

# EDINBURGH COLLEGE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

## MINUTES OF MEETING OF 26 MARCH 2025

Meeting held in the Boardroom, Granton Campus



Start time: 14:00

**Present:** Audrey Cumberford; Stewart Darling; Fiona Doring; Becky Duff; Judit Harangozo; Daniel Holland; Alan Holligan; Derek Hynds; Alex Killick; Adam Lowe; Ian McLaughlan; Nora Senior (Chair); Eleanor Sim; Bill Troup; Charlie Whitson; Bethany Winkler

**In attendance:** Jon Buglass; Mike Jeffrey; Jonny Pearson; Marcus Walker (Clerk); Alan Williamson

**Observers:** Mark Sheridan; Kate Signorini; Paul Smart

### 1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

#### 1.1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

- 1.1.1 No apologies received.
- 1.1.2 The Chair welcomed Bethany Winkler to the Board of Management following her appointment, on 2 December 2024, as a Support Staff Board Member.
- 1.1.3 The Chair welcomed Mark Sheridan, Kate Signorini, and Paul Smart who had all been invited to observe the meeting, following their names being put forward to Scottish Government to join the Board as Non-Executive Members.
- 1.1.4 The Board NOTED that Nina Munday, EDI Lead, would join the meeting for *Item 7.2, Equality Outcome & Mainstreaming Report 2025-29*.
- 1.1.5 The Chair, on behalf of the Board, thanked Garry Maxwell (Head of School, Construction) for his presentation on curriculum development through partnership working - prior to the Board meeting.

### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 The Board NOTED that the re-appointment of Non-Executive Board Members, Fiona Doring, Becky Duff, and Ian McLaughlan would be considered under Item 8.3, *Governance Report*.

### 3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS SCHEDULED MEETING

- 3.1 The Board APPROVED the minutes from 10 December 2024 as an accurate record of the meeting.

#### **4. MATTERS ARISING REPORT**

- 4.1 The Board NOTED that actions from its previous meeting(s) were complete, overtaken or on the agenda.
- 4.2 The Board NOTED that Non-Executive Board Member, Becky Duff, had attended her first meeting of the Edinburgh College Development Trust on 13 March 2025. The Chair informed the Board that a second Non-Executive Member would be put forward to join the Trust following the Chair's annual one-to-one performance evaluation meetings with the Board.

#### **5. CHAIR'S REPORT**

- 5.1 The Board NOTED an update from the Chair on developments across the further education sector since its last meeting on 10 December 2024, including ongoing changes to the governance structure of Colleges Scotland. The Chair informed the Board that on 30 January 2025 the Colleges Scotland Board had approved new governance arrangements which included a Council of Members consisting of each colleges' Principal and Chair.
- 5.2 The Board NOTED that associated Articles of Association would be approved at Colleges Scotland's Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 27 March 2025. The Board DISCUSSED changes to the governance of Colleges Scotland and the status of the College's current membership arrangements. The Board AGREED that its membership of Colleges Scotland should be discussed in further details at its next meeting.
- 5.3 The Board NOTED that a consultation on the Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) (Scotland) Bill, created to simplify the funding landscape for post-school education and training had commenced. The Chair advised the Board that the College would be formally responding to the 'call for views' by 11 April 2025.
- 5.4 The Chair, on behalf of the Board, acknowledged recent national awards won by the College since the last meeting of the Board. The Board NOTED and commended the following award winners and nominees:
  - i. Professional Cookery and Hospitality students picked up a total of 3 gold, 11 silver, and 11 bronze awards, as well as 14 merits, and a range of food and safety hygiene awards at ScotHot Awards 2025.
  - ii. The College was shortlisted in the 'Innovation in Business' category at the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce Business Awards for its work on the VasteXchange platform, in partnership with Vaste Technologies.
  - iii. Three Hairdressing, Beauty and Barbering students won four medals at the Association of Hairdressers and Therapists annual Scottish Heats. Jessica Bell, Jessica Strek and Theo Burns brought one gold, two silvers and one bronze.

5.5 The Chair, on behalf of the Board, congratulated Non-Executive Member, Eleanor Sim, on her appointment to the Scottish Government's Cyber Resilience Advisory Board.

