NOTES - MEETING OF THE BOARD OF LEICESTER COLLEGE CORPORATION – AWAY DAY HELD ON 5-6 JUNE 2026

Present:	Danielle Gillett (Chair)	Roger Merchant
	Kyle Cameron	Steve Munro (6 June)
	Shawn George	Robert Radford
	Lesley Giles	Jackie Rossa
	Sue Hopewell	Nicky Randall (5 June)
	Shabir Ismail	Lee Soden
	Vipal Karavadra (5 June)	Sophie Strevens-Robinson (5 June)
	Chan Kataria	Tom Wilson (5 June)
	Neil McDougall	

In Attendance:	Zubair Limbada	Deputy Principal Finance and Corporate Services
	Randeep Sami	Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality
	Amanda Scott	Director of HR
	Louise Hazel	Director of Governance and Policy
	Mukund Narshi	Associate
	Alan Simpson	10Architect (Session 5)
	Scott Knowles	Chief Executive East Midlands Chamber (Session 1)
	Lisa Armitage	Director of MECC (Session 2)
	Zoé Butler	Director of Student Services and Marketing (Session 2)
	Andy Cookson	Assistant Principal (Session 2)
	Gerry Daly	Director of CHHS (Session 2)
	Rachel Hall	Director of Apprenticeships (Session 2)
	Rob Hansel	Director of CAPA (Session 2)
	Helen Lewis	Director of SAIL (Session 2)
	Darren Roome	Director of Construction (Session 2)
	Yvette Sexton	Director of BECT (Session 2)
	Craig Visram	Director of Engineering (Session 2)
	Shaun Curtis	Director of Estates and Campus Services (Session 5)
	Tom Farrand	Director of IT (Session 5)

FRIDAY 5 JUNE

1 WELCOME

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3 AIMS

3.1 The Chair outlined the aims for the away day which were to:

- Review progress with the previous Strategic Plan
- Consider the external business environment
- Discuss the plans for a strategic development of our foundation learning programme
- Consider and discuss the draft curriculum, student and HR strategies
- Review key themes from estates review
- Provide an opportunity to discuss key priorities for 2026/27.

4 SESSION 1: REFLECTIONS ON 2022-2026

4.1 The Principal introduced an update on progress with 2022-2026 Strategic Plan. The following RAG rating was given to each objective and highlights and issues were noted:

4.1.1 Objective 1. Green – Strong recruitment in 16-18 and apprenticeships, Skills Advisory Boards working well, development of sector strategies.
4.1.2 Objective 2. Amber – 16-18 and Apprenticeship achievement improved; introduction of new quality framework and improved access to data. Root cause analysis undertaken. Level 1 remained an issue; 68% students joined without English/maths and NEET figures continued to rise.
4.1.3 Objective 3. Green – Considerable work around personal development; effective safeguarding but many more students with EHCPs.
4.1.4 Objective 4. Green – Lots of EDI activity focussed on anti-racist approaches and several iterations of Hear My Voice research. Achieving the 2030 carbon reduction target would be difficult without additional funding.
4.1.5 Objective 5. Green – Budgeted position on track; positive EBITDA.
4.1.6 Objective 6. Green – Staff recruitment and pay remained under pressure.
4.1.7 Objective 7. Green – Opening of Aeronautical and OfS capital investment in teaching environment, IT investment including server replacement; completion of the estates review and condition survey.
4.1.8 Objective 8. Green – Good progress overall.

Student Voice Highlights and Considerations

4.2 The Student governors gave a presentation on the highlights from their experience of the College. They valued the different environment provided by College and the support and approach of tutors. They appreciated the College's values and described the many doors that the College had opened up for them, both through their courses and their participation in the student union and as student governors. Suggestions for improvements included better communications about cancelled classes and ideas for encouraging students to wear their lanyards such as personalisation, gamifying or offering incentives.

4.3 The following **comments** and **questions** were raised during discussion:

4.3.1 **What did the students feel their impact on the College had been?** To give students a voice and show how students could have their voices heard.
4.3.2 **What should the College be investing in?** More funding for the student union?
4.3.3 **What did the College give the students in terms of their employability that another institution would not have done?** Confidence and resilience.

