Rose
Bruford
College

Board of Governors

Approved minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 7 May 2026 at 2.00pm in the Boardroom

Present: Janet Smith (Chair), Dr David Reid, Geraldine Kelly, Helen Fairfoul, Anni Domingo, Chris Payne, Miles Gibson, Dr Alex Bols, Haydn Jones (student governor), Daryl Burns (support staff governor) Dr Phoebe Patey-Ferguson (Academic Board staff governor), Prof Randall Whittaker (Principal and CEO)

Apologies: None

In Attendance: Prof Stephen Farrier, Deputy Principal
Michael Healy, Chief Financial Officer (CFO)
Veronique Fricke, Director of Corporate Affairs
Rachael Wilson, Director of Service Delivery
Dawn Turpin, Clerk to the Board

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

1.1 The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and provided an update on Board membership. Vivien Goodwin had reached the end of her first term of office and had indicated she was unable to serve for a second term due to work commitments; the Board recorded its thanks for her contribution to the Board over the past four years. Anthony Carey had also resigned from the Board. As a result the Board now comprised eight independent members against a requirement of ten set out in the Articles of Association. Both departing members had also served on the Audit & Risk Committee. The Governance and Nominations Committee would consider succession planning at its meeting in June 2026.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were no new declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2026 were **approved** as a correct record, subject to an amendment at minute 5.5 as follows:

"In response to governors questions the Principal noted that the College *would not in the future support students because of a rapid market exit elsewhere. The College had been* designated as a Specialist Provider *by UCAS*."

4. MATTERS ARISING

4.1 Updates to the actions from the last meeting were **noted**.

4.2 The Chair also reported that Chair's action had been taken between meetings to approve expenditure for the upgrade of the College's IT network.

5. PRINCIPAL AND CEO'S REPORT

5.1 The Principal and CEO introduced his report noting that staff, students and alumni continued to achieve strong outcomes. A consultation was underway on Strategic Priority Funding, distributed by the Office for Students (OfS) to support national priorities. The new PhD programme had been approved for validation by the University of Chichester which should have a positive impact on the College's Research Excellence Framework (REF) performance. The College had been shortlisted for the 2026 WhatUni Student Choice awards and was the only conservatoire shortlisted. In addition, alumnus Tom Edden had returned to the campus for the first time in 24 years following his Olivier Award for Best Actor in a Supporting Role.

5.2 The Principal reported that a donation had been secured to refurbish the Outdoor Theatre, which would be named after the donor. In response to questions it was confirmed that planning permission would not be required and that under the terms of the funding agreement the Outdoor Theatre would be named after the donor in perpetuity.

5.3 The Chair noted the achievements of alumni asking whether more could be done to promote these successes. The Principal advised that the College had not previously invested significantly in communications due to the need to stabilise the institution. However an evidence base was being developed and the recruitment of two communications specialists was underway.

5.4 A Governor enquired how the College determined which community events to engage with. The Principal reported that relations with the local Council had been strained prior to his appointment but had since improved and the College was actively participating in a range of Council and Community events.

5.5 It was confirmed that the College had met OfS Condition F1 with the required transparency information published on the College's external website. A fuller report would be provided to the Board meeting in July 2026.

5.6 The Principal extended his thanks to Daryl Burns for her work in implementing the new payroll system. The Board **noted** the Principal and CEO's report.

Strategic and financial items

6. STUDENT RECRUITMENT UPDATE

6.1 The Principal introduced the item noting that the UCAS deadline for acceptances had passed the previous day. Since the circulation of the paper the College had recording an additional 32 acceptances.

6.2 The Director of Corporate Affairs presented the September 2026 recruitment position for highlighting the expansion of the Admissions Team, ongoing improvements to data recording systems to address historic reliability issues, an overview of the recruitment cycle, implementation of recommendations from the 2024 external Data HE report, offer rates in comparison with the sector, trends in applications, offers and acceptances across the undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) portfolios including home and international students, conversion activity and identified areas of portfolio risk.

6.3 In response to questions from Governors it was noted that increased offer rates were partly attributable to improved efficiency in the admissions process; a further recruitment cycle was needed to establish whether this growth was sustainable. That earlier offers did result in earlier acceptances and better retention. That there was anecdotal evidence of improved applicant calibre with some discussion about the possible introduction of tariffs at the Academic Board. The programme identified as at risk was still expected to make a small contribution.

6.4 Regarding international recruitment the College had historically made limited investment and did not use agents. A new role had now been created providing a single point of contact for international applicants whose enrolment remained subject to UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) processing. The Strategic Plan key performance indicator (KPI) for international recruitment was unlikely to be met although performance had improved significantly; the KPI also including exchange students within the international student body. The College expected to use its full Confirmation of Acceptance of Studies (CAS) allocation enabling international students to apply for visas; a balance was required between maintaining academic standards and managing compliance risk associated with UKVI scrutiny.

6.5 The Principal expressed cautious optimism on recruitment performance. Priorities included structured conversion activity and retention of students post acceptance. Decisions on the programme at risk would be informed by data with efforts to avoid withdrawal. Staff involved in the 23 programmes in teach out were being redeployed where possible or leaving the College.

