do a lot of looking back, checking progress and seeking assurance on matters that are in the past). • Improvement to Board papers: More data driven and to have relevant benchmarks. • Proactively encourage all governors to engage and contribute, especially in formal meetings.
1.3	Senior Independent Governor shared the recommended objectives agreed with the Chair for 2025-26 (also based on Praesta). These were considered and supported, summarised as: Good Governance • Ensure opportunity for the Board to consider impact of emerging government policy and agree strategy adjustments to align with government policy nationally and locally. • Champion and support Board assessment of risk of predicted cohort decline from 2028 and gain assurance that robust mitigations are in place (Excite), based on enhanced supply side market analysis to mirror demand side analysis. The levers of the chair are applied appropriately and effectively • Further develop Board papers - facilitate better conversation/debate between governors and ensure accurate and timely assessment of performance in delivering the strategic plan. • Explore the Board Appetite for a balanced scorecard. Commission Exec to produce options. • Support the Board in horizon scanning as part of strategy formulation to include AI, Digital and Supply side market analysis • Board members more specific feedback on Principal and Governance Professional PDRs. Board Performance is Regularly Reviewed • Build a more collaborative approach with committee chairs in leading the Board and managing its business. • Work with SIG in its second year to strengthen the objective setting, PDR and reporting arrangements for the Chair. • Complete second independent review of governance building on the first review and taking account of the criteria for governance within the new Ofsted Framework. Investment in relationships is effective • Provide challenge and support to the Principal as we move into year 2 of the strategic plan and prepare for the Ofsted Monitoring Visit. • Attend with members of Exec, the AoC and Landex National Conferences to ensure we remain engaged and aware of development in the sector and the evolving operating context • Support Excite strategy strand Education Partnership activity with schools and other partners including making a step change in careers education and IAG. • Continue to be visible in college; attending meetings with students and staff to listen to how plans are landing and feed back to the Board • Work with Board members to explore how their expertise and networks might be harnessed to increase Board visibility in pursuing college strategy.
1.4	RESOLVED: The Senior Independent Governor recommendations on the Chair's objectives for 2025-26 academic year were approved.
2.	**Independent Governor Business: Remuneration Committee recommendations (in the absence of staff and student members)**
2.1	Part B confidential item: The Remuneration Committee Chair's report and unconfirmed committee meeting minutes.
3. General business	

3.1	Apologies from Sean Houlston and Jared Erskine were received and accepted.
3.2	RESOLVED: Following the staff governor recruitment process, the appointment of Nick Blakemore and Charlotte Riley as staff governors for a period of three years from 1 January 2026 was approved, with membership of quality and standards and curriculum skills and stakeholder committees respectively
3.3	No declarations of interest in relation to the meeting agenda items were declared.
3.4	Annual declarations of interests and eligibility were agreed to be confirmed via GovernorHub following the meeting and by the end of January, with support from the Head of Governance as necessary.
3.5	RESOLVED: The minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2025 were approved as a correct record.
4. Strategy: Strategic Priority Enrich	
4.1	Student Union Annual Report: The Student Union (SU) president presented her annual report. The meeting received the report and SU constitution in advance. The SU president provided a presentation update of SU activities followed by discussion in the meeting, including: • The need to recruit more members to the SU with expectation of filling these roles in the early spring term. • Cross college student feedback and the progress made on making changes to the student experience based on this feedback. For example, retaining the student ID card balance into the new academic year for returning students. • Members welcomed the annual RAG (raising and giving) charity work undertaken by the SU. Last year this raised almost £18,500 for Mind Mid Cheshire. They were pleased to hear that the current RAG charity total was just under £1000, which was ahead of target for this time in the year. The RAG week activities were scheduled for March and there were the large events planned for later in the year with the aim of raising around £20,000 in total for this year’s RAG charity, local charity David Lewis that provides residential, educational, and medical services for young people and adults with complex needs. • In response to questions from members, the SU president confirmed she felt supported in her role by the college and student life staff. • Members were keen to be involved in the work on student voice in the 2025-26 year including working with the organisation Unloc to review and refresh the college’s learner voice activity. This would commence with staff and student workshops and a member of the Board would link to this activity, starting by attending the staff workshop in January.
4.2	RESOLVED: The Student Union Annual Report was received and the Student Union Constitution 2025-26 approved.
4.3	Annual Safeguarding and Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) Training: Training was presented by the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) – the Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality. This covered the following in the context of the College: • Key guidance and legislation refresher including changes to the KCSIE guidance. • Local priorities from the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children Partnership (contextual safeguarding, education as a protective factor, sexual abuse and neglect). • Refreshing awareness of possible indicators of abuse and types of abuse. • Online safety for young people (content, content, conduct, commerce). • Operation encompass in relation to domestic abuse. • The importance of attendance (KCSIE). • Assurance that all college staff must read and sign to confirm at least part 1 of KCSIE and the safeguarding policies on the college’s 4Policy system.
4.4	Annual Safeguarding Prevent and Wellbeing Report and Policies: The DSL presented the annual report and policies, considered in advance of the meeting. The report provided a summary of key safeguarding measures undertaken throughout 2024-25 and to date in the