## 6. PRINCIPAL & CHIEF EXECUTIVE REPORT

- 6.1 The Board NOTED an update from the Principal on developments across both the College and the wider sector since its last meeting on 10 December 2024.
- 6.2 The Board NOTED that, on 28 February 2025, the SFC met with the College Principals' Group and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Finance Directors Group to discuss the current funding model, with a particular focus on credit price and premia. The Principal advised the Committee that the focus of the discussions related to historic inequalities between colleges, the lack of transparency around credit pricing, and the embedded premia which amplified price differentials.
- 6.3 The Board NOTED that the SFC had proposed changes to their approach on credit prices, which would benefit Edinburgh College given its comparatively low credit price in comparison to the wider sector. The Principal informed the Board that to avoid the risk of significant disruption, and to ensure stability of provision, the SFC had proposed a staged approach to implementing any changes.
- 6.4 The Board DISCUSSED the following in relation to the proposed credit price model adjustments:
  - i. The change in position of the SFC towards credit prices following several years of lobbying from Edinburgh College for a more equitable approach.
  - ii. The 'baselining' of the credit pricing model and its impact on the sector.
  - iii. The expected timescale for the proposed changes to take place.
- 6.5 The Board NOTED that an indicative funding allocation letter was expected from the SFC on 27 March 2025. The Principal advised the Board that once received the details would be circulated to Board Members – for information.
- 6.6 The Board NOTED that a Voluntary Severance Scheme had opened to all College staff on 4 March 2025. The Principal advised the Board that the Scheme would close on 28 March 2025, at which point applications would be considered by the Executive Team.

## 7. FOR APPROVAL

### 7.1 EDINBURGH COLLEGE TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME

- 7.1.1 The Board NOTED that, since its last meeting, the development of a Transformation Programme had been worked on intensively by the Senior Management Team and the Portfolio Manager. The Principal advised the Board that following the consideration of a high-level Transformation Proposal at a strategy session on 6 February 2025, the Executive Team sought Board Members' endorsement to draft a business case for consideration by the SFC.

7.1.2 The Board NOTED a presentation from the Executive Team on the Transformation Blueprint 2025-29, which outlined a phased approach towards the implementation of five programme themes: (i) Curriculum Development; (ii) Business Development; (iii) Inspiring and Supporting Our People; (iv) Campus Revitalisation; (v) Data and Systems for the future.

7.1.3 The Chair, on behalf of the Board, welcomed the presentation provided by the Executive Team and the bold vision outlined. The Board DISCUSSED the following points in response to the Transformation Blueprint:

- i. The piloting of new approaches across Construction, ESOL, and Healthcare courses.
- ii. The proposed reduction of Full-Time provision, within pilot areas, from 36 to 32 weeks, and the potential impact on staff to meet both student needs and those of awarding bodies.
- iii. The impact of the proposed changes on the student experience and how this would be monitored.
- iv. The need to create a responsive curriculum to meet the needs of employers and transition students into the skills market.
- v. The aim to reduce the assessment burden placed on staff/students and introduce a more blended learning approach within piloted areas.
- vi. The level of staff 'buy-in' to the proposed changes and how this could be gauged and supported through the People Strategy.
- vii. The impact of the proposed changes on support services at the College, and the incorporation of an inclusive curriculum design practices within each pilot project.
- viii. The capacity of the College, and its staff, to pilot projects whilst also continuing business as usual.
- ix. The definition of success with regards to the completion, and embedding, of pilot projects
- x. The timescales outlined in relation to Systems Innovation, and the pace at which staff could be upskilled.

7.1.4 The Board AGREED to endorse the direction of travel outlined within Transformation Blueprint, whilst remaining cognisant of points raised in relation to both the capacity of the College and the funding flexibility available. The Chair, on behalf of the Board, commended the Executive Team on their work to move this matter forward over recent months.

7.1.5 The Board AGREED that a business case for transformation should be prepared for submission to the SFC by 1 May 2025. The Board AGREED that - prior to the submission of the business case - the membership of the Convenors Committee should have an opportunity to review the final document via correspondence.

*The EDI Lead joined the meeting*

## 7.2 EQUALITY OUTCOME AND MAINTSTREAMING REPORT 2025-29

7.2.1 The Board NOTED a Draft Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Report 2025-29. The Vice Principal Innovation, Planning & Performance advised the Board that, as an employer and a public body, the College played a leading role in the wider promotion of equality and diversity. Further to this, both equality and access to education were recognised as crucial to unlocking many significant opportunities in life.

7.2.2 The Board NOTED that the College had a responsibility to meet the requirements of the Equality Act (2010) including the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

7.2.3 The Board NOTED the 10 proposed Equality Outcomes for the period 2025-29, and details of the rationale, measurable success metrics, and actions to be taken by the College for each Outcome. Further to this, the EDI Lead highlighted that the Mainstreaming Report also gave due regard to the PSED by detailing the day-to-day incorporation of equality, diversity and inclusion into work of the College.

