

CORPORATION BOARD of UNITED COLLEGES GROUP
Minutes of the Finance and Resources Committee
Monday 29 September 2025, 6 pm – by Zoom

Members Present: Alex Fyfe, Nadia Babar (staff governor), Ross Mackenzie (Chair), Alastair Procter, Laura Griffin, Stephen Davis, Franklin Asante.

In attendance: Zoë Lawrence (Director of Governance), Amanda Thorneycroft (Chief Finance Officer). Paul Bradley (Director Business Intelligence), Nadia El Atrash (HR Operational Manager), Aurora Lewis Green (Head of Marketing & Communications), James Wilson (Principal), Heather Cross (External Reviewer - observer).

1	<p>Welcome and apologies for absence. RM welcomed everyone to the meeting. There was 100% attendance.</p>
2	<p>Declarations of Interest in the agenda items No declarations of interest were made.</p>
3	<p>Minutes of meeting held on 16 June 2025. The minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2025 were approved as an accurate record.</p> <p>Matters Arising</p> <p>a. Standing Financial Instructions RM reminded the Committee that this issue dated back to March 2025 when AT proposed changes to the authorisation levels in the Standing Financial Instructions. Governors raised questions about the level of increased risk associated with the changes and what mitigations were being put in place. The Committee to date had not received an adequate response to their questions so it had been deferred to this meeting. The paper provided included an annex with the changes, level of risk quantified and action as necessary. Members were aware why the changes were being made so that there was consistency across different types of expenditure, delegating some authority to budget holders and other members of the SLT. The new finance system would reflect the authorisation levels in the purchase ordering system and there would be visibility throughout. AF said that she was pleased to see the clarification and that it included the segregation of duties, more than one signatory, the ability to limit specific suppliers and overall found the paper reassuring. She suggested that the authorisation levels be checked in the draft provided before being presented to Corporation for approval. RM was in agreement and thought the controls set out were helpful. The Committee resolved to recommend the Standing Financial Instructions to the Corporation for approval.</p> <p>b. Inclusive Talent Strategy NEA explained that the strategy had been amended at sections 2 and 4 to include additional reference to performance and accountability of staff, and that the format had been improved to make it more accessible. AP commented that it read well and asked what measures would be used to monitor the inclusion targets. NEA said that the metrics in the Balance Score Card were currently being revised, and it was hoped that some of the new measures being introduced would help capture this. The Committee resolved to approve the Inclusive Talent Strategy.</p>

STRATEGIC

(Papers circulated in advance)

i. People, Culture & Growth (PCG) / Robust Financial Health BSC

PB reported that the HR metrics in balance score card (BSC) were stable and that they cross referenced with the risk register later on the agenda. He said that some new metrics were being developed to be included on the BSC for PCG and were likely to include staff turnover and Investors in People (IIP) accreditation. A paper on this was due at the Corporation meeting in October. FA asked if it was necessary to progress through the four IIP levels or if it was possible to skip any. NEA said that the incremental approach was favoured as missing one made it quite difficult. Finance KPIs were generally end of year measures and were mostly met.

ii. Enrolment Numbers Funding Allocation

JW explained the target number for 16-18-year-old enrolments and progress towards this at the current time. Enrolments exceeded target currently, but attrition was expected between now and day 42 (15 October) so it would not be known until then what the final position would be. Enrolment had begun ahead of GCSE results day and ended on 26 September. Seven courses had been taken out, but eight had been brought in. On Adult Skills Fund (ASF) enrolments were just short of target, but enrolment continued onto short courses throughout the year so was not a concern. The funding allocation was anticipated to be aligned with the expected enrolment levels (i.e. funding consistent with provision spend). Apprenticeships were also in a good position with 172 new starts and a further cohort starting later in October.

AT explained the lag learner funding for 16-18-year-olds and that the funding allocation for this would not change in year. ASF was clawed back if not delivered against it, but this has not happened and if there was any under delivery then a subcontracting route would be utilised. An additional £600k had been received for Free Courses for Jobs which would be a variation to the July budget.

RM commented that the position appeared to be positive on income at the moment and that enrolment had progressed favourably this year. He asked how UCG compared with other London colleges. SD said that there appeared to be a difference between inner and outer London colleges, and that closing the Wembley campus had not impacted on enrolment at all. He also referred to further opportunities to enrol 16-18-year-olds through Fresh Start schemes in November and January at Willesden though this sometimes caused disruption at the Paddington Campus. He was aware that at a couple of other London colleges their 16-18 enrolment was down on the previous year, with another level with the previous year. He said that the focus now was on aggressively pursuing student attendance and retention. Student behaviour at the beginning of the academic year was also unpredictable at Paddington. Several students had been suspended or excluded already.

iii. VFM of enrolment marketing campaign

ALG presented her paper setting out marketing activity for enrolment covering organic and paid media, historical spend, and the costs per click and conversion, and wider awareness raising. Her paper showed that there had been a 5-10% increase in enrolment rates on the previous year although marketing spend had gradually decreased/levelled. The information gathered would be used to direct how the budget would be split the following year, but overall it was achieving value for money. FA asked if it was the intention for enrolment to be entirely online at some point in the future. ALG said that

