

MINUTES

**South Essex Colleges Group Corporation Board
MS Teams
Tuesday 9th December 2025 at 17:30**

Date and timings:	17:30 to 20:41
Location:	MS Teams
Present (Governors):	Sally Dicketts (SD) (Chair) Rick Olver (RO) Denise Brown (DB) (Group CEO) Kate Merritt (KM) Aaron Thompson (AT) Gerry Bender (GB) Marco Steel (MS) Gilly Salmon (GS) David Knott (DK) Steve Hemmings (SH) Paul Martin (PM) Denise Darrell (DD) Jake Lines (JL)
Minutes:	Carrie Brown (CB)- Head of Governance
Clerk to the Corporation:	Lana Jackman (LJ)- Group Executive Director Governance and Strategy
In attendance:	Adam Fahey (AF) Group Deputy CEO- Curriculum and Quality Zed Mohammed (ZM) Group Deputy CEO Ansar Mahmood (AM) Group Deputy CEO- Chief Information Officer Stuart MacKay (SM) MHA Sharon Dunphry (SDu) Deputy Executive Director HE Saskia Haas-Lee (potential Student Governor) Jayne Sheehan (JS) Vice CEO- Innovation
Apologies:	Tina Booth (TB) (Staff Governor) Kianna Smith (KS) (Student Governor)

Item

PRE MEETING BRIEFING- HE Briefing

SDu gives the Corporation Board a briefing on HE which is in response to a Scrutton Bland internal audit request that the Governors knowledge HE is strengthened.

MS asks if there is an alternative source of data that gives the learners that do not identify as male or female? SDu yes this is in the internal dashboard these are the OfS dashboards.

DK impact on the closures of University of Essex Southend Campus on the SECG HE? SDu details that SECG is looking to bridge the gap for some of the learners but this has the added complication of students that live in halls.

JL asks about the evidence for the alumni and employer engagement strategy? SDu details the alumni events, newsletters and also employer engagement strategy.

17:57 SDu leaves the meeting.

00.00 Agenda

01.00 Chair's welcome and introduction.

SD welcomes attendees and opens the meeting and brief introductions were made.

02.00 Preliminary items.

02.01 Apologies for absence and declarations of interest.

Apologies were received from Tina Booth and Kianna Smith.

02.02 Declarations of Interest.

No additional declarations of interest other than those already registered.

02.03 Urgent business notified in advance.

None.

03.00 FORMAL RATIFICATION OF NEW CORPORATION BOARD MEMBERS.

The Corporation Board **FORMALLY RATIFIES** the appointment of **Jake Lines** to the Corporation Board for a four-year term.

The Corporation Board **FORMALLY RATIFIES** the extension of **Seye Awolusi** to the Corporation Board for a one-year term.

04.00 2024-2025 ACCOUNTS

The Corporation Board **FORMALLY APPROVES THE SIGN OFF** of the 2024-2025 audited accounts.

SM introduces the Audit Findings Report, noting that the audit goes much more smoothly this year and is on a path to excellence. SM notes that the number of recommendations has reduced and that there is a near miss relating to an MPM payment. SM highlights that The Backstage Centre Ltd is going into dormancy.

RO confirms that progress over the last two years is solid and that the Audit and Risk Committee fully challenged the report, with all answers provided clearly.

SM provides feedback on the commercial accounts. SD asks why the commercial account shows a deficit. SM notes that this is possibly due to COVID-19, as the car park is not in use during that period. ZM adds that staff use of the car park is not charged, which compounds the issue. MS requests an amendment to the statement of income and retained earnings and profit post-tax adjustments. SM advises that this is a typographical error and confirms that it will be amended to 48 before tax and 25 post-tax.

SD asks whether anything gives SM cause for concern. SM confirms that there is nothing of significant note; however, had this question been raised two years ago, his response would have been very different, indicating the rapid progress made. ZM notes that EBITDA is above the sector average (the sector average is 6%, while SECG is posting 12%) and that SECG is projected to achieve a "good" financial health rating this year.

SD asks about cash reserves. ZM reports that he is forecasting 28 cash days at year-end, a large improvement from two years ago when reserves were in single digits.

SD thanks ZM for improving the SECG systems in finance to facilitate such a positive audit.

SM leaves the meeting 18:19.

05.00 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

05.01 Minutes of the meeting 14 October 2025.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2025 were **APPROVED** as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

05.02 Matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

There were no outstanding matters arising from the minutes of the meeting 14 October 2025 that were not discussed elsewhere on the agenda.

