

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporation held on Thursday, 13th November 2025 at 1730h in FO26 with participation by Teams.

Present: Nigel Holliday (Chair); Yvonne Bannister; Elaine Clinton (Vice Chair); Claire Dunn; Phil Jardine; Elaine Jordan; Michael Priestley; Michael Proudman; Robert Milburn; Chris Nattress; Professor Jill Stewart (from Min No)

Present Online: Yvonne Bannister; Elizabeth Hull; Valerie Pallister

Apologies: Peter Ellwood; Alistair Mason; Denise Rollo

Also present: Karen Wilson (Deputy Principal); Iain Glendinning (Vice Principal); Irene Farragher (DSL Min No 67/55); Jeanette McCallig (Quality Manager Min No 68/55); Jane Murray (Clerk)

65/65 Minutes

Resolved – that the minutes of the meeting held in confidential session on 30th September 2025 be approved and signed as a correct record, subject to the date being recorded as Tuesday.

66/65 Declarations of Interest

None received.

67/65 Boardroom Briefing-Safeguarding

Part 1 of Keeping Children Safe in Education had been tabled to all Governors with the Board papers for the previous meeting. The Designated Safeguarding Lead would now draw out a few changes, remind governors of their responsibilities and look at issues of Safeguarding at Lakes College over the past year. In particular, she noted that the need to ensure that policies and procedures and training were fit for purpose and that there was compliance.

She noted the need to take action to enable all children to have the best outcomes, whether that is help and support, providing protection and making sure they receive safe and effective care and preventing impairment of mental and physical health.

She noted that nationally:

- 1 in 20 children in the UK have been sexually abused;
- 1 in 14 have been physically abused;
- 1 in 10 have experienced neglect (this was a particular issue at Lakes)

It was added that around a third of child sexual abuse is by other children, with online grooming crimes against children increasing by 6% over the last six years.

She felt that staff were vigilant in respect of safeguarding and made 1453 reports last year. There were 72 referrals to the local authority with 92 learners subject to early help and child protection.

She continued to note the increase nationally in prevent referrals, noting that the number of arrests for under 18s has increased. It has doubled in the North West resulting in a backlog in response rates.

She continued to note that the most common of the safe guarding issues at Lakes centred around mental health; abuse (inc drugs and acohol); family and relationship issues.

The main changes in Keeping Children Safe in Education were to clarify that misinformation, disinformation and conspiracy theories were safeguarding harms and further clarification of filtering and monitoring and the use of AI, noting that children can be more at risk of 'fake news' online. She noted the role of college staff to make sure learners understood the risks and were kept safe online.

She provided reassurance to governors about the effectiveness of our filtering and monitoring services (which also filter AI products).

She continued to remind the Board of key changes in a child which might alert staff to a safeguarding issue. This included a change in performance at college, mood or behaviour changes, self-harming; mental health needs, increased absence or evidence of using drugs or alcohol.

She noted that it could and does happen here and again noted the need to remain vigilant, supported by the Safeguarding team.

She reminded the Board that Michael Priestley was the safeguarding governor for the Board.

The Safeguarding Link Governor added that he had been impressed by the approach of the safeguarding team which he felt was very professional and robust. He received reassurance that meetings were again well attended and engagement was good.

68/25 Stakeholder Report

The Quality Manager presented the feedback from stakeholder groups and surveys, complaints and compliments. It was felt that a significant majority of learners and employers would recommend the college.

Questions raised included the low level of engagement of apprentices in the survey at 9% which could not be considered to be valid data. It was felt that there needed to be closer monitoring throughout the time the survey was open and to make sure curriculum areas were informed.

Some further concern was raised about some of the feedback for HE. It was felt that in spite of varying approaches, it continued to be the case that the liaison committees were poorly attended and that those who attended were likely to have an issue. Improvement action included better communications, to provide refresher training for staff on conduct and learner engagement and to review gaps in course organisation.

Issues would be picked up in Self-assessment and would be monitored through the year.

69/25 Self-Assessment Report 2024-25

The Vice Principal presented a mature draft of the Self-assessment, which required some additional data and formatting, but was presented for approval. It is an assessment compiled from the bottom up of strengths and weaknesses of the college with grading according to the new Ofsted framework.

He added that the new grading system would mean that a majority of colleges would meet the 'expected' grading, with the criteria for being strong meaning that best practice is being widely shared internally and externally.

He noted that the commentary provided an open and honest account of strengths and weaknesses.