4.4 Scott Knowles gave a presentation to the Board on the external business environment highlighting the following:

4.4.1 The quarterly business survey showed decline in business confidence and investment. Business concerns included inflation, business rates, competition, corporate taxation, interest rates, access to skilled labour and exchange rates.
4.4.2 There was an investment disparity between Leicester and Leicestershire and other devolved areas despite it being the largest economy in the region.
4.4.3 Escalating costs were hitting profit margins across the hospitality, manufacturing and service sectors in particular.
4.4.4 Domestic pressures were exacerbated by geopolitical instability and Brexit-related issues, disrupting exports and supply chains.
4.4.5 Decline in business confidence meant many SMEs had stalled investment, reduced headcounts or ceased trading. There was a sense that current policy was failing to support the fragile regional growth.

4.5 The following **comments** and **questions** were raised during discussion:

4.5.1 **The Government talked about the importance of employer engagement but the approach kept changing; what was required to shift the dial on engagement?** This was difficult, most employers were SMEs who were time poor and struggled to navigate the education system so enabling them to access the relevant bits of the system would be helpful.
4.5.2 **What would the advice be to young people about particular routes or sectors to take?** Not all employers wanted graduate but they valued the enthusiasm and energy of young people. Apprenticeship routes were more suitable for many young people.
4.5.3 **Some employers would retain students on work experience or placements which could meant they would not complete their qualification.**
4.5.4 **Why was there a productivity gap in the region and what should be done about it?** There was perhaps not the gap that was presented however AI would help in addressing productivity, not in terms of reducing headcounts, but in freeing up resources and adding value.
4.5.5 **The continued dialogue with the Chamber was going to be important to ensure the College continued to tune in to employers' viewpoints.**

5 SESSION 2: CURRICULUM AND STUDENT STRATEGIES

Foundation Learning

5.1 The Principal and Directors of Student Services and Marketing and Re-engagement Maths and English gave a presentation on a strategic approach to foundation learning. The following points were highlighted:

5.1.1 There were growing number of NEETs in City and County with over 1,600 young people locally NEET. The Milburn Review had highlighted the issue at national level.
5.1.2 Linear pathways through education were not suitable for growing numbers of students and many students came to the College without English and maths.
5.1.3 SEND reforms were expected to result in more demand on mainstream provision and other curriculum reforms had the potential to squeeze existing pathways. Inclusion was a theme running through the new Ofsted toolkit.

5.1.4 The College approach for 2026/27 would start with a small expansion of Launchpad provision with January and Easter start points, and including a carousel offer for all curriculum areas including a Level 1 award. The provision would include a focus on maths, English and personal development and there would be guaranteed progression into the mainstream curriculum. For 2027/28 onwards, the plan would be to implement a full foundation program.

5.1.5 Consideration could also be given to introducing a post-16 DSP (Designated Specialist Provision) which was currently a gap in provision locally.

5.2 The following **comments** and **questions** were raised during discussion:

5.2.1 **What were likely to be the disadvantages of the planned approach?** Funding was an issue; this was a more expensive model although some high needs funding could be used. The potential students were those furthest away from education and so tended to have poorer attendance and behaviour.

5.2.2 **More students were electively home educated and so would be further away from education and structured education. How could the model be flexed to get them engaged in a more structured education environment.** There was already the option to flex the timetable and bespoke timetables were created where needed for some students. There was expertise in the College; a lot of this was about building trust and a relationship with the student and a successful transition from home or school would be key.

5.2.3 **The risk of this approach could be that the College could become a ‘dumping ground’. It would also mean that young people were taking another year of funded activity so the provision needed to be ambitious enough to help them progress.** The Carousel would help with this. Tasters could be multiple weeks and a minimum of two tasters could be undertaken.

5.2.4 **How dependent was this on curriculum areas creating an offer in their area?** This was now mandated and all areas included foundation programmes within their plan.

5.2.5 **In terms of a DSP, was there any indication of projected numbers.** Not specifically but there was a high anticipated demand given the absence of this provision locally. A DSP should have no more than 10 students.

5.2.6 **Had students in Launchpad been consulted about what worked for them and how they felt about the provision?** They had; they did not feel it was a dumping ground; they all knew what they wanted to do, they just need a bit more support to get there. Students could be in the foundation programme for a few months or a couple of years, depending on their need.