6.6 The Board thanked the Director of Corporate Affairs for the paper noting that it would be helpful in future to include recruitment targets and final outturns. The Board **noted** the student recruitment report.

7. STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2027 – KPI REPORT AND DEEP DIVES - EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SURVEY 2025/26

7.1 The Deputy Principal introduced the KPI report noting ongoing work to improve the presentation of the KPIs. This included clarification of the data source for KPI 05 (graduate outcomes) and the introduction of a KPI 05a more closely aligned to OfS Condition B3 continuation, completion and progression metrics and the student activity linked to graduate outcomes.

7.2 In discussing the suitability and appropriateness of the KPIs members suggested that some that were not strategic or were lagging indicators could be removed or reported less frequently/ by exception. The KPIs had served an important purpose in supporting culture change during a period of instability for the College. However, a more focused and streamlined set of measures should be developed to support the next strategic plan as the College moved beyond recovery. Members also commented that improvements had been made and should be recognised.

7.3 The Deputy Principal reported on the results of the Employee Engagement Survey (KPI 07 achieving 75% positive engagement in the staff survey) noting that the areas of positive and negative feedback were consistent with the previous years' survey although there had been an improvement in scores including an increase from 59% to 70% in the Employee Engagement Index. It was noted that responses may have been influenced by sector wide concerns about job security as well as internal factors such as 23 programmes being in teach-out and c53 staff having left the College. The survey provided a helpful "temperature check" and results would be shared with staff.

7.4 Members commented that the College Executive Group (CEG) should be encouraged by the results. While there was a need for improvement in academic line management, this was not necessarily uncommon across the sector. The Deputy Principal agreed, noting the need for line management training. There were challenges for staff both in participating in training and in undertaking line management responsibilities within the College's high-intensity studio-based model.

7.5 Regarding the lower completion rate (49% compared to 60% the previous year) the Deputy Principal suggested that staff with negative experiences may have been more likely to respond previously or that some staff may perceive that completion would not lead to change. Staff turnover was also likely to be a contributing factor.

7.6 It was suggested that the leadership question "You think the CEG understands the day-to-day challenges of your job, and they provide clear direction for Rose Bruford College" combined two distinct issues and might be separated in future surveys. However, it was agreed that some measures should remain consistent for Board tracking; this would include the Employee Engagement Index would remain constant. Local action plans to address the survey findings were recommended.

7.7 The Board **noted** the Strategic Plan 2024-27 annual KPI report and the results of the Employee Engagement Survey.

8. HE FINANCES AND DRAFT BUDGET 2026/27

8.1 The Director of Service Delivery presented to the Board on the core components of financial reporting at the College comprising the statement of financial activities (surplus/deficit or income/expenditure), the balance sheet (assets, liabilities and reserves) and cash flow and the purpose of each. The CFO further outlined how the College received its income from the Students Loan Council (SLC) and the associated financial reporting requirements including the Annual Financial Return (AFR) which presented a longer forecast, the financial statements, interim financial returns, Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC), the World Leading Specialist Provider funding and Capital monitoring. and OfS reportable events. The College was also required to inform the OfS of 'reportable events' of which there had been three since the CFO had been in post - the closure of the Wigan campus, the appointment of the new Chair and a liquidity breach during the year caused by delayed receipt of the theatre tax rebate.

8.2 Governors welcomed the presentation and requested that the AFR be made available for review. During discussion it was noted that sector bodies such as Universities UK (UUK) and GuildHE had lobbied for a change in the distribution of SLC funding however there were concerns regarding student withdrawals. It was further noted that TRAC methodology was helpful in assessing whether activities were financially sustainable. That staff costs were 40% of total cost which was low compared to the sector and indicative of a lean staff cost base. That income from student accommodation was expected to support financial sustainability in the next financial year.

8.3 The CFO moved on to introduce the draft budget for 2026/27. It was noted that this was indicative and would be resubmitted for approval at the July Board meeting informed by confirmed student enrolments. The CFO explained that the draft budget presented 'desired' case and a 'low' case scenarios and outlined the underlying assumptions and key risk factors. It was noted that should the low case materialise, more significant action would be required beyond cost reductions.

8.4 In discussion a governor noted that while many factors were within the College's control external pressures - particularly student withdrawals driven by the cost-of-living crisis - were not. It was recognised that it was difficult to adjust the cost base quickly in response to reduced student numbers. A more cautious inflation assumption of 6% was advised.

8.5 Governors further discussed the purpose of the budget specifically whether it should aim to achieve the surplus in the Strategic Plan KPIs or, if that was not feasible, prioritise maintaining sufficient liquidity to satisfy OfS expectations on financial viability and sustainability. The CFO advised that achieving the Strategic Plan KPI would require a significant reduction in the College's cost base. It was also note that that reducing capital expenditure would create longer term challenges, as the College had experienced in needing to invest in systems. Additionally the absence of a fixed assets register limited the College's ability to fully identify and plan for technical debt and future capital investment requirements. The Principal also emphasised the importance of ensuring the student experience was not compromised.

8.5 The Chair acknowledged the time appropriately taken to consider this item. The Board **noted** the draft budget for the 2026/27 financial year which would be finalised and return for approval at the next