East Coast College Corporation Meeting

9.30am 20th May 2026 East Restaurant Lowestoft

Present:	David Blake (Chair - DB) Peter Carr (PC) Giles Kerkham (GK) Ian Lomax (IL) Kirk Lower (Vice Chair-KL) Madeleine Moretta (MM) Mark Buckton (MB) Mike Dowdall (MD) Paul Padda (Principal and CEO) Peter Lavender (PL) Rachael Botley (RB) Rachel Kirk (RK) Robin Jackson (RJ) Teresa Sharman (TS) Vicki Paterson (VP) Bill Farrow (BF)	
In attendance:	Wendy Stanger (Director of Governance) Urmila Rasan (Deputy Chief Executive) and Gary Jefferson (Deputy Principal)	
	Apologies and membership	**Action**
Apologies Apologies were received from Tina Ellis (Vice Chair -TE) Dawn Carman-Jones (DCJ), Jacob Yates (JY), and Katie Alexander (KA) **Membership** David Blake (Chair - DB) Dawn Carman-Jones (DCJ) Peter Carr (PC) Giles Kerkham (GK) Ian Lomax (IL) Katie Alexander (KA) Kirk Lower (Vice Chair-KL) Madeleine Moretta (MM) Mark Buckton (MB) Mike Dowdall (MD) Paul Padda (Principal and CEO) Peter Lavender (PL) Rachael Botley (RB) Rachel Kirk (RK) Robin Jackson (RJ) Teresa Sharman (TS) Tina Ellis (Vice Chair -TE) Vicki Paterson (VP) Bill Farrow (BF) Jacob Yates (JY)		
	Declarations of Interest.	
David Blake (Chair - DB) Robin Jackson (RJ) and Wendy Stanger (Director of Governance) declared an interest in the External Board Review item within the Governance Update (Agenda Item 11). The Director of Governance advised that, as set out in the report and minutes, they are a consultant with Rockborn, working with Unloc to support student governors and governance professionals, and the proposed reviewers are close professional colleagues. It was agreed that this interest did not preclude participation in the discussion.		
ECC/26/05/6	**To approve the Minutes of the last meeting 16/12/25 and any other matters raised previously not otherwise included in the Agenda**	
The minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2025 were approved as a true record.		
ECC/26/05/6.1	**To approve the Minutes of the last meeting 24/3/26 and any other matters raised previously not otherwise included in the Agenda**	
The minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2026 were approved as a true record.		
ECC/26/05/6.2	**To approve the notes of the Board Away Day 24/3/2026**	
The notes of the Board Away Day held on 24 March 2026 were agreed. Governors queried the opportunities available for students who did not participate in international trips. The Deputy Principal advised that the College also provides a wide range of enrichment activities, including masterclasses, guest speakers, competitions and national		

trips. The Director of Governance commented that the Principal's report included a snapshot of recent activities. Governors commented, in light of the changes to Ofsted gradings discussed at the recent Governor Twilight, whether the College's strategic aim required amendment. It was noted that the 'exceptional' grade would be awarded rarely and only where practice is among the very best nationally and demonstrably supports improvement in others. The Deputy Principal advised that the College's strategic aim remains 'Outstanding Provision,' which can be evidenced not only through the Ofsted report card but also through the College's own definition and demonstration of outstanding practice. Governors commented that the new Ofsted arrangements appeared to represent a move back towards a more 'tick-box' approach and emphasised that the College should be clear about its own definition of 'outstanding' for its students, staff, and wider community. Just because the 'exceptional' grade may be difficult to achieve, this should not deter the College from striving towards it, as there should be a continued commitment and desire to achieve the highest possible standards. In some areas, there seemed to be a significant gap between weak and outstanding teachers, and this needed to be addressed with the Heads of Department, key to driving this improvement. This also needed to be aligned with the College's marketing across all audiences and markets, which at the moment seemed more focused on publicity.		
ECC/26/05/7	**Rolling Action Log**	
The action log was reviewed. The Director of Governance updated on the work of the College's AI group and referred the Board to the presentation circulated in the Governance Update on AI and Governance. It was noted that the Away Day Actions had been incorporated into an action plan by the Senior Team, where progress would be monitored and reported to the Board. **Governors agreed the following action:** • **Strategic update on AI to the Board at the September Board**		**SMG**
ECC/26/05/8	**Principals/CEO Report**	
The Principal presented the report, highlighting improved apprenticeship performance, with an "Excellent" rating this year via the Find an Apprenticeship portal (up from "Poor" in 2024/25) and rising employer satisfaction, though engineering required further work. Retention remained positive but needed to be sustained. Exams were ongoing and well organised, with around 92% attendance. The Place marked its first anniversary with strong progress in adult provision. Risks were the absence of any increase in adult funding or allocation, and only a minor rise in 16–18 rates for 2026/27, with potential implications for the budget, including the ability to fund a staff pay award, alongside the need to continue improving attendance. Governors commented that external assessment would become increasingly important with the introduction of new qualifications. They noted that, in addition to impacting students and staff, these changes would also have implications for the College's estate and finances. Governors discussed the Staff Inclusive Excellence Survey. It was noted that the survey focused on inclusion rather than all aspects of staff experience. The Principal advised that engagement was strong, and the College achieved Inclusive Excellence Leader accreditation; however, overall staff sentiment was slightly less favourable than in the previous survey. The Senior Team has developed an action plan, including a Leadership Conference in July, and the introduction of the Norfolk Steps programme to help with inclusivity. The People Chair advised that the Committee had discussed the survey and action plan in detail and had been assured by the action plan.		

