

Heart of Yorkshire Education Group Corporation

Board of Governors

Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 May 2025

Present:

- Addison Coudette (until minute 7)
- Andrew McConnell (Chair)
- Duncan Agnew
- Dmitry Fedotov
- David Powell
- Louise Elkington
- Mohammed Ayub
- Neil Warren
- Nigel Brook
- Sam Wright (Principal)
- Tink Lewis (until minute 7)
- Tim Welton
- Vijay Teeluck
- Wiktor Loc (until minute 7)

In Attendance:

- Head of Governance and Legal Services (Clerk)
- Group Executive Director of External Relations and Development (GEDER)
- Group Executive Director of Finance and Resources (GEDFR)
- Group Executive Director of Curriculum and Quality Standards (GEDCQ)
- Group Executive Director of Student Experience and Support (GEDSE)
- Group Executive Director of People (GEDP)

Apologies for Absence:

- Jayne King
- Stuart Brenton

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

1.1. The Chair:

- 1.1.1. welcomed all attendees to the Meeting, which had been called in accordance with the Group's Instrument and Articles and was quorate;
- 1.1.2. noted the apologies received (as recorded above); and
- 1.1.3. noted resignations from:
 - 1.1.3.1. Ruth Baxter (Staff Governor, Selby) – the Board recorded its thanks to Ruth for her outstanding contribution to the Group;
 - 1.1.3.2. Martin Shaw – the Board recorded its thanks to Martin for his leadership, particularly in support of the Group's merger and community engagement work; and
 - 1.1.3.3. Nigel Brook who had notified of his intention to step down, though he would remain with the Board until 2 July to support transition planning.
- 1.1.4. The Chair further noted ongoing work to recruit replacements for these roles, with several promising candidates identified.

2. Declarations of Interest

The Chair invited declarations of interest. None were declared.

3. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 18 March 2025

IT WAS RESOLVED THAT the minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2025 be approved.

4. Matters Arising

4.1. The Clerk reported on matters arising:

- 4.1.1. MA 1: Several governors still needed to submit outstanding Skills Audits.
- 4.1.2. MA 2: Progress was noted on the student app project. An initial version was in place; continued refinement and student engagement

would support future development. Improvements to provision of student badges was expected due to better enrolment planning.

- 4.1.3. Pay negotiations continued with trade unions; a final position was awaited, and updates would follow once available. The Board requested regular updates regarding pay negotiations and stressed the importance of finalising the pay award to help ease the cost-of-living crisis.
- 4.1.4. MA4: Work was progressing on incident response plans, including lockdown procedures.
- 4.1.5. MA5: A deep dive on the staff cost ratio was scheduled for 3 July 2025.
- 4.1.6. MA6: Recruitment for key governor vacancies was progressing via the Search and Governance Committee.
- 4.1.7. MA7: Risk Management Policy work was ongoing, with a revised draft expected for review at the next Audit Committee meeting.
- 4.1.8. MA 8: The decarbonisation plan would be addressed in the next academic year.
- 4.1.9. MA9: Positive progress had been made in discussions with the local Council regarding potential mine water heating projects.

5. Chair's Business

5.1. The Chair provided the following updates:

- 5.1.1. The recent mock student interview programme had been highly successful, with over 300 students participating across the Group. The Chair and fellow governors found the experience valuable and encouraged ongoing Board engagement with this initiative.
- 5.1.2. The first Chairs of Committees meeting was held on 23 April, following recommendations from the AoC governance review. The meeting was largely unscripted but offered valuable opportunity for cross-committee discussion. A more structured format and Executive presence was requested be considered for future sessions.

5.2. Questions and answers:

- 5.2.1. Q: How did students respond to the mock interviews?

A: Feedback was very positive. Students valued the opportunity to practise interview skills.

6. Student Update

6.1. Student Governors noted the following:

- 6.1.1. Positive feedback had been received on the new student app, which was improving communications and access to information. Students had expressed enthusiasm for further development to ensure the app is comprehensive and reliable.
- 6.1.2. Progression meetings had been redesigned to take place across the term, rather than in a single block. Students reported this approach as more effective, with clearer goal setting which enhanced confidence. Some flexibility to allow longer meetings for those needing additional support had been suggested which had been reported to College staff.

6.2. Dmitry Fedotov gave feedback on the student engagement session which took place before the Meeting:

- 6.2.1. High levels of satisfaction with student safety on campus had been reported, despite isolated incidents. Continued education and preventative work on knife crime were highlighted as a priority by Group officers, with support for ongoing initiatives such as the 'HMP Not for Me' roadshow.
- 6.2.2. Students were pleased with the quality of teaching but flagged some tutor gaps. Officers noted that tutor replacements were sometimes hard to find but improvements were ongoing.
- 6.2.3. Interest had been raised in establishing opportunities for students to engage with 'repair and reuse' activities as part of the sustainability agenda.
- 6.2.4. Mixed feedback had been received regarding personal development activities. Some students were apathetic, and it was acknowledged that not all students would be engaged in lots of personal development activities, but all should be engaged in something.