5.2.7 **It was possible that this approach would have implications on behaviour and attendance and on achievement but it was important to try something new and keep it under review.**

5.2.8 **The risks and benefits associated with the approach were noted and accepted.**

<u>**Curriculum and Student Strategies**</u>

5.3 The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality introduced the curriculum sector strategies.

5.4 Members broke into groups and discussed each of the sector strategies with the Directors who joined for this item. Themes emerging included:

5.4.1 **Use of AI; this evidently presented an opportunity and a challenge but was there enough investment or enough clarity on solutions?**
5.4.2 **There were variations in the readiness of curriculum areas for the foundation learning programme.**
5.4.3 **The strategies linked curriculum and skills but there was less clarity on progression into and connection with the workplace.**
5.4.4 **The inclusion strategy needed to be embedded in the other strategies.**
5.4.5 **More work was needed on promotion, external financial support and sponsorship. Greater use could be made of alumni.**
5.4.6 **More work on school liaison was needed including inviting schools into College; the College's offer was not on some people's radar and engaging parents as big influencers was important.**
5.4.7 **The social aspects of college (belonging) should be promoted as well as the vocational and employment routes.**
5.4.8 **Different metrics might be needed for assessing progress from starting points for foundation learning students; the LA might be able to provide some of the data to help with this.**
5.4.9 **Recruitment of staff was a potential issue for all strategies given pay constraints. There were also workload issues.**

6 SESSION 3: CURRICULUM AND QUALITY

6.1 The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality then introduced the Curriculum and Quality Improvement strategies. The following **comments** and **questions** were raised during discussion:

6.1.1 **Why was devolution included as a risk/challenge?** At this stage there was a lot of uncertainty. Leicester and Leicestershire were missing out on funding because of the absence of a combined authority. The main risk was around adult education which both councils offered and could be threatened under a devolved model. The College needed to be in the discussions and if we got it right, this could become an opportunity rather than a risk.
6.1.2 **What external agencies had been involved or consulted to make sure that the benchmarks were right?** The Deputy Principal had come from another college and was also becoming an Ofsted inspector. The Quality team was visiting other colleges to see what was working well and Curriculum teams also needed to do more of this. The College was one of a small number of institutions involved in the DfE Pioneer group for curriculum reforms which was proving helpful and opened up more networking opportunities.
6.1.3 **What was driving growth in HE as an objective, given the increasing competition from universities?** The College's offer was very different and there was demand for a different offer particularly from part-time students. It would be important not to lose a foothold in the HE market given the LLE and the potential to offer modular learning including to employers.
6.1.4 **HE had a lower contribution rate; was it sustainable and was there a ROI analysis?** These were the right questions to ask. The Post-16 white paper had opened up conversations with universities in a way that had not been possible previously. There was work to do to get the marketing right and look at different options including pre-application, 2+1 and 1+2 year options with the universities. The existence of the HE offer had enabled the College to access £8m in capital funding in recent years.
6.1.5 **How would the strategies be synthesised so that the real priorities could**

be focussed on? There were some common themes, risks and opportunities. All strategies were anticipating growth and so the ELT would need to look at all of them and decide where to prioritise resource and action. Directors of Curriculum would have actions from the strategies within their QIPs; the strategies would need to be adapted as the curriculum reforms unfolded.

6.1.6 **How were staff responding to the increased expectations about accountability?** New Assistant Principals would be accountable for areas within their responsibility and the Deputy Principal would be holding them to account. The new approach would be uncomfortable for some staff and the Focussed Improvement Plans were already bringing an enhanced level of scrutiny which not all staff were used to. It was being made clear that underperforming courses would be scrutinised more and if underperforming for several years, there would be a discussion as to whether the provision continued.

SATURDAY 6 JUNE

7 SESSION 4: HR STRATEGY

7.1 Director of HR gave a presentation on the HR Strategy. This highlighted the need to move from an HR function to a people function. Strategy drivers included recruitment and pay issues, legislative changes, digital and AI transformation, and the College's current workforce and offer. A series of questions were posed including consider where to prioritise investment to achieve most impact on student outcomes.