It was asked about the grading for apprenticeships and it was explained that ofsted required that it should be a 'secure' fit and it was felt that, mainly for legacy reasons, that there was some achievement data which remained too low. It was also noted that new starts/in-year data was significantly improved.

Noting the abundance of risks around apprenticeships, it was raised whether the demands of the new Ofsted framework should be reflected in the risk register. Discussion continued around the quality risks, particularly about those who may drop out, and it was felt key was to make sure college was involved in the employers' interview process. ***It was felt that risk register should be reviewed to ensure that risks were properly reflected in this context.***

It was asked whether compliance with systems had improved for apprenticeships. It was noted that the Audit Committee continued to monitor progress against the audit recommendations, one of which was about progress reviews. It was felt that there were green shoots and that meetings demonstrated a commitment to work together, albeit slow progress.

It was asked whether we could add a bit more context to the apprenticeship section to better reflect the context. It was felt that this would be beneficial to a number of areas in the report, which appeared quite bold and questioned whether, without the context, it painted an unduly negative picture. Although the Vice Principal felt that it painted a very honest picture, it was agreed that he would reflect and review and bring an amended version to the Board meeting of 4th December 2025.

Jill Stewart joined the meeting

It was asked about analysis of attendance and felt that those with an EHCP, high needs, Idd declared or those on free school meals seemed to be the ones that attended worse, felt to be a reflection of circumstances.

It was asked what more could be done to encourage the uptake of free school meals and felt that they had put in representation from finance at open evenings and hoped to encourage uptake alongside bursary support and bus passes. It was also felt that enrichment had an important role to play, noting that there would be a trip to Bali (grant supported) for these learners to widen their horizons.

It was raised about parent engagement and asked whether there was any progress on a parent portal. This was in progress, and sounded simple, but here were a number of nuances (eg making sure the contacts were up-to-date to reflect family circumstances for example in terms of lead contact). In the interim, marketing was working on a dedicated parents' page on the website.

It appeared that the number of Level 3 learners was dropping and wondered what steps were being taken. Reassurance was offered that IAG was happening by the coaches with conversations throughout their last academic year.. Destination data was externally compiled and would be tabled to the Board. It was asked who made sure that that IAG conversations were taking place and noted that the COLs took responsibility.

It was noted from a link governor that foundation learners almost all go into positive destinations and therefore a positive destination could be wider than paid employment, which was accepted.

Resolved -

- 1) That the SAR be reviewed before approval in respect of context and comments
- 2) That the Risk Register be reviewed for apprenticeships.
- 3) That progression or destination data be tabled to a committee or board.

70/25 KPIs

The Deputy Principal noted that the positive recruitment position for 16-19 this year. It was noted that there was a comparatively greater number of late starters this year, for which the reasons were as yet unclear.

Adult enrolments were low and the College would continue to work with partnerships.

Apprenticeships starts are down against target, noting again the downturn in the supply chain (and which may also account for the increased recruitment on the 16-19 contract).

Attendance continued at 85%, on target, although English and maths attendance remained very much the same as last year. Apprenticeship and HE attendance was strong.

It was noted that there was a new way of assessing progress throughout the year, which would become evident throughout KPI monitoring during the year.

Apprentices beyond planned end date were marginally above the national target at 9%, but lower than at the same point last year.

Unfunded apprentices were, however, higher than the recommended target at 14% (noting previous comments about apprenticeships reflected in the risk register).

It was noted that there had been a significant improvement in the timeliness of apprenticeship progress reviews.

Sickness absence was higher than we would have liked, but not hugely high and staff turnover remained a challenge although below what had been anticipated to date.

It was asked about a strategy for staff turnover and it was noted that the same point had been raised in the Finance and Corporate Working Group, and it had been requested that the HR Strategy be refreshed to document the initiatives underway. The Deputy Principal added that there was also a staff recruitment and retention policy under development.

The Board noted that the cash position was very strong.

Remembering that in developing a standalone case, effort had been made to make sure that the underpinning position, without the SL contract, remained strong and the concern was that the downturn in the supply chain apprenticeship market could have an impact on sustainability. The Deputy Principal noted that she had already seen signs of a downturn in the apprenticeship market and had taken the decision to revise down the income stream in the financial plan.

Welcoming the healthy 16-19 recruitment, it was asked whether T-Levels had seen strong recruitment. It was felt that there was good performance, but not as many as had been predicted on some courses (eg the mechanical T-Level had low numbers and was being taught with another T-Level course. There had, however, been a healthy start to T-Level numbers for this year.