Governors challenged whether results varied by area; the Principal advised that the survey was fully anonymous and could not be attributed to specific teams. Governors queried which areas were subject to an establishment review. The Principal advised that this was directly driven by curriculum planning, or where external funding had ceased. Governors discussed the changing political landscape and its potential impact on the College, including challenges to local government reorganisation, shifting funding priorities, and forthcoming SEND reforms.		
ECC/26/05/8.1	**KPIs Dashboard**	
The Principal presented the KPI dashboard, explaining the drill-down functionality and the rationale for the RAG ratings, which are based on the College's targets. The dashboard remains a work in progress and is continuing to be developed. Risk ratings are determined using a 5% variance from the target figure. The Director of Governance requested that any Governor unable to access the dashboard via the link provided should contact her directly.		
ECC/26/05/8.2	**Annual Conversation - Draft Letter**	
The Chair congratulated the Senior Team on the positive outcome of the Annual Conversation and the subsequent letter, and the Board concurred. It was noted that these annual conversations also provide an opportunity to discuss policy and to relay key messages on its impact locally back to the Department. The Principal commented that the DFE team were assured that the College was addressing the areas for improvement and had confidence in the College's team and its performance. Governors noted that the letter had highlighted transport issues and queried what action had been taken. The Principal advised that the bus network had been mapped to identify 'cold spots' and areas where transport timing and provision did not align with the College's timetable. It was noted that some cold spots were in small villages where it would not be cost-effective to provide transport. Consideration was being given to adjustments in individual provision timetables, and a shuttle service alongside engagement with Transport East and local bus companies. Governors commented that it was essential to ensure transport options were accessible as part of the College's commitment to inclusivity. Governors queried the demographic risk referenced in the letter. The Deputy Principal advised that this relates to the projected decline in the number of 16–18 year olds in the local area.		
ECC/26/05/8.3	**Away Day SMG Action Plan - Draft for Board Approval**	
The Principal presented the action plan, advising that it remained in draft for Board review, with completion dates to be added. Governors queried how progress against the actions would be monitored. The Principal advised that the plan includes assurance to be provided through the governance committees, with matters brought to the Board for approval where required. Governors suggested that adults should be considered as one strategy regardless of funding streams.		