7.2.4 The Board welcomed the Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Report and DISCUSSED the following points:

- (i) The use of the term BME and the nomenclature used by other public bodies and charity organisations.
- (ii) The number of BME staff leavers outlined within the Report and whether this required further interrogation.
- (iii) The conversion rate of BME applicants seeking employment at the College.
- (iv) The current BME population of the City of Edinburgh, East Lothian and Midlothian, and whether the College reflected these demographics.
- (v) The loss of the Flexible Workforce Development Fund (FWDF) and its impact on BME enrolments.
- (vi) The role of all staff and students towards achieving all 10 Equality Outcomes and embedding best practice.
- (vii) EDI in relation to the College Transformation Blueprint and business case for increased international student recruitment.
- (viii) The potential need to focus the College's limited resources on those Equality Outcomes that could have the most significant impact.

7.2.5 The Board AGREED that its People & Remuneration Committee should consider the 23 recommendations put forward by the Access & Inclusion Working Group in further detail and review progress towards their implementation.

7.2.6 The Board APPROVED the Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Report 2025-29 for publication on the College website. The Chair

advised the Board it would receive a follow-up report in March 2027, which would allow Members to consider progress against each of the 10 Equality Outcomes.

*The EDI Lead left the meeting*

## 8. FOR DISCUSSION

### 8.1 EDINBURGH COLLEGE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION (ECSA) REPORT

- 8.1.1 The Board NOTED an update from the ECSA on recent activities and engagement undertaken by the Students' Association at its last meeting on 10 December 2024.
- 8.1.2 The Board NOTED that ECSA had held student elections to appoint its full-time officers for the academic year 2025/26, with online voting taking place on the week commencing 17 March 2025. The Student President informed the Board of the outcome of the elections, as follows:
  - (i) Adam Lowe, ECSA Student President
  - (ii) Sukinder Landa, Vice President Welfare
  - (iii) Mary O'Driscoll, Vice President Activities
- 8.1.3 The Chair, on behalf of the Board, congratulated all three candidates on their (re-)election. The Board NOTED that the current Vice Principal Activities, Charlie Whitson, had decided not to seek re-election and instead had accepted an offer to study at Edinburgh Napier University.
- 8.1.4 The Board NOTED that, in addition to its regular Class Rep activities, the Students' Association had also launched a Lead Rep Scheme which aimed to facilitate communication between the Rep system and curriculum staff. The ECSA Student President advised the Board that the initial Lead Rep meetings had been asked to consider campus spaces and how well they served students.
- 8.1.5 The Board NOTED that, in light of feedback through the Class Reps and Lead Rep systems, the ECSA Team were currently engaging with the Director of Finance & Estates Infrastructure to explore ways to enhance social spaces across all four campuses.

### 8.2 COMMITTEE BUSINESS

#### 8.2.1 AUDIT & RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE 05.03.25

The Board NOTED a verbal update from the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee on matters considered at its meeting 5 March 2025. The Chair of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee advised the Board that a more detailed review of the Committee's terms of reference would take place before the end of the academic year to ensure it remained

clear and concise, whilst meeting the requirements of the Scottish Government's Audit Committee Handbook.

The Board NOTED that the Committee had conducted a risk deep dive into Artificial Intelligence (AI) at Edinburgh College, which had included a presentation from the College's Chair of the AI Advisory Group. The Chair of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee commended the work of the AI Advisory Group and provided a brief overview of the key challenges highlighted to the Committee.

#### 8.2.2 STUDENT SUCCESS COMMITTEE 06.03.25

The Board NOTED a verbal update from the Student Success Committee on matters considered at its meeting on 6 March 2025. The Interim Chair of the Student Success Committee highlighted that, in relation to its terms of reference, the Committee had considered what student success looked like, and how it could be measured.

The Board NOTED that the Committee had agreed to consider how existing and new internal groups, such as the Learning, Teaching & Quality Strategy Group and the Access and Inclusion Group, reported into the Committee.

The Board NOTED that the interim chairing arrangements for the Committee would continue until the Chair of the Board had spoken with incoming non-executive members about the available position. The Chair informed the Board that proposed changes to interim membership arrangements would be circulated in due course, for approval, via correspondence.

#### 8.2.2.1 RECRUITMENT RETENTION & CREDITS DASHBOARD

The Board NOTED that the credits position of the College, as of 27 March 2025, was 158,280 (96% of activity target). The Vice Principal Education & Skills advised the Board that planned Semester 2 activity would take the credits total to a projected figure of 160,571 credits (97.4% of activity target).

The Board NOTED that the College was expected to meet its 98% credits threshold and avoid any financial clawback. The Vice Principal Education & Skills highlighted that the Assistant Principals Curriculum and Heads of School were actively working on plans to ensure that the College exceeded its threshold.

The Board DISCUSSED the 7.9% increase in Full-Time HE applications for the academic year 2025/26, and the potential factors behind this positive development.

8.2.3 FINANCE, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & RESOURCES (FBDR) COMMITTEE 21.03.25

The Board NOTED a verbal update from the FBDR Committee on matters considered at its meeting on 21 March 2025.