	2025-26 academic year, to give assurance that the College is carrying out its safeguarding duties effectively in line with responsibilities laid out in Keeping Children Safe in Education, Prevent Duty Guidance and other related guidance/policy documents. In summary, the report provided assurance information across the following areas: • Safeguarding leadership and training. • Staff continue to have access to appropriate supervision support through line manager 1-1 meetings and via the Employee Assistance Programme. Work this year will provide staff with more focused reflection meetings that are recorded more effectively to help relevant teams continue to develop their practice. • Engagement with external agencies including Cheshire East Safeguarding Children Partnership • Safeguarding Children in Education Settings (SCiES) team at Cheshire East section 175 audit was completed (local authority self-assessment tool to assess effectiveness of safeguarding measures in schools and educational institutions), with guidance from the SCiES team that the College should not expect to be 'effective' in every category. The self-assessment outcome was 'effective' with five criteria rated as 'partially effective', with clear actions in place and on track to fulfil these in a timely manner, with no concerns to escalate to the Board. • Student survey feedback positive on feeling safe in college, how to report a concern and where to go to access wellbeing support, with analysis by department and any slightly lower scoring areas picked up by the college safeguarding committee and outreach work undertaken. • Anti-bullying work is a key focus for continuing work into 2025-26 academic year. • Data breakdown including safeguarding cases with multi-agency involvement, student monitoring by the college and mental health and wellbeing monitoring. • Prevent and protective security. No prevent referrals were made to the in the 2024-25 academic year. The College's Prevent Risk Register was updated to reflect the latest Cheshire Counter Terrorism Local Profile (CTLP), provided at the start of November. The online space remains one of the primary influences and the College's online filtering and monitoring system provides effective monitoring, the Online Safety Policy developed as part of the safeguarding policies and reviewed by the DSL. • Audit committee reviewed assurance reporting at its meeting on 5 December 2025. It reported that the risk score remained within tolerance with reasonable assurance on management of risk in this area. Review in the Spring term would expect to move to substantial assurance with the addition of third party assurance from the internal audit service report on the implementation of the safeguarding reporting system CPOMS.
4.5	In follow up questioning, the main points clarified were: • Cybersecurity measures are strong with the college meeting 'cyber essentials' benchmark and working towards the higher benchmark of ISO27001 on information security management. • The College does assess incoming students itself and does not rely solely on information provided by schools. • Attendance is a constant focus with ongoing close monitoring and the resource invested in the attendance impact officers having positive impact but also emphasising the message that attendance is everybody's responsibility. • Mental health and wellbeing evidently a significant resource issue and assurance was provided on how cases are prioritised by the team, with weekly monitoring lists reviewed and revisiting cases constantly. • Challenge on how to know that the informal mechanisms to raise lower level concerns are effective. Evidence from surveys provides assurance on this and the internal audit service audit on safeguarding being carried out in the spring term could provide some useful feedback around confidence and knowledge. Staff voice mechanism used to test this out in addition.