ECC/26/05/9	Maritime Update	
The Deputy Chief Executive presented the report and advised that the University of West London(UWL) team was currently on site to ensure compliance for the new maritime intake. The University manages a large international cohort and has a dedicated compliance team in place. The maritime intake was small, due to time constraints following visa approvals, but the restart of the provision was positive. A 5 year plan had been developed, and this included sunk costs and the need to renew the licence for the Kongsberg simulator. Governors challenged the forecast numbers, questioning whether they were overly optimistic given the international situation impacting maritime, the restrictions on international students and current recruitment levels and sought clarification on the level of recruitment required to achieve a break-even position. The Deputy Chief Executive clarified that these figures were not those that would be included in the budget. The income has been calculated at both full, 100%, course recruitment and also at an 80% recruitment rate in 2026/27 and 90% thereafter. UWL aims to become the largest maritime university and has established links and contracts with shipping companies and Lloyd's. This is expected to open the College's provision to a wider market and provide clear progression pathways from the College's existing offer. The College previously had a larger maritime recruitment cohort; however, this has declined due to the impact of COVID-19, the loss of UKVI visas, and a reduction in visa allocations with the University of Suffolk. The College was registered with the Nautical College Association (NCA) and the five-year agreement with UWL enabled a significant increase in visa allocations, with enrolment per cohort limited by simulator capacity. Should recruitment grow substantially, the College may need to consider investing in an additional simulator and utilising alternative College buildings to support maritime provision. Governors challenged why staff needed to be seconded to the UWL. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the provision had to be provided by University staff due to the tightening of the visa regulations. Governors highlighted the reported financial challenges across the Higher Education sector, noting the impact of reduced international student numbers. The reports did not identify the UWL as being at risk. The Principal commented that these financial challenges were being experienced sector-wide within Higher Education. Governors noted that they had previously agreed to continue supporting maritime provision and the associated costs, welcomed the positive progress in the resumption of recruitment, and congratulated the team on successfully developing the agreement with UWL. **Governors agreed the following action:** • **Maritime five-year plan to be updated to include a break-even position and reviewed by June's Finance and General Purposes Committee.** **Corporation resolved to:** • **note the maritime five-year plan** **and** • **approve the financial commitments required to deliver the five-year plan**		UR
ECC/26/05/10	**Estates Development and Funding**	
ECC/26/05/10.1	**Lowestoft Tower Block**	
The Deputy Chief Executive presented the report and outlined the funding requirements. The work had been detailed in the previously approved Lowestoft Ground Floor Master Plan, and now also includes the mandatory upgrading of the electrical distribution boards. Using the		

reserves would reduce the College's cash days to approximately 80–85 days, which remains well above the sector benchmark. The College is seeking clarification from Lloyds Bank on whether this use of reserves would have an impact on the bank covenant. If the College is successful with its application to the Construction Skills Capacity Fund (CSCF), the College will be able to return c£1,500,000 to its reserves. The expenditure on the distribution boards will be funded by College reserves.

Governors queried whether the work was necessary, irrespective of how it would be funded. The Principal confirmed that the work was required, noting that this part of the College's estate was in poor condition and in need of investment. The Deputy Chief Executive added that the project addresses issues identified in the recent DfE Condition Survey, and that it was important to commence the work in order for it to be carried out over the summer period. The costs would be finalised once plans were fully developed and would be project-managed by Fusion.

Governors agreed that it was important to invest in the estate. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the 2026/27 budget to be considered at the July Board would include the capital forecast.

Corporation resolved

- **to approve the allocation of c£1,800,000 from the College reserves for the refurbishment works on the St Peter's Street entrance and ground floor roofs.**

ECC/26/05/10.2	ASEC Funding Grant - Seal	

The Deputy Chief Executive presented the report and advised that the agreement was still being finalised and could, at this stage, only be agreed in principle.

The Director of Governance advised that if a restriction was to be registered at the Land Registry agreement from those already with a charge, may be required.

Corporation resolved, in principle, subject to final wording and confirmation from funders that already hold a charge on Lound to:

- **approve the execution of the ASEC grant funding agreement as a Deed**
- **approve the restriction with the Land Registry restricting the disposal of the Lound campus without its consent until 31st March 2030.**

ECC/26/05/11	Governance Update and recommendations from Governance Remuneration and Search	

The Director of Governance presented the report, and no queries were raised.

Corporation resolved, as recommended by Governance Remuneration and Search:

To appoint:

- **Kirk Lower for an additional term as Vice Chair for the academic year 2026/27 until 31/7/27.**
- **Peter Blackburn as a full governor and as Chair of ECETA for two years commencing with the academic year 2026/27 until 31/07/28.**
- **Rachel Kirk as Chair of Quality and Standards for two years commencing with the academic year 2026/27 until 31/07/28.**
- **Mike Dowdall for an additional term of office and Chair of Estates for the academic year 2026/27 until 31/07/27.**

- **Rockborn as the Board’s External Board Reviewer, with Heather Cross and Melissa Drayson as the reviewers. The review to commence in the Autumn Term 2026/27.**

To approve:

- **for inclusion in the standing orders Appendix 14 Policy on the Independence of the Director of Governance.**

Corporation minutes that the written resolution was resolved:

- **to approve the following appointments, subject to satisfactory fit and proper checks and formal acceptance of the roles:**

    1. Peter Carr as a full independent governor on Estates. This appointment to be for a 2 year initial period, aligned to the academic year, up to 31 7 27, with extension available for an additional 2 year period, subject to annual review.