6.3. Questions and answers:

6.3.1. Q: What is the main benefit of the student app?

A: The app offers a simple, mobile-friendly way to access key information and communicate with the College. Students particularly value its potential to streamline administrative tasks and improve access to personal data.

6.3.2. Q: Are there areas where students feel safety could be improved?

A: While overall perceptions of safety are strong, some isolated incidents were mentioned. Students support continued proactive education and prevention work.

6.3.3. Q: Why is there inconsistent engagement in personal development?

A: Awareness and access vary across sites and groups. The new personal development model and app should help address this and improve consistency.

6.4. The Chair thanked the Student Governors for their professional and thoughtful contributions and recorded the Board's appreciation for their work over the year, noting that this was their final meeting in role.

7. Governance Business

7.1. The Clerk noted:

7.1.1. that the calendar of meetings and Schedule of Business were in the final stages of preparation and would be circulated to the Board as soon as possible.

7.1.2. approval would be requested for the Schedule of Business to ensure clear lines of delegation, particularly in light of the Weston College issue and the Department for Education's related recommendations.

7.2. The Board also agreed that the Away Day programme for next year should be shaped proactively to ensure strategic focus.

8. Principal's Business (inc. Emerging Risks)

8.1. The Principal presented a comprehensive update.

8.1.1. On the political landscape:

- 8.1.1.1. The recent immigration white paper would increase the Immigration Skills Charge and potentially introduce a new international student levy; details were awaited.
- 8.1.1.2. There were plans to reduce core adult skills funding, though the Group was performing strongly and had secured growth allocations to mitigate this.
- 8.1.1.3. The National Audit Office report had highlighted critical recruitment and retention challenges for FE colleges and the Group continued to address these.
- 8.1.1.4. An Interim report on curriculum and assessment review signalled potential future changes and the Group would monitor developments.
- 8.1.2. On knife crime prevention: the Group was strengthening work on knife crime awareness and prevention, with increased tutorial content, targeted workshops, and external partnerships. The Board welcomed this proactive approach, endorsed continued focus and noted that the student engagement session supported the effectiveness of the work carried out.
- 8.1.3. On recruitment:
 - 8.1.3.1. There had been strong applications across the Group, with Wakefield and Castleford particularly buoyant.
 - 8.1.3.2. Castleford was facing space pressures, but the new construction centre was expected to help. However, contingency plans were in place for potential delays.
 - 8.1.3.3. Selby College showed mixed trends: A Level applications were down and there had been challenges in some areas.
- 8.1.4. On retention:
 - 8.1.4.1. There had been improved 16–18 retention and attendance following targeted interventions.
 - 8.1.4.2. Adult retention was slightly below the prior year, but current management of withdrawals would provide an accurate stable position at the end of the year.
 - 8.1.4.3. The Board commended the Principal and staff for this progress.
- 8.1.5. On capital funding:

- 8.1.5.1. The transformation Fund and Capital Maintenance funding would support summer works and the reopening of F Block to provide additional teaching space.
- 8.1.5.2. The 3G pitch project at Selby College was progressing well. Planning approval had been secured and final approvals were pending including from the DfE and from the Board at the appropriate time.
- 8.1.5.3. The Group had also secured an additional £350,000 in one-off government funding to address priorities such as workforce recruitment and retention. The Board discussed the impact that the one-off payment would have on the affordability of staff pay awards going forwards.
- 8.1.6. On sustainability:
 - 8.1.6.1. There had been strong engagement with the Planet Earth Games, with Group colleges and individuals achieving top rankings.
 - 8.1.6.2. The Group continued to develop sustainability week and wider activity to promote the agenda.
- 8.1.7. On wider news:
 - 8.1.7.1. Further external recognition had been achieved through numerous awards and accreditations.
 - 8.1.7.2. Positive feedback had been received from Young Carers and Matrix accreditations which had been retained.
 - 8.1.7.3. There had been growth of Project Search partnerships.
 - 8.1.7.4. There had been high levels of engagement in student fundraising and community activities.
 - 8.1.7.5. Emerging risks were being monitored and address including the outcome of the Wakefield Futures Commission, Selby transport, the delay to the Post-16 Construction building and parking at Castleford College.

8.2. Questions and Answers:

- 8.2.1. Q: How is the Group mitigating the risk of adult funding cuts?
A: By continuing to diversify income streams and securing growth in flexible funding areas such as Free Courses for Jobs.
- 8.2.2. Q: Why is recruitment at Selby College down in some areas?

A: Some subjects, notably Hospitality, have seen a national decline in demand. The Group is working hard to promote these areas locally.

8.2.3. Q: What are the biggest risks to retention?

A: Increasing mental health needs among students and the challenge of maintaining engagement in Maths and English.

8.2.4. Q: When would F Block be ready?

A: Christmas 2025. There would be a focus on the ground floor for expediency which should be ready by the beginning of the Autumn term.

8.2.5. Q: How much additional car parking space is needed?

A: Assessment is ongoing, and the Group is exploring options including off-site parking arrangements.

8.2.6. Q: How are the Selby transport issues, which have been ongoing for some time, being addressed?

A: The Group has agreements with local coach providers and current routes may be expanded. Negotiations will be had with bus companies as necessary. Officers outlined their strategy to determine need.