7.2 The following **comments** and **questions** were raised during discussion:

7.2.1 **If staff were going to be held to account, empowerment and psychological safety was important to enable them to make decisions and be able to respond to challenge.** This was a cultural issue and the staff survey indicated there was a good culture. It also needed buy in from everyone and would be included in leadership and management training and succession planning.

7.2.2 **Was there a need for fewer better paid people?** This needed looking at although there were many staff who worked across sites so it was hard to affect staff numbers. There was an ambitious curriculum plan and some process efficiencies could be made but staffing should match to curriculum reforms with better workforce planning without over staffing.

7.2.3 **Was there a model in which more junior staff got higher pay rises?** A unionised workforce meant this was difficult; if pay was capped, there was likely to be industrial action and an impact on morale. It could create further disparity with schoolteacher pay. The NLW also impacted on the compression of support pay scales and competitor pay was also a consideration.

7.2.4 **Pay was a national issue, what were other colleges doing to tackle this?** Pay was not the only issue, workload and wellbeing were important to staff and these were things that the College could look at. Not many colleges had attempted to tackle it in a different way. Northampton College had condensed pay scales; the impact of this was being monitored as there was the potential for equal pay claims.

7.2.5 **What was the level of spend on agency and was there a correlation with outcomes?** It was high but no higher than other colleges and cheaper than what might be paid in industry. There were some quality issues but a teacher essentials package had been designed for agency staff and there was not a significant impact on achievement.

7.2.6 **Were there opportunities for recruiting apprentice teachers?** Ideally the College would want to grow its own but staff also needed industry experience before they could become teachers. This was more of an option for some digital/IT roles.

7.2.7 **The College should not offer a curriculum it could not staff. How much more creative could it be and was there scope for more administrative support to reduce the burden on teachers?** The 'family of jobs' had been introduced to address this but it was time to relook at some of the roles.

7.2.8 **Was there a different model for outsourcing training?** A question as to whether there should be different terms and conditions for different role had been raised in a national forum; most colleges were not doing this and unions would oppose any such move.

7.2.9 **What opportunity was there for lobbying at national level?** The College had lobbied locally and this was being done at national level by AoC. Treasury made the decisions about funding.

7.2.10 **It was understandable that the Treasury would want to focus limited funding on the jobs of the future**. The College needed to look at the curriculum and its efficiency in terms of funding rates but balance this with its Mission and social responsibility particularly when it came to the most disadvantaged students and NEETs.

7.2.11 **A USP as an employer would be different for different people. Did the College remain as attractive an employer as a public sector organisation as it once was?** Teaching roles would be similar across the education sector but there was more challenge for some support roles and potentially less flexibility than in the private sector. The College's terms and conditions including pensions remained attractive.

7.2.12 **Was there anything from the staff survey that helped focus on what to prioritise?** There was lots of helpful information, including feedback on physical resources which were restricted by financial constraints; cultural issues were not coming out as a concern.

7.2.13 **The College was starting in a good place; focussing on the future workforce and how to deal with the five generation workforce and getting them working effectively would be the issue.**

8 <u>SESSION 5: ESTATES STRATEGY</u>

8.1 The Deputy Principal Finance and Corporate Services and Alan Simpson gave a presentation on the estate and plans for capital investment. The following points were highlighted:

8.1.1 A condition survey had been completed and identified £9.4m of works needed up to 2036.

8.1.2 The estates review was nearing completion. Themes from the review included:

- Strengthening curriculum identity and clustering: zoning and visual identity of curriculum areas, signage; consolidation of provision across campuses
- Improving student experience and sense of belonging: limited social spaces – indoor and outdoor; on-site sports and enrichment facilities; entrances and reception areas.
- Increase efficiency and utilisation of space, including potential consolidation: FPC and SMC opportunities; utilisation at outreach centres;

modern libraries suitable for flexible learning

- Better showcasing the curriculum offer: specialist facilities; supporting recruitment and stakeholder engagement

8.1.3 Possible campus moves were suggested; there were some quick wins which could be achieved over the next 18 months including expansion of student social space, improvements to entrances and facades to create more welcoming environments.

8.1.4 More significant works and larger projects required further consideration for their strategic fit, affordability and investment return during 2026/27.

8.1.5 The College had received a DfE Condition Allocation of £4.5m to date; £400k had been spent, £1.8m to be spent by March 2028, £2.3m to spent by March 2029. The College would add up to £1m annually from reserves so that there was up to £3m available for investment in 2026/27; this would maintain the financial health rating of Good.