    2. Jacob Yates as a student governor. This appointment to align with his period of study which is currently to 31 7 26.

ECC/26/05/12	**Strategic Risk Register and summary Tactical Risk Registers**	

Governors reviewed the risk registers and noted that the maritime risk was to be reduced.

The Audit Chair confirmed that the Committee had undertaken a detailed review, supported by the summary reports and relevant extracts from Committee minutes. The Committee has agreed that future narrative summary reports should include the rationale for any changes in risk scoring, and that Committees should consider and reflect on the potential impact of political developments.

ECC/26/05/13	**Management Accounts - March 2026**	

The Deputy Chief Executive presented the management accounts.

Governors challenged how realistic the budgeted student number projections were. The Deputy Principal advised that a detailed and structured process underpins curriculum planning, drawing on a range of data sources including historical enrolment trends, local demographic information, and market demand. These assumptions are subject to challenge from senior leaders to ensure they are evidence-based, that group sizes are appropriate, and that overall projections remain within the constraints of lagged funding.

Governors challenged the level of cash held. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the cash balance held includes money to support planned capital expenditure including funds allocated for the Great Yarmouth fit-out.

ECC/26/05/14	**Quality and Curriculum Committee Report 3/2/26 & 21/4/26**	
ECC/26/05/14.1	**QD221 East Coast College Adult Education Strategy 2025–2026 as recommended by Quality and Curriculum**	
ECC/26/05/14.2	**QD135 - East Coast College Digital Learning Strategy 2025 as recommended by Quality and Curriculum**	

The Quality and Curriculum Chair presented the update, highlighting that a key aspect of the Committee’s work is engagement with students at the start of each meeting. This has been enhanced by holding meetings across different sites.

An ongoing risk is student attendance, which was the subject of a detailed deep dive at the February meeting. This will continue to be closely monitored, alongside evaluating the impact of the Success Coaches' role on improving attendance.

The April meeting focused on the potential impact of the proposed SEND reforms and how the College would need to respond to and address the challenges and opportunities arising from these changes.

Governors queried whether the College would be affected by the proposed ban on mobile phones in schools. The Deputy Principal advised that the ban does not apply to colleges and implementing such a restriction would be disproportionate and challenging to enforce. Mobile phones can be used positively to support teaching, learning, and student engagement, and it should also be recognised that our students are adults.

Corporation resolved, as recommended by Quality and Curriculum, to adopt:

- **QD221 East Coast College Adult Education Strategy 2025–2026**
- **QD135 - East Coast College Digital Learning Strategy 2025**

ECC/26/05/15	**Finance and General Purposes Committee Report 17/3/26**	
ECC/26/05/15.1	**Carbon Reduction Plan as recommended by Finance and General Purposes**	

The Finance and General Purposes Committee Chair presented the update.

Corporation resolved, as recommended by Finance and General Purposes, to adopt:

- **The Carbon Reduction Plan.**

ECC/26/05/16	**Audit Committee Report 12/05/26**	
ECC/26/05/16.1	**Internal Audit Service - Verbal Update**	
ECC/26/05/16.2	**QD036 Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure as recommended by Audit Committee**	

The Audit Committee Chair presented the update and advised on the process for appointing Internal Auditors. It was positive to see that the recent internal audits on Curriculum Planning and Key Financial Controls: General Ledger were both substantial assurance with one recommendation in each. The risk of a single point of failure arising from reliance on the Deputy Chief Executive was highlighted in the Curriculum Planning report, and this risk needed to be mitigated.

Corporation resolved, as recommended by Audit, to adopt:

- **QD036 Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure**

ECC/26/05/17	**People Committee Report 10/02/26 & 05/05/26**	

The People Committee Chair presented the update, and advised that the Committee had considered student behaviour and the related implementation of the Norfolk Steps Programme, the staff inclusion survey and associated action plan, and job evaluation.