	• The Board recorded that it expected to see the protective security lock down drill as a priority for action in 2025-26. ACTION. • Online training for governors was clarified and the induction training re-circulated on GovernorHub for any members to refresh this, as well as the requirement to confirm on GovernorHub all have read the updated 2025 KCSIE statutory guidance. ACTION
4.6	RESOLVED: The Annual Safeguarding Report was received and the safeguarding policies, reviewed in line with KCSIE 2025 and approved as part of the consent agenda item.
4.7	Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI): The Executive Director of People and Culture presented the Annual EDI Report, EDI Policy and Gender Pay Report for consideration and approval. Members had considered the reports in advance of the meeting and there were no substantive changes proposed to the policy. In summary the reporting provided assurance on provision of statutory information and duties to ensure the principles of equality diversity and inclusion are embedded within the College: • Learners: Positive impact of work to close learner attainment gaps as shown in the breakdown of learner achievement data section of the report. This is in the context of the college's proportion of learners with low prior attainment being higher than both the national average and land based national average. English and Maths prior attainment places the college in the bottom quartile of colleges nationally and is a declining picture. Despite this, learners making progress in both GCSE English and Maths is positive and in line with national rates. • Staff: Disability Confident and Mindful Employer status. Development of Menopause Policy and work associated with supporting employees experiencing perimenopause and menopause. Enhanced staff benefits range with a fully comprehensive employee assistance programme. • Gender Pay Gap Report: The percentage difference between the mean hourly rate for males (£15.97) and females (£13.37), indicating a gender pay gap of 16.3%. The College has made efforts to address this gap by promoting equal opportunities through recruitment and promotions, ensuring fair treatment of all staff irrespective of gender. Reaseheath College's Median Gender Pay Gap is 4.8% in favour of males, a significant decrease from the previous year's median of 10.8% in favour of males. • The EDI Action plan was considered, which the College EDI Committee would monitor, with a working group structure to ensure a focus on the 4Es in the College's Strategic Plan 2024-27: Excite – Resources Awareness and Engagement; Enrich – Equality Impact Assessment; Engage – Accessibility; Enable – Data Access and Use.

4.8	Questions raised and discussion covered the following main points:
	• Reason for lower attainment on entry for students – no migration to level 2 with two thirds of provision still at level 3, so no obvious reason for this. Previous year's data to be checked to see if this is a significant change to previous data. ACTION.
	• Higher education student disability data is high relative to other higher education providers and so it would be useful to see this broken down into more detail in future reporting. ACTION
	• Support for the proposed 2025-26 action plan with several points made including:
	    • Given the context of prior attainment, a key focus will need to be on the English and Maths strategy.
	    • Need to capture more detail about learners at point of entry and to be able to provide intersectionality of the core learner data.
	    • Education Partnership Manager role to focus on outreach activities to promote the college as a diverse, inclusive and exciting place to study within the wider community, regionally and nationally.
	    • The Board is accessing the Department for Education governor recruitment service to reach a wider, diverse community of potential governors.

4.9	RESOLVED: The Equality Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report, Action Plan and Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy were approved and the Gender Pay Report was

	approved for submission and publication on the College website.
4.10	Health and Safety Annual Report and Health and Safety Task and Finish Group Final Report: The Task and Finish Group Chair joined the meeting to report on the outcome of the group's work. He reported that the group had completed its objectives as tasked by the Board, and that the group held its last meeting in November. For assurance, he reported that the group considers a sustainable governance structure is in place, with ongoing oversight by the Executive Team, College Health and Safety Committee, and Audit Committee. There needs to be a continued focus on embedding the student competency framework and ensuring consistent application of risk assessments and safe operating procedures. The planned third-party independent audit will provide further assurance on these and all aspects of the action plan, which will support the college's commitment to continuous improvement in health and safety. This audit work will be reported into the Audit Committee. Members thanked the Task and Finish Group Chair for attending the meeting to give his report and for his work and the work of the governor and executive members of the group. The meeting confirmed agreement to the governance oversight structure going forwards. The meeting then turned to the annual health and safety reporting, presented by the Vice Principal, Finance and Resources. There were no proposed changes on the annual review of the policy. Members had considered the report in advance and in summary, the outcome of the discussion was: • The health and safety link governor attended the College Health and Safety Committee meetings and undertook regular health and safety learning walks. He confirmed that he had seen some strong practice in his activities as link governor. In addition, governors on learning walks had seen strong housekeeping aspects of practical sessions where the 5 Whats Board was used and dynamic risk assessments undertaken. • The British Safety Council Five Star Occupational Health and Safety Audit will provide a comprehensive gap analysis and support continuous improvement. The audit will be reported to the Audit Committee and used to inform future internal audit cycles. • The report provided effective oversight of the health and safety framework including action plan completion/progress, annual statistical data, riddor incident reporting, policy framework, staff training, statutory compliance testing and workplace occupational health. • Statistical data showed a need to increase near miss reporting with the reporting process simplified and a promotion campaign to raise awareness of the importance of near miss reporting – with the expectation to see an increase in this over the year. • An oversight and reporting process is in place for apprenticeship workplace incidents. • Assurance sought and received on COSHH (control of substances hazardous to health) storage on the farm and elsewhere on campus, with confirmation that all of these are recorded on the college system. • Audit Committee had considered risk exposure and level of assurance at its meeting on 5 December and reported the risk exposure reduced with the significant progress on the action plan, but with the recommendation that assurance remains partial assurance to be reviewed again in March 2026 with the planned British Safety Council external audit work important in providing substantial assurance in this area.
4.11	RESOLVED: The Annual Health and Safety Report was received and the Health and Safety Policy approved as part of the consent agenda item.
5. Strategy: Strategic Priorities Excite, Engage and Enable	
5.1	Principal's Report: The Principal provided his strategic report on strategic plan implementation progress and the College level KPI for approval for monitoring performance in 2025-26, with the key points made in discussion:

	• The external environment summary indicated potential impacts on the College strategy and this information would be used to inform further discussion at the forthcoming strategic day in January 2026.
	• An update on the strategic plan 4Es progress and linked strategic plan KPI indicated that at the end of year one the College can evidence good progress across the four strategic priority areas, with KPI reporting beginning to see evidence of the impact the 4Es approach.
	• In terms of the College level KPI monitored by the Board, there is evidence of improving KPI performance generally. Areas still red rated for 2024-25 performance were chiefly the English results which were a decline from the previous year, the core achievement rate which whilst improving has further to go and elements of the staff survey following a challenging year for the College.
	• The College level KPI 2025-26 had been considered at the relevant committee meetings during the term and were now presented for approval.
	• The drive to improve the consistency of the quality of delivery and support in every way, remains the biggest areas of focus.
	• Key other focus areas are:
	    • The work to stabilise and support staffing in hard to recruit areas.
	    • Responding to the external environment and especially the new Ofsted framework, post 16 Skills strategy and devolution for Cheshire and Warrington.
	    • The work to develop the curriculum plan to maximise alignment with the external environment, growth opportunities and progression pathways.
	    • Relentless focus on the 4E strategy to improve systems, engagement with future students, consistency of delivery and the day-to-day management of the high caseload of safeguarding and wellbeing support alongside enriching the experience for staff and students.

5.2	Strategic Risk: The Principal reported that the Health and Safety risk score has been reduced, though it remains the area where more assurance is needed within the next three months. This will be reported to Audit Committee in the spring term. Other higher risk areas remain People, though the executive and the Board recognised that this is an ongoing area of higher risk for the sector and it remained within risk tolerance currently. Risk areas reducing over the year to the current position now within tolerance were Financial Targets and Budget, Financial Sustainability and FE Quality, with continued positive direction of travel. Board assurance reporting from committees over the current term was recorded as: • SR1: Financial Management and Targets: Reasonable Assurance: within risk appetite tolerance • SR2: Financial Sustainability: Reasonable Assurance: within risk appetite tolerance • SR3: Quality and Student Outcomes: Substantial Assurance: HE and Apprenticeships within risk appetite. Reasonable Assurance: FE within risk appetite tolerance • SR4: Strategy and Leadership: Substantial Assurance: within risk appetite tolerance • SR5: Curriculum Skills and Stakeholders: Reasonable Assurance: within risk appetite tolerance • SR6: Infrastructure and Resources: Reasonable Assurance: within risk appetite tolerance • SR7: People: Reasonable Assurance: within risk appetite tolerance • SR 8 Safeguarding and Wellbeing: Reasonable Assurance: within risk appetite tolerance • SR 9 Health and Safety: Partial Assurance: Reduced but still outside risk appetite tolerance, with action by March 2026 to increase assurance level via third party audit to confirm management actions in place/effective. • SR 10 Legal and Regulatory: Substantial Assurance: within risk appetite tolerance
5.3	RESOLVED: The Board reviewed the external environment summary, welcomed the good progress evidenced on year one of the strategic plan 4 Es and formally approved the College