Turning to the KPI targets for 2025-26, the Vice Principal noted that the Achievement rate targets were particularly ambitious reflecting the points by a Board member that these would be areas of focus for the board.

It was asked about the attendance target and felt that it was reasonable and a progression from last year.

Asked about the new value added progress measures, this would reflect progress greater than 0% with the aim of securing more merits and distinctions.

Asked about English and maths, a new strategy does recognise that there is a need for some stepping stone alternatives.

Asked about apprenticeship breaks in learning, it was felt that this element was not an issue for Lakes College. It was also noted that the apprenticeship pipeline had fallen and was now at 30 days, comparatively strong.

Resolved – that KPI targets for 2025-26 be approved.

(Action since: 'stretch' targets have been circulated since the meeting).

71/25 Curriculum Update

Some aspects of performance had already been noted under KPIs and the SAR.

It was also noted that apprenticeship performance had been comparatively strong and whether there were ways in which good practice was being shared. It was felt that there was a lot of work going on to share best practice. It was noted that although apprenticeship performance had improved, it still needed to be higher.

The Vice Principal reviewed the Ofsted framework which went live from 10th November 2025.

A review of the apprenticeship achievement data included in the report was requested as it didn't seem to add up and it was agreed that this would be reviewed. Although apprenticeship recruitment was down overall, reassurance was offered that the SL contract was largely as had been forecast.

72/25 Governance

Following interview, it was

Resolved –

- 1) That Ingrid Richardson be appointed as the HE student Governor from 4th December 2025 until 3rd December 2026, renewable for a further year by mutual agreement.
- 2) That Thierry Mvalo be appointed as the FE Student Governor from 4th December 2025 to 31st July 2025. Thierry Mvalo was not intending at this stage to return to college and therefore this would be his end date.
- 3) It is conditional that the appointments last as above for as long as both remain in college (a student governor cannot remain if they leave college).

The Governance self-assessment was received and noted. It would translate into the governance action plan for this year.

The Board received and noted the FE Commissioner's Autumn newsletter.

The programme for 4th December 2025 was approved and the Board noted that the online meeting on 11th December was the meeting at which the financial statements were approved.

There had been a number of committee meetings over the past month and the respective Chairs noted:

Lifts were now fully up and running, having been replaced over the summer with grant funding. In respect of Lakes College Enterprises Ltd, cleaning was doing better than catering, with various aspects under review.. They had also considered a HR report, as mentioned earlier in the meeting.

The Quality Working Group had taken an earlier look at self-assessment, focusing on health and social care; construction; engineering; English and maths and HE. The Committee had been impressed by the scrupulous honesty of the staff and the consistent focus on attendance. The rest was documented in the minutes. One thing the Committee Chair wanted to draw to the attention of fellow governors was that with the departure of the Construction COL, the remaining COLs were comparatively inexperienced and assurance was sought that support was in place.

For Search and Governance Committee, a review of Governance in the past year had taken place. It was noted that attendance had been 83.5%, above target and sector average.

The Committee had also noted how impressed they had been with the new governors this year, who already felt like longer-standing members of the team.

They had considered the External Review of Governance scope.

73/25 Confidential Session and Minutes

Resolved –

- 1) To move into confidential session
- 2) That the minutes of the meeting held in confidential session of 30th September 2025 (amending to Tuesday as before) be approved and signed as a correct record.

74/25 Finance Update – confidential

The Deputy Principal updated the Board in respect of financial matters.

75/25 Strategy Update – confidential

(This minute is not redacted).

The Principal noted the recent Post 16 white paper and this would be monitored with a view to opportunities and future strategy development.

The College was still waiting for a non-disclosure agreement to be able to progress a potential business opportunity.

It was noted that the National College for Nuclear had been renamed as the National College for Nuclear and Clean Energy.

It was asked how well placed the college was to respond to the White Paper and it was felt that it was a bit early and the sector was waiting for more detail. It was felt, however, that the college was well placed to offer V-Levels and this development may encourage greater collaboration with schools again. How it will be funded will drive delivery.

Staff and staff governors left the meeting

76/25 Senior Staffing – Confidential

(This minute has been partially redacted).

Resolved –

- 1) That the selection panel be delegated to take a decision in respect of appointment of a new governance professional (the two candidates' CVs having been circulated to the whole board).

- 2) That the Search and Governance Committee be delegated to take a decision on the external review of governance.
- 3) That the Job Description of the Deputy Principal be approved.
- 4) That the salary level (*redacted*) of the Deputy Principal be approved

The meeting closed at 1950h