8.2 The following comments and questions were raised during discussion:

8.2.1 **To what extent should the ELT expect staff to support the proposed changes; would there be challenges?** Bringing people on board was going to be important, some staff might be resistant and feel threatened by some of the moves. It would be important to think about how to socialise the concept and see how the plans could address some of the issues in the culture survey.

8.2.2 **Investment in the façade and outward presentation of the College was important in creating the right environment and helping to become an employer of choice.**

8.2.3 **The review focussed on improving the user experience but less on sustainability, efficiency and asset management.** The review had looked at trying to balance utilisation across campuses and thereby improve efficiency as well as improve access to social space. An Asset Plan would follow which could include potential areas to be mothballed. A decarbonisation plan had also previously been completed and informed the plans.

8.2.4 **How could the College find the £9.4 million needed to address the condition survey and how was ROI measured?** Some of the projects identified in the review could address condition survey/PMP issues. The DfE condition funding would help address some of the issues but shovel ready projects were also needed so that if further funding became available, they could be proposed and initiated quickly. ROI would be linked to curriculum strategies and growth potential.

8.2.5 **How did the masterplan fit with neighbouring properties?** That was something to be aware of; SMC was next to an area planned for regeneration but that was some years away and so maintaining dialogue with the City Council would be important over the coming years.

8.2.6 **There were some great opportunities to help transform the student experience. The review was an opportunity to improve things for staff as well as students. What opportunities were there for improvement to staff social or collaborative space?** There were staff rooms but it was a fair question as to whether they were good enough.

8.2.7 **Were there innovative classroom/collaboration spaces?** Universities provided some good examples to learn from; enabling digital confidence and creating safe spaces for people to explore technology would need to be included in the plans. AI presented opportunities in terms of automation and self service but there were also opportunities to make more use of digital signage and use technology to improve communications.

8.2.8 **The costs and income associated with outreach centres also needed to be taken into account to see if there was opportunity to relocate provision, recognising any impact on the community.** Usage and value for money would need to be assessed.

8.2.9 **If the direction of travel was accepted, whatever was included in the 2026/27 capital plan needed to address the estates review.** A masterplan would be created but should be kept under review. Any investment needed to be carefully communicated and managed with staff.

9 SESSION 6: OTHER STRATEGIES

9.1 The Principal introduced the draft Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and draft Strategic Plan. The Stakeholder engagement strategy highlighted the importance of seeking and acting on all stakeholders' voices. Comments were invited on the draft Strategic Plan. This would be published but then kept under review and progress would be reviewed annually.

9.2 The following comments and questions were raised during discussion:

9.2.1 **How could an affordable plan that addressed all the strategies be arrived at?** It was not possible to cost everything at this stage because of the ongoing policy shifts but the documents provided a blueprint. The ELT needed 2026/27 to cost up plans in detail; some could be moved on quickly but all strategies and plans would need to be reviewed every year.

9.2.2 **There would be challenge and the College should not be afraid to make some changes but needed to manage them carefully.** The focus would be on the benefits to students and stakeholders; any concerns would be heard and reflected on but that should not inhibit plans.

9.2.3 **The ambition was evident in the strategies; the strategic plan vision could be a bit more ambitious.**

9.2.4 **Strategic partnerships were perhaps missing; when there were sustained financial pressures, all of the options should be considered.** Noted. These remained an option; the College had taken time to work with other institutions including with the universities, councils, Chamber and other colleges and this work was ongoing.

9.2.5 **There were also more opportunities for employer engagement and linkages with sector bodies.**

9.2.6 **This felt like a very different approach with a deeper review which looked wider than just the local impact. The work undertaken should encourage the College to be braver about what made it distinctive and what it should stand for.**

10 SUM UP AND REFLECTIONS

10.1 **The Chair thanked governors and staff for their attendance and contributions. The main themes would inform future discussions over the coming months. There was lots to do, but lots of energy and enthusiasm and confidence in the team to deliver.**

10.2 It was noted that this would be Danielle Gillett's last meeting and she was thanked for her immense contribution to the College and her outstanding leadership of the Board.

Governors and staff wished her well.