

PETER SYMONDS COLLEGE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS

HELD ON MONDAY 23 FEBRUARY 2026 at 3.00 PM

Present:

Lynne Evans (Chair)	Richard Priestley
Syamantak Bhattacharya	Derek Wiles
Joanna Townsend	Aman Basra
John White	Marc Bishop
Oscar Holloway	Daniel Spiers
Michael Wesley	Ed Vokes
Caroline Rand	Sara Russell
Lucy Walsh Waring	Alan Sydney

In Attendance:

Nick Allen	(Vice Principal)
Lucy Edevane	(Deputy Principal Welfare & Progression)
Stephen Cowling	(Deputy Principal Stakeholders, Systems & Services)
Irfan Khan	(Finance Director)
Vicky Owen	(Clerk)
Sam Carrasco, Lesley Mallarky, Isobel Sallon Simons	(for item 2 only)

Item		Action
1.	Apologies – Hugh Stafford-Smith, Dave Stickland (co-opted governor), Khadijeh Masty, Lucy Hale, Liv Denton.	
1.1	The Chair welcomed Marc Bishop (Parent Governor) to his first meeting and invited him to introduce himself which he did.	
2.	Presentation from Staff – “Meeting Skills Needs” <i>Paper shared after the meeting: Presentation from Staff</i>	
2.1	SC introduced the staff and explained the rationale for the shared presentation. He reminded the Board that the College must work to understand and meet skills needs at a local, regional and national level. In doing this, the College must work with stakeholders; the speakers aimed to show examples of how their teams are doing this. SC said that work like this goes on across the College, resulting in the delivery of some very exciting events.	
2.2	The following curriculum leaders spoke to the Board about each of their areas: Lesley Mallarky (Head of Subject, Psychology); Sam Carrasco (Head of Keyboard on behalf of the Music department); Isobel Sallon Simons (Head of English Language & Literature on behalf of the English department). Each provided an overview of events in their area as outlined in the presentation. They involved participation not only from College students but also from those from local schools. External visitors made important contributions alongside College staff.	
2.3	The Chair thanked the staff for their very interesting presentation.	
	Questions from the Board	

<p>2.4</p> <p>2.5</p>	<p>The Board asked whether the events are open to students who do not study the subjects in question. The speakers explained that this varies according to the event. They also said that, even amongst students studying the subject, the level of involvement varies e.g. some elect to spend the whole day acting as hosts for external speakers.</p> <p>The Board asked whether participation in these events has inspired any students to continue their study of the subject at HE who might otherwise not have done so. The staff replied that they hope so, but do not know whether it is the case. They explained that, whether or not the events influence HE course choices, staff feel that they provide a really valuable experience for students, giving them ideas for potential careers and providing networking opportunities. Above all, they show to students the possibilities that exist so that they ‘dare to dream’ and ‘jump higher’.</p> <p>(SC, ISS and LM left the meeting)</p>	
<p>3.</p> <p>3.1</p> <p>3.2</p>	<p>Sara Russell awarded an OBE for services to education</p> <p>On behalf of the Board, the Chair congratulated SR on her considerable achievement in being awarded an OBE. SR’s award recognises her work throughout her career in FE, reflecting the strength of her leadership and her commitment to inclusion and the celebration of diversity. She expressed the view that the College is fortunate to have her as Principal. Other Board members joined in congratulating SR on her achievement.</p> <p>SR thanked the Chair, reflecting that she has benefited from tremendous support from colleagues throughout her career, not least from staff at this College. She feels humbled to receive this award and lucky to lead such an exceptional institution.</p>	
<p>4.</p>	<p>Minutes of the meeting dated 8 December 2025</p> <p>The open and confidential minutes were accepted as a correct record.</p>	
<p>5.</p> <p>5.1</p>	<p>Matters arising</p> <p>Item 3.4 – this relates to the proposals for structured visits and for an informal event for Governors, both of which are on the agenda. The Clerk circulated a sign-up sheet inviting governors to commit to attend the structured visits. Completed.</p>	
<p>6.</p> <p>6.1</p> <p>6.2</p> <p>6.3</p>	<p>Principal’s Matters</p> <p><i>Paper circulated: Principal’s Matters 2 February 2026</i></p> <p>SR summarised the key points of the document which is the same as the version which went to P&R:</p> <p>LEP legacy funding opportunity – SR explained that unfortunately the College now been told that it was unsuccessful in securing funding under this bid.</p> <p>OfS consultation – SR said that this is about stripping back ‘red tape’ for providers who deliver HE but are already regulated as FE colleges.</p> <p>Government consultation on a social media ban – SR said that young people are being pushed extremely worrying content by algorithms; older people with different social media profiles will not be seeing it. She said that there</p>	