8.2.7. The Board welcomed the breadth and ambition of these developments and endorsed the direction of travel.

9. Strategic Plan

9.1. The GEDER presented the latest iteration of the Strategic Plan the progress of which governors had been actively monitoring throughout the year.

9.2. The Chair thanked the Executive Team for incorporating the Board's comments from the recent strategy day into the latest iteration of the Strategic Plan.

9.3. Some minor changes to wording were suggested.

9.4. Questions and answers:

9.4.1. Q: Do the underpinning strategies listed cover all the proposed strategic objectives?

9.4.2. Yes. These will be introduced over the course of the following academic year.

9.4.3. Q: Should the Group be aiming for TEF Gold rather than silver?

A: Silver is more realistic at this stage, but the GEDCQ will report back.

9.4.4. Q: Is the maintenance of Cyber Essentials, which is the only measure under supporting objective 4.5, ambitious enough?

A: The Digital Infrastructure Strategy will be introduced next year which will contain further indicators although these will be measured at Committee level.

9.4.5. Q: What are the key risks to delivery?

A: Political and funding volatility, recruitment and retention challenges, and the evolving needs of students and employers.

9.4.6. The Board asked that all KPIs be SMART and that they be circulated to the Board as soon as possible.

9.5. Governors commended the clarity and quality of the document and acknowledged the progress achieved.

9.6. The GEDER confirmed that the final version of the document would be presented to the Board for approval on 1 July 2025.

10. Annual Accountability Statement

10.1. The Board considered the Annual Accountability Statement.

10.2. Questions and answers:

10.2.1. Q: What is the purpose of the Annual Accountability Statement?

A: It demonstrates to stakeholders that the Group is meeting its public sector accountabilities, local skills needs and delivering against its mission and values.

10.2.2. Q: How does the statement align with the Strategic Plan?

A: The Statement explicitly references progress against the five Strategic Objectives, ensuring alignment between strategy and accountability reporting.

10.2.3. Q: Are there areas where the Group needs to strengthen its position?

A: Continued focus on Maths and English, staff recruitment/retention, and broadening employer engagement are identified as key areas for development.

10.3. IT WAS RESOLVED THAT the Annual Accountability Statement be approved.

11. Finance Report

11.1. The GEDR presented the Finance Report. Key points included:

11.1.1. The Group maintains a Good financial health rating.

11.1.2. Budgets and forecasts reflect a cautious but stable outlook.

11.1.3. Space pressures at Castleford and the construction project remain areas of financial focus and risk.

11.1.4. Funding reductions and staff cost pressures will require ongoing vigilance.

11.2. Questions and answers:

11.2.1. Q: What are the key financial risks?

A: Risks include staff cost inflation, uncertainty in income linked to certain funding streams, and space pressures at Castleford.

11.2.2. Q: How is the construction project being managed financially?

A: A phased approach with contingency planning is in place. The Board will receive further detailed reports as the project progresses.

11.3. Governors commended the Finance Team for its careful management and prudent planning in an uncertain climate.

12. Briefing Papers

12.1. The Board received the following briefing papers:

12.1.1. Corporate Dashboard;

12.1.2. Safeguarding Update;

12.1.3. Health and Safety Update;

12.1.4. Property Update; and

12.1.5. Interim Report on Governor Attendance.

12.2. The Clerk confirmed no questions had been received regarding these prior to the Meeting and the Chair encouraged questions to be submitted via email.

13. Review of Effectiveness of Meeting and Identification of Emerging Risks

13.1. The Chair led a brief review of meeting effectiveness. Governors felt the meeting had been effective and productive, with positive contributions from the Student Governors.

13.2. It was noted that emerging risks discussed had included:

13.2.1. Recruitment and retention of staff, particularly in specialist and hard-to fill areas.

13.2.2. Ongoing challenges around student mental health and its impact on retention and achievement.

13.2.3. The impact of national funding volatility and political changes post-election.



Signed Date 01.07.2025

Actions

No.	Minute	Details	Deadline	Responsibility
1	4.1.1	Several governors still needed to submit outstanding Skills Audits.	ASAP	Governors
2	4.1.3	Finalise pay award discussions and update Board	ASAP	GEDP
3	4.1.4	Complete incident response plan updates	Autumn Term 2025	GEDSE
4	5.1.2	Re: the Committee Chairs' Meeting - A more structured format and Executive presence was requested be considered for future sessions.	The next Committee Chairs Meeting	The Executive Team

5	7.1.1	Circulate final Schedule of Business and Meeting Calendar	The next Board Meeting	Clerk
6	7.2	The Board also agreed that the Away Day programme for next year should be shaped proactively to ensure strategic focus.	The first Away Day 2025/26	The Executive Team
7	9.4.3	Re: the Strategic Plan - The GEDCQ was to report back on whether TEF Gold was a realistic target.	The next Board Meeting	GEDCQ
8	9.4.6	Re: the Strategic Plan - The Board asked that all KPIs be SMART and that they be	ASAP	GEDER

		circulated to the Board as soon as possible.		
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