	level Key Performance Indicators for 2025-26.
5.4	Part B confidential item: Commercially confidential matter.
5.6	Chair’s Report: The Chair provided an overview of activities and engagement this term, including internal governance activity, staff and student engagement and external stakeholder engagement including sector events and the potential impacts of the external policy environment. She shared the Search and Governance Committee recommendation on the external review provider to carry out the external governance review in the spring term and proposed the annual self-assessment of governance report for approval. She also thanked Phil Gibbon on behalf of the Board as he steps down as staff governor and member of Quality and Standards Committee. She congratulated the Principal on behalf of the Board on his appointment as Deputy Lieutenant of Cheshire.
5.7	RESOLVED: Following consideration of quotes and proposals by the Search and Governance Committee, the Board approved the recommendation to commission the Association of Colleges’ (AoC) to provide the external governance review, led by Rob Lawson, a member of the FE Commissioner’s National Leaders of Governance team, an experienced chair of governors and a highly experienced reviewer for the AoC.
5.8	RESOLVED: The annual governance report was reviewed and the governance priorities for development in 2025-26 approved as: Excite: • Curriculum Skills and Stakeholder Committee working group on board level external stakeholder plan aligned to college engagement strategies needs development. • Better capture and evidence impact of board level stakeholder engagement. Enrich: • Succession planning focus on key senior roles on the Board that will require succession within the next two to three years including chair, vice chair, senior independent governor, safeguarding lead and health and safety lead • EDI reporting and oversight at Board level taken forwards in the context of the new Ofsted framework approach to inclusion. • Develop ways to promote a diversity of stakeholder experience and thought at board level. • Better capture and evidence impact of governor training and development. Engage: • Support and challenge to drive continued improvement in quality of teaching and learning across college. • Further develop effective board reporting including performance data reporting Enable: • Continue work on risk appetite and Board assurance. • Develop oversight and assurance in relation to AI and digital technology opportunity, risk and governance across education and support systems in college.
5.9	Year End Reporting: Assurance reporting was made to the meeting. This consisted of the Audit Committee Annual Report, internal audit service annual opinion and presentation by the financial statements’ auditor Forvis Mazars of the external audit completion report and management letter: • Forvis Mazars reported a clean audit of the financial statements, evidencing strong financial management and robust management accounts evidenced by the bridge report comparing management accounts to statutory accounts. • The meeting 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. • The meeting considered the financial statements, presented by the Vice Principal Finance and Resources and the Finance and General Purposes Committee’s report

	that it had reviewed the statements and recommended approval. • The Finance and General Purposes Committee reported that it had reviewed performance against financial objectives in 2024-25, considering the FE Commissioner's financial benchmarks. • All bank covenants have been met successfully. There had been no requirement to use the bank covenant waiver previously agreed with the bank as a precaution. • On debt service cover, the College's calculation differs from the FE Commissioner's methodology, as it aligns with the banks' approach, which places the College slightly below the FE Commissioner's measure because the College used its own funds to support capital investment in student resources. • On year end surplus the College was below the target 1-3%. The meeting queried the released provisions shown in the statements and took assurance that these were non-cash bearing and not a concern. • EBITDA remained well above the FE Commissioner's benchmark and above the College's 8% target. • Pay Costs and Benchmarking: Current pay costs were 59% (FE Commissioner benchmark: 65% for sixth form). The College ratio would always be lower as a land-based college. Outsourcing can impact this figure, so it is important to remain cautious about benchmarks. • The Finance and General Purposes Committee recommended the 2025-26 objectives unchanged. The Vice Principal Finance and General Purposes added that the College expects to achieve all bank covenants again. On FE Commissioner's debt service cover again, the College may be slightly below target but will be compliant in the following year. • The Finance and General Purposes Committee reported management accounts indicated no concerns on cash flow or key performance indicators.
5.10	RESOLVED: The Financial Statements for the year 31 July 2025 were approved and the Chair and the Principal were authorised to sign the statements and the College to submit the Financial Record, and the terms of the management representation letter were approved
5.11	RESOLVED: Committee reporting and unconfirmed minutes from the committee meetings were received and recorded.
5.12	RESOLVED: The following items were approved: 1. Remuneration Committee Annual Statement 2. Internal Audit Plan 2025-26. 3. Student Union Constitution 4. Gender Pay Report 5. Policy Approvals – Equality Diversity and Inclusion, Health and Safety, Online Safety, Safeguarding Adults, Child Protection and Safeguarding, Data Protection, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement. 6. Board Instrument and Articles of Government, Standing Orders, Scheme of Delegation, Board cycle of standard business. 7. Governor Policies - Governor Code of Conduct, Governor Conflict of Interest Policy, Policy on reimbursements of governor expenses, Procedure for complaints against the corporation, Procedure for obtaining independent legal advice, Attendance at Corporation Meetings, Governor Training and Development Policy, Governor Recruitment and Succession Planning Policy.
6. Concluding business	
6.1	There was no other business reported to the meeting.
6.2	The dates of the next meetings were confirmed as • Friday 30 January – Morning Learning Walks/Afternoon Strategy session • Friday 27 March – Morning Board Meeting

The meeting closed at 1pm, followed by lunch joined by staff members, including staff award winners.

Approved as a correct record 27 March 2026 Jane Cowell OBE (Chair)