	<p>was a very good speaker on this topic at a recent Mercers’ event and that the College is looking at the possibility of them coming to speak to staff.</p> <p>Questions from the Board</p> <p>6.4 Regarding social media, the Board asked whether students are showing any of the offensive content to teachers. SMT said that they are not aware of this and that the College needs to do its best to equip students with the ability to think critically about what they are receiving. Boys are exposed to deeply misogynistic content.</p> <p>6.4.1 The Board asked whether the College has considered trying to help educate parents. SR replied that this is under discussion. There is an organisation https://progressivemasculinity.co.uk/ which runs workshops and SMT are considering whether that model could be adapted to work at the scale of this college.</p> <p>6.4.2 Given that such content is more prevalent, the Board asked whether staff are seeing more directly associated offensive behaviour manifesting in students in recent years. LE said that they see it in some individual cases, but not generally. She commented that girls seem more ready to report such behaviour than they had been in the past, but the number of reports remains low.</p> <p>6.5 Referring to the LEP funding, the Board asked if the College received feedback as to why it was unsuccessful. IK said that they were told that the programme was greatly oversubscribed and that, as a result of the large number of applicants, feedback will not be given. However, he has asked the organisers to note that, should any successful recipients be unable to proceed, this College is ready to start work and would welcome a late award.</p>	
<p>7.</p> <p>7.1</p> <p>7.2</p> <p>7.3</p> <p>7.3.1</p>	<p>Governors’ Snapshot as at February 2026 <i>Paper circulated: Snapshot 2025-26 V2 Feb</i></p> <p>NA drew the Board’s attention to the following items:</p> <p>Attendance data – there has been an improvement, particularly in the U6. The Board noted that L2 attendance has gone down and asked if SMT know why this is. NA said that analysis shows that it is those with higher lever GCSE scores who are more likely to be absent. More of those students have been directed to a L2 course this year and it may be that they are not happy being in a L2 group for a year, rather than going straight to L3.</p> <p>Retention – retention is at a record high. NA said that this may reflect work done at enrolment to make sure that students join the right courses. He reminded the Board that, not only is this good news for students, but it also has positive financial implications as there is an element of funding which is linked to retention.</p> <p>Key Priorities – NA said that lozenge 9 is amber because one of those recently appointed staff has left mid-year, drawing further attention to the need to support those new in post.</p> <p>He also said that item 34 (re improvement of the estate) will also go amber at the next review because the delay in the College receiving information on</p>	

	the scope of the School Rebuilding Programme (SRP) means that projects are on pause.	
8.	<p>Risk Management <i>Papers available: draft minutes of meeting of 14 January 2026; Strategic Risk Register (RR) & Board Assurance Map 2025-26 January review; Prevent RR Jan 26; IT register Jan 26; Operational RR 2024-25; Risk Mgt Meeting Schedule 2025-26; Risk Mgt Policy 2025</i></p> <p>NA reported on the Risk Management meeting of 14 January 2026. The RMG reviewed the Strategic, Prevent and IT registers.</p>	
8.1	<p>IT Risk Register - NA explained that the latest advice is to focus less on prevention and more on how the organisation would respond to a cyber-attack i.e. ‘when’ rather than ‘if’. The Board asked from where the College receives advice on this risk. NA said that there has recently been an internal audit and commented that the auditors seemed very knowledgeable. Additionally, the College is part of the JISC network https://jisc.ac.uk/ as well as using other sector links. SR said that SMT has detailed plans in place in case of an attack will be carrying out a scenario-based exercise later this week.</p>	
8.1.2	<p>SMT commented that there is work in progress about the use of external devices on the College network and also requiring students to use multi-factor authentication to access College accounts.</p>	
8.2	<p>Strategic Risk Register – NA said that the SRR has been remapped to the new Strategic Plan. He also reminded the Board that the College’s perceived risk regarding enrolment numbers is not a failure to recruit sufficient students but the potential for reputational damage associated with turning down applicants.</p>	
8.2.1	<p>Regarding curriculum change, NA said that leaders in the sector seem to feel that colleges will be able to run the threatened courses in September 2026, but this is by no means certain.</p>	
8.2.2	<p>The Board asked why item 6.1 ‘Failure to achieve outstanding outcomes for students’ is amber. NA said that, notwithstanding excellent student achievement data, one cannot be complacent and must be vigilant.</p>	
8.3	<p>Prevent Risk Register – NA said that there is no new intelligence from the police etc necessitating any change to this register. The Board asked whether students are subject to ongoing monitoring after online activity has been flagged. LE said that they are spoken to and a note is placed on a student’s file, but staff have not felt it necessary to monitor their activity ongoing; she thought that this might be problematic in terms of privacy. She said that most activity turns out to be innocent, although such activity has formed part of a Prevent referral in the context of wider issues.</p>	