The Board NOTED that it was anticipated that the Scottish Government would support public bodies to cover the National Insurance (NI) increase outlined in the UK Government's Autumn Budget. The Chair of the FBDR Committee informed the Board that, in February 2025, it was communicated to the College that only partial funding (circa 60%) for the NI employer increase would be received for 2025/26 which would cost £1m, with no increase for the period April to July 2025, leaving a £350k shortfall against the College Budget in the current year.

The Board NOTED that the Senior Management Team were working together to reduce the unexpected financial gap.

8.2.3.1 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS SUMMARY TO JANUARY 2025

The Board NOTED the financial performance of the College as outlined in the Management Accounts to January 2025.

The Board DISCUSSED the year-to-date position against the College Budget and the current forecasting around whether the budgeted year-end position could be achieved. The Chief Operating Officer highlighted the challenges associated with the Scottish Government's in-year decision to not to fully fund increased NI costs, whilst identifying cash savings for Voluntary Severance payments.

The Board NOTED that the challenges outlined had resulted in a year-end forecast deficit of £750k in the upcoming Management Accounts to February 2025, and an increase of £270k from the start of the year £480k deficit.

### 8.3 GOVERNANCE REPORT

8.3.1 The Board NOTED that the 3-year terms of Ian McLaughlan, Becky Duff and Fiona Doring were all due to end on 30 June 2025. The Board Secretary informed the Board that all three Non-Executive Members were eligible to seek a second 3-year term - subject to the approval of Scottish Ministers.

8.3.2 The Board DISCUSSED the re-appointment process and AGREED that all three Non-Executive Members names should be put forward to Scottish Ministers.

8.3.3 The Board NOTED a Top-Level Risk Register (TLRR) Summary, as agreed by the Risk Management & Assurance Group on 11 February 2025. The Chief Operating Officer informed the Board that the top-risks within the

TLRR remained unchanged from those reported to the Board on 10 December 2024.

- 8.3.4 The Board NOTED that, on 19 March 2025, the Scottish Parliament's Education, Children and Young People Committee had, as part of an independent investigation, questioned the Interim Principal at the University of Dundee around its current financial challenges. The Board DISCUSSED the matter and AGREED that the recording of the Scottish Parliamentary Committee meeting should be circulated to Members – for information.
- 8.3.5 The Board NOTED progress against its 2024/25 Improvement Plan. The Board Secretary highlighted that 11 of the 28 overall actions had been marked completed, The Board DISCUSSED five actions RAG rated 'Amber' which were expected to continue into the next academic year, including a specific action relating to the introduction of public board meetings.
- 8.3.6 The Board NOTED a proposal by the Chair, the Vice Chair and the Principal to hold an AGM in the academic year 2025/26. The Chair advised the Board that an AGM, rather than a public board meeting, format would provide a better format for engaging with stakeholders. The Board DISCUSSED the benefits of holding an open and transparent AGM and AGREED to endorse the proposal.

## **9. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS**

### **9.1 BOARD REFLECTION / FEEDBACK**

- 9.1.1 The Board NOTED feedback and reflections from the three observers in attendance. The Chair welcomed the feedback provided and looked forward to all three observers joining the Board in due courses – following approval by Scottish Ministers.

## **10. FOR INFORMATION**

### **10.1 AUDIT & RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE MINUTES 05.03.25**

- 10.1.1 The Board NOTED the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee minutes from the meeting held on 5 March 2025.

### **10.2 STUDENT SUCCESS COMMITTEE MINUTES 06.03.25**

- 10.2.1 The Board NOTED the Student Success Committee minutes from the meeting held on 6 March 2025.

### **10.3 FBDR COMMITTEE MINUTES 21.03.25**

- 10.3.1 The Board NOTED the FBDR Committee minutes from the meeting held on 21 March 2025.

#### **10.4 HEALTH & SAFETY UPDATE**

- 10.4.1 The Board NOTED a Health & Safety Update which provided a quarterly update on occupational health, safety and welfare within the College over November and December 2024, and January 2025.

### **11. FOR CIRCULATION**

#### **11.1 TOP-LEVEL RISK REGISTER TO MARCH 2025**

- 11.1.1 The Board NOTED a Risk Management Summary Report and the Top-Level Risk Register to March 2025.

#### **11.2 BOARD OF MANAGEMENT AGENDA PLANNER 2025/26**

- 11.2.1 The Board NOTED an agenda planner for the 2025/26 academic year, which aimed to provide members with an opportunity to review upcoming items of business.

#### **11.3 REGIONAL OUTCOME SELF-EVALUATION 2023/24**

- 11.3.1 The Board NOTED the Regional Outcome Self-Evaluation 2023/24 as submitted to the SFC on 19 December 2024.

### **12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- 12.1 The Board NOTED that its next meeting would take place on 10 June 2025.

***Meeting closed at 17:00***