	<p>this was a possibility, but that checking exam certifications for prior learning was often more difficult online. The Committee thanked ALG for the really informative and detailed paper which had been frequently requested in prior years. AF noted that only a third of the overall marketing budget was spent on enrolment and she would have expected it to be a larger proportion. SD said he also thought the paper was well written and mentioned that there would soon be a new website which would better articulate the student journey for enrolment, and an admissions department to increase the conversion rate acknowledging the value of quality of teaching & learning, customer care and teaching experience as part of successful enrolment campaigns.</p> <p>iv. Financial Risk Register There were no significant changes to the risk register from the previous version shared in June. This was provided for information.</p> <p>v. People, Culture & Growth Risk Register There were no significant changes to the risk register from the previous version shared in June. This was provided for information.</p>
5	<p>HR <i>(Papers circulated in advance)</i></p> <p>i. HR Workforce Composition Report NEA highlighted the main points from the report which included that there was now a slightly higher proportion of female employees, a reduction in the number of staff declaring a disability, staff turnover had increased slightly though this was thought to be due to increased numbers of permanent staff and performance management measures, and a slight reduction in the sickness rate. AP asked about the length of service by job family and if this reflected head count. There was a small error on the paper which had transposed two columns making this unclear. AP suggested separating out those sick intermittently verses those on long-term sick to better understand the trends. LG commented on the number of staff with length of service less than 2 years and how this might impact on the culture. AF compared the proportion of teaching and non-teaching staff, and it was clarified that LSAs whilst student facing were under support staff or casual contracts. Agency staff were being used much less which had reduced costs. SD reminded the Committee of the benchmarking information shared earlier in the year which they may find useful to refer to. The Committee thanked NEA for the report which was noted for information.</p> <p>ii. Staff Sickness Absence Policy NEA explained that although this policy was not due for review just yet some changes had been made to better manage sickness absence. These included medical suspension, staff receiving treatment overseas, details on occupational health referrals and the ability to move straight to stage 2 in exceptional circumstances. All the policies being reviewed by the committee at this meeting had been reviewed by the college's HR lawyers. AP proposed an alternative wording at para 12.3. Members also discussed the increase in medical treatment overseas which was often for cosmetic surgery. It was suggested that as this was elective cosmetic treatment that unpaid leave or annual leave be used in place of sickness absence. The Committee had delegated authority to approve this policy. The Committee resolved to approve the Staff Sickness Absence Policy.</p> <p>iii. Staff Discipline Policy NEA said that whilst a version of the policy had been provided showing the changes made in track changes it had essentially been rewritten with several sections reworded to better set</p>

	<p>out the process and be clearer. The Committee welcomed the changes and had no other questions. The Committee resolved to recommend the Staff Discipline Policy to the Corporation for approval.</p> <p>iv. Staff Grievance Policy The staff grievance policy had undergone a similar review to that of the Staff Discipline Policy with improvements to how the processes were set out and greater consistency with other policies. The Committee resolved to recommend the Staff Grievance Policy to the Corporation for approval.</p> <p>v. Staff Code of Conduct Members discussed whether the inclusion of tone of voice in how staff addressed other staff and students should be included more explicitly in this Code of Conduct. There was general agreement that the requirements to refrain from rudeness already in the Code were sufficient and there was a concern that often tone of voice could be a perception and subjective in nature. It was agreed that no further changes were to be made. The Committee resolved to recommend the Staff Code of Conduct to the Corporation for approval.</p>
6	<p>FINANCE</p> <p>i. Financial Outturn 2024/25 – Management Accounts (July) The end of year position showed a surplus of £1.2m against an original budgeted surplus of approx. £500k. This was largely because of accounting adjustments in the release of provisions where there was now confidence of no clawback. The increase in 16-18 funding had been spent on the pay honoraria for all staff. There continued to be issues with the receipt of borough income from SEND provision. Apprenticeship income was as expected, and payroll was consistent with the reforecast noting that there were some vacant posts. It was also confirmed that the intercompany debt between UCG and CWC Enterprises (subsidiary) had been repaid at the end of the year. RM noted the overall good performance and thanked AT for the report.</p> <p>ii. Staff pay negotiations A brief verbal update was provided for this item, noting that AoC had made a 4% pay recommendation, though UCG had provided a 2% provision in the budget. Pay negotiations were yet to start.</p> <p>iii. Banking Covenants It was noted at the previous meeting of this committee that the banking covenant which measures the ratio of college borrowing against operating surplus would be breached at year end. The amending agreement was now prepared for approval and signing and had been included in the papers. It was also noted that where an amendment to a banking covenant incurred a fee that DfE approval was also required. This had been acquired, and the confirmation letter was included in the papers. The Committee resolved to recommend the Amendment Agreement to the Corporation for approval.</p> <p>iv. Wembley Project – Finance and project budget (See Confidential minutes).</p>
6	<p>AoB There were no items of AoB.</p>

7	Date of next meeting 01 December 2025 (Joint with Finance) Meeting closed at 8.02 pm
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Minutes taken by Zoë Lawrence 30 September 2025

SIGNED:

Date:

Ross Mackenzie, Chair