<p>9.</p> <p>9.1</p> <p>9.2</p> <p>9.3</p> <p>9.4</p> <p>9.5</p>	<p>Report from the Search & Governance Committee <i>Papers circulated: Search mins Draft Jan 26; Study Support & LDD Link Governor Draft 2026; Conflict of Interest Policy Governors Draft 2026</i></p> <p>LWW was absent from the Committee, so JT chaired and reported to the Board. She said that the Committee spent quite a lot of time on succession planning and was keen for members to move to new committees which then benefit from wider experience. She thanked governors for accommodating this.</p> <p>The Committee discussed the next External Governance Review process which is due in spring 2027. They may suggest using the same assessor as last time.</p> <p>Other matters included a conversation as to whether eligibility for the role of Parent Governor could be expanded to allow carers to apply and whether the name could be changed accordingly. The Committee felt this is an important question which could help improve inclusivity, agreeing to return to it when there is a vacancy.</p> <p>The Committee was pleased to recommend the appointment of Rev Chris Curry as Diocesan nominee to join the Board.</p> <p>Resolved: the Board approved</p> <p>1) the appointment of Oscar Holloway to the Policy & Resources Committee (moving from Audit);</p> <p>2) the appointment of Ed Vokes to the Audit Committee;</p> <p>3) the appointment of Derek Wiles to the Search Committee (moving from C&QA);</p> <p>4) the appointment of Marc Bishop to the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee. All the above with effect from 24 February 2026.</p> <p>5) the appointment of Revd Chris Curry (Diocesan nominee) to the Board on a date to be agreed;</p> <p>6) the Conflict of Interest Policy (Governors) as per the draft circulated;</p> <p>7) the Role description for the Study Support Link Governor as per the draft circulated.</p>	
<p>10.</p> <p>10.1</p>	<p>Report from the P&R Committee <i>Papers circulated: P&R mins Draft Feb 26; Finance Report February 26; Charging Policy and Procedures 26 27 Draft; ToR P&R 2026 Draft</i></p> <p>JT said that she and JW had been taken on a visit to the Catering Department before the Board meeting and that it was very interesting to see the investment put in, how the department responds to student needs, its work on sustainability etc. She encouraged other governors to take up offers to join visits when possible.</p> <p>JT invited IK to present his finance report to the Board followed by an update on the estate.</p>	

<p>10.2</p> <p>10.2.1</p> <p>10.3</p> <p>10.4</p> <p>10.5</p> <p>10.6</p> <p>10.7</p>	<p>Finance</p> <p>2025/26 Forecast Outturn Position – IK said that the actual figures are as at the end of December. AHED is on budget. The number of boarders is below the forecast, but the impact on income is currently modest. Cash flow is strong.</p> <p>The Board asked about in year growth funding and IK replied that, although the government publishes a formula, their pot is finite and so colleges cannot be sure what they will receive at this point. IK will review the budget when the figure is confirmed.</p> <p>Estates</p> <p>Schools Rebuilding Programme – the College is still awaiting news on the scope of the project. Drone surveys were conducted over half term but there is one survey outstanding. For the benefit of newer members, the Clerk asked IK to explain the difference between this and previous projects. That is, previously the College has paid for capital projects itself and/or done so with the assistance of grant funding. On those occasions, the College has managed the preparation and build process. The SRP is different in that the preparatory and build phases are entirely funded and managed by the DfE, albeit that they would liaise with the College about how to organise work alongside the day-to-day operation of the site. The College would be responsible only for loose equipment such as furniture and IT hardware. In answer to a question from the Board, IK confirmed that there is no financial risk to the College.</p> <p>IK explained that the AHED building is outside the scope of the SRP and SMT would like to propose work on that, but want to wait for confirmation re the SRP plans which would influence the priority given to the AHED project.</p> <p>Departments moved into the refurbished Kelso building over half term. Facilities include a new prayer room and offices.</p> <p>The College is applying for planning permission to keep the temporary buildings for contingency purposes in the light of SRP and other potential work.</p> <p>Resolved: the Board approved</p> <p>1) the Charging Policy & Procedures 2026/27 as per the draft circulated;</p> <p>2) the Terms of Reference of the Committee as per the draft circulated</p>	
<p>11.</p> <p>11.1</p> <p>11.2</p>	<p>Oxbridge Report</p> <p><i>Paper circulated: Oxbridge Report to Governors Feb 2026</i></p> <p>LKE said that 57 students have received offers from Oxford and Cambridge. As usual, more had applied to the former but the success rate was similar.</p> <p>LKE commented that some students who meet widening participation criteria have received offers despite lower GCSE scores; a member of the Careers team does SUN work https://www.sunoutreach.org/ which involves supporting disadvantaged students.</p>	