The Committee also approved the following policies:

- QD126 Family Friendly Policy
- QD132 Recruitment of Ex-Offenders

• QD203 Sexual Harassment Policy Governors noted that, once the job evaluation process is completed, it would be difficult to argue that its outcomes are unaffordable, and this could impact the staff pay award.		
ECC/26/05/18	**Estates Committee Report 17/03/26**	
The Chair of the Estates Committee presented the update, advising that capital funding is becoming increasingly limited, with fewer opportunities available. Funding bids are not guaranteed and are not always accessible, and the College's current level of under-utilisation may also affect its eligibility for such funding. As part of the Estate Strategy, the College had expressed an interest in Lound being designated for housing in the revised Local Plan.		
ECC/26/05/19	**None Confidential - Governance Remuneration and Search Committee 10/03/26 & 14/04/26**	
It was noted that this item had been covered in the governance update.		
ECC/26/05/20	**ECETA Report 18/03/26**	
ECC/26/05/20.1	**ECETA Business Plan - recommended by the ECETA Board**	
In the absence of the ECETA Chair, the Director of Governance advised that the ECETA Chair commend ECETA's Business Plan to the Board, highlighting how it supports and aligns with ECC's overall strategy, and noting its key strategic objectives, including its commitment to Corporate Social Values and the Sustainable Development Goals, which are considered a strength.		
	Breakout	
ECC/26/05/21	**Chair and Vice Chair Presentations - How Would I, as Chair or Vice Chair, Support the Board and the College to Achieve Its Strategic Objectives?"**	
ECC/26/05/21.1	**Chair Nomination - Ian Lomax**	
ECC/26/05/21.2	**Vice Chair Nomination - Rachael Botley**	
The Chair nominee, followed by the Vice Chair nominee, presented to the Board on their respective approaches. The Chair nominee highlighted the importance of: • Ensuring agendas are strategically focused. • Promoting full engagement from all Governors and fostering an open, inclusive culture where everyone feels comfortable contributing. • Working with and empowering the leadership team. • Meeting learners, an inspirational aspect of the role, and engaging with their families. • Engaging with employers and other key stakeholders to help promote and develop the College. • Working with, and learning from, other Boards as part of ongoing Board development.		

The Vice Chair nominee highlighted: • A commitment to effective governance and active contributions. • The importance of building strong relationships and partnerships with the leadership team. • A collegiate approach to chairing, ensuring all voices are heard. • The ability to bring day-to-day experience to support the delivery of the strategic pillars. Governors queried how the Vice Chair nominee would engage with students and the community. The Vice Chair nominee advised that, as the Board was aware, logistically this would not be possible to the extent of the current Vice Chair, but that they would plan to increase their engagement. Each nominee withdrew to allow the Board to discuss the respective roles. Governors commented on the importance of the Chair and Vice Chair engaging with policy matters at both the regional and national levels. The Director of Governance outlined the networks available to support this, as well as relevant training and development opportunities. Governors discussed whether it was appropriate for the Vice Chair to chair both the People Committee and the Governance, Remuneration and Search Committee. It was agreed that, for best practice, these roles should be held by separate Chairs. **Corporation resolved to appoint:** • **Ian Lomax as Chair for 2 years commencing 1/8/26 and ending 31/7/28.** • **Rachael Botley as Vice Chair for 2 years commencing 1/8/26 and ending 31/7/28.**		
ECC/26/05/22	**Our Governance moving forward - Maximising Impact and Value: Discussion All**	
Postponed to July Board		
ECC/26/05/23	**Review of the meeting**	
1. Confidential Items: separate agenda 2. Were Learners prominent in discussions? Yes, 3. Risk Management: any issues discussed which may require an additional Assessment: Political changes. 4. Equality & Diversity: any issues discussed which may require an additional Impact Assessment: Staff Inclusion Survey and action plan, accessibility regarding estate development. 5. Health & Safety: any issues discussed which may require an additional Impact Assessment: None 6. Sustainability: any issues discussed which may require an additional Impact Assessment: None. 7. Media: any issues discussed to inform local media: New Chair and Vice Chair 8. How did the meeting go: A good meeting that covered a lot of ground.		