RO asks for an update on devolution. DB responds that devolution is paused for Essex and will not progress until the mayor is elected.

06.00 Un-starring of items.

The Corporation Board **NOTE** the un-starring of any starred item (12.00 and 13.00). Members wishing to un-star items must notify the Secretariat (Carrie Brown), including detail of the reason(s) for un-starring, by Thursday 5 December 2025.

STRATEGIC ITEMS

07.00 Group CEO report.

The Corporation Board **DEFER** the Group CEO report update to the Board Development Day.

08.00 Learner Pathway.

The Corporation Board **RECEIVE** the Learner Pathway report.

AF presents the Learner Pathway Report, which sets out the full learner journey from pre-application onwards. AF notes that the underpinning principle is that there is a place for every learner at SECG. AF outlines the structured routes available from level to level, and the progression options into higher levels, apprenticeships, or employment, noting that this is not a one-size-fits-all model. AF comments that the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper will require a fundamental redesign of curriculum.

SD thanks AF for his presentation on a very complex topic and comments on the scale of change that staff are preparing for.

AT asks how learners learn about SECG and what the organisation is doing in terms of community engagement. AT suggests that more could be done with places of worship, hairdressers, and other community touchpoints. DB responds that SECG is developing a community engagement strategy, which will include junior schools, nurseries, churches, and similar local organisations.

AT asks whether the “keeping warm” activities consist solely of social media, email, and post, or whether they also include phone calls. AF responds that SECG aims to create an emotional bond with applicants by offering more personal interaction, noting that performance varies across curriculum areas. AM adds that learners are contacted by phone and email, and are invited in for discussions about their interests during the application process and throughout the first weeks of enrolment.

DK asks whether there are statistics on learners who feel they are not appreciated at school and view SECG as a genuine fresh start. AF reports that there is data on learners from high-deprivation backgrounds and those joining SECG with poorer school results.

DK asks how important schools are in helping young people see college as a fresh start, particularly if their prior school experience was not positive. AF notes that some schools are more supportive than others, and that the “brightest and best” are often retained in school sixth forms. DB adds that SECG enrolls a cohort of Elective Home Educated [EHE] learners who have opted out of the school system, with around 85% progressing within SECG from age 14–16 onwards.

JL asks about the underpinning principles and how they are tracked, including whether questionnaires are used. AF responds that there is a “Welcome to College” survey, which receives very positive feedback and has a high completion rate; this is an external survey. AF notes that the Executive Board has approved an app run by Inclusion UK to deliver pulse surveys to learners after the first 42 days.

KM asks whether there is a strategy for engaging with schools that have sixth forms and may be reluctant to allow SECG access to their learners. DB responds that SECG is working around this by

undertaking door-to-door prospectus drops in areas where access is limited, and by running street-based engagement campaigns.

08.01 Quality Improvement Plan.

The Corporation Board **DEFER** the Quality Improvement Plan for further work.

08.02 Curriculum Planning.

The Corporation Board **RECEIVE AND DISCUSS** the Curriculum Planning.

AF presents the curriculum planning document, which includes the local skills needs and SECG's response to them. AF notes that a different approach may be required in future years. DB adds that meeting local skills needs is a statutory responsibility of the Governors and suggests that consideration may be needed on how this is monitored at the Board Development Day.

MS asks what the strategy is for implementing the White Paper from the learners' perspective. AF notes that this is difficult to define at the moment but stresses the importance of everyone engaging in the consultation process to ensure their voices are heard. AF explains that some subject areas do not align with T Levels—for example, Dance—and therefore SECG intends to retain the Level 3 programme for as long as possible. SD notes that the Government will not defund these programmes until a replacement offer is in place.

DK asks for clarity on the definition of local skills needs and whether this refers to the region in which individuals live or the region in which they typically work, noting that many residents commute to London. SD confirms that the definition applies to the region in which individuals live.

08.03 Student Protection Plan.

Deferred.

FINANCE.

09.00 Finance Report.

The Corporation Board **RECEIVE AND DISCUSS** the finance report including the HE finance.

HE Finance.

ZM notes that there is potential clawback on HTQ provision. DB provides background on the HTQ programme, explaining that the targets were based on an expectation that the Government would run a national campaign on HTQs, which did not take place. DB notes that the HE market is very competitive, and SECG's ability to maintain its degree market share is a testament to the strength of the SECG HE brand.

Management Accounts for October.

ZM reports that financial health remains on track for a "good" rating, with stronger EBITDA and improved cash days. ZM adds that a Q2 reforecast will take place following Day 42.

SD notes that the income position is very tight. ZM responds that this is due to High Needs learners, and that local authorities are undertaking data cleansing. AF notes that High Needs learner funding is a national issue and that disagreements between local authorities and education providers are common. AF explains that all local colleges are presenting a united front in tackling this issue and describes the relationship as very challenging.

SD observes that apprenticeship income is also down and asks why. JS explains that this is due to Past End Date (PED) learners. SD notes that most colleges have agreements with employers to prevent PED learners accumulating and requests a report setting out apprenticeship income, including PED learners, and identifying the fault lines for lack of progression.

ACTION: A report to be presented to Corporation Board detailing apprenticeship income, including PED learners, and the fault lines contributing to lack of progression.

SD highlights the importance of building apprenticeship and Adult Skills Fund market share so that, when 16–19 learner numbers fall due to population decline, SECG remains strongly competitive in other markets.

ZM asks for feedback on the new report. SD provides positive feedback, stating that it is a very clear document. MS and DK agree with SD's comments. GS also feels the report is clear and easy to follow.

09.01 Annual Health and Safety Report.

The Corporation Board **RECEIVE AND DISCUSS** the Annual Health and Safety Report.

ZM notes the priorities set out at the end of the report and the accompanying action plan outlining what needs to happen to improve compliance and policies.

SD requests that future reports include year-on-year comparisons.

MS notes that the report highlights delays in completing follow-up actions from inspections and asks how the Corporation Board can be assured that these delays will not compromise student safety. ZM confirms that all actions are submitted to an internal Health and Safety meeting, where they are regularly reviewed and escalated as necessary.

MS asks about the plan to ensure adequate Health and Safety and First Aid provision in high-risk learner areas. ZM notes that responsibility and accountability for this are increasingly shared across the organisation, including with the College Principals.

ACTION: SD requests that the Health and Safety Report is presented to the Corporation Board at the end of every term.

OPERATIONAL AREAS OF CONCERN.

10.00 Funding Agreements.

The Corporation Board **RECEIVE AND DISCUSS** the Funding Agreements presentation.

AM delivers a full presentation on funding agreements, including apprenticeships, 16–19, and the Adult Skills Fund. AM outlines SECG's funding levels across the past three years and provides detail on the immediate funding challenges and the positive steps SECG is taking to mitigate them.

SD thanks AM for his clear presentation.

DK asks about the NEET learners expected under the new system. AM notes that this is not a funding issue but a resource issue. AF adds that it relates to physical space and staffing capacity. DB comments that SECG uses Vector to analyse future demographic markets and that, as the population reduces, SECG will need to adapt accordingly.

PM asks what activity has led to the growth in learner numbers. AM explains that this is due to the launch of a new marketing team with a completely new approach. AM adds that learners are tracked from enquiry through to exit.

COMPLIANCE.

11.00 Governance Matters.

11.01 Committee Membership.

The Corporation Board **NOTE** the Committee Membership.

LJ notes SECG has two committees and it was agreed that Governance and Remuneration Committee to be changed to include Strategy and become the Governance and Strategy Committee.

LJ asks for members to put themselves forward for the Committee and also nominate themselves for Vice Chair at the end of the academic year.

ACTION: LJ to circulate a summary of the Committees and the time requirement for these communities.

FORMAL APPROVAL OF POLICIES.

12.00 Policies.
None.

STARRED ITEMS FOR REPORT AND FORMAL APPROVAL.

13.00 Report of Decisions Agreed by Written Resolution and Circulation.
The Corporation Board **FORMALLY REVIEW AND AGREE** the report of decisions agreed by written resolution and circulation:

- Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report 2024-2025
- Governance and Remuneration Committee Annual Report 2024-2025

14.00 Self-Assessment Report.
The Corporation Board **FORMALLY REVIEW AND AGREE** the South Essex Colleges Group Self-Assessment Report.

15.00 Any Other Business

SH leaves the meeting 20:04.

There being no further business the meeting ended at 20:41 hrs

Signed 

Dated 10 March 2026

Item	Actions	Deadline	Lead	Status
Actions from 9 December 2025				
09.00	Report to come to Corporation Board detail apprenticeship income including PED learners and the fault lines for the lack of progression.	10 March	JS	
09.01	Health and Safety report is presented to the Corporation Board at the end of every term.	19 May	ZM	Added to the meeting schedule
11.01	LJ to circulate a summary of the Committees and the time requirement for these communities.		LJ	To be picked up by CB
20.00	CB to circulate the previous Board Development Day agenda.	ASAP	CB	Completed