<p>11.3</p> <p>11.4</p>	<p>The Board asked on what basis the universities make offers i.e. to what extent it is dependent on their GCSE scores. LKE said that they use a combination of predicted grades, entrance tests, references and GCSE scores. The reference template now has a section for information on extenuating circumstances. The Board asked if the College prepares students for the entrance tests and LKE says that it does not specifically and explained that the tests are taken off site at external centres.</p> <p>Several students had benefitted from practice interviews with governors and LKE thanked governors for their very valuable participation.</p>	
<p>12.</p>	<p>Student Governor Report</p> <p>Both Student Governors had sent their apologies, but three governors (LE, RP and JW) had a pre-Board lunch with members of the SU which they found a very positive experience. They reported that students had a lot of news about their charitable work and other events, including planning for this year's Prom. They explained what they are doing about sustainability and also how the SU works with the Student Parliament. They reported that the main challenge that students face is a lack of social space, particularly areas with seating. The governors found the students both eloquent and enthusiastic about their college experience.</p>	
<p>13.</p>	<p>Health & Safety (standing item)</p> <p>IK said that there are no RIDDOR reportable incidents to report and no other concerns. A Board member asked about the reference in the Safety Committee minutes to unauthorised members of the public accessing the Science Centre. SMT reported that, on investigation, it appeared that it was an isolated incident. All staff are expected to challenge unaccompanied adults who are not wearing ID badges.</p>	
<p>14.</p> <p>14.1</p> <p>14.2</p>	<p>Appointment of a panel for selection of a new Clerk</p> <p>The Chair expressed her regret that VO is leaving her post as Clerk. The Instrument and Articles set out some procedural requirements and the Remuneration Committee proposes that the Board agrees that a panel of that Committee's members is appointed to carry out the selection. This is likely to comprise LE, JT, LWW and SR but it will depend on governors' availability. A number of staff will also be involved in a carousel of activities.</p> <p>The Board approved the appointment of a selection panel from members of the Remuneration Committee and as described.</p>	
<p>15.</p> <p>15.1</p> <p>15.2</p>	<p>Any other business</p> <p>Events - The Clerk drew the Board's attention to the dates of various College events coming up, to which they are invited. Governors can book tickets or ask the Clerk to do so.</p> <p>Strategy & Training Day – The Clerk drew the Board's attention to the venue and said that a programme will be issued nearer the time. The Chair explained that the day will include an informal session to enable Board development and discussion on governance. Governors will be asked to consider some questions in advance.</p>	

15.3	<p>Bios – The Clerk invited governors to check their bios on the College website and let her know if there is anything to be updated. (Staff left the meeting.)</p>	
16. 16.1 16.2	<p>Remuneration Policy <i>Paper circulated: Remuneration Policy draft 2026</i></p> <p>Although this Policy was recently reviewed, further changes were proposed by the Remuneration Committee following the publication of a new SFCA model.</p> <p>Resolved: the Board approved the Remuneration Policy as per the draft circulated</p>	
17.	<p>Private business There was no private business.</p>	
18.	<p>Date of next meeting: Monday 11 May 2026 at 3pm. There being no other business the meeting ended at 5.15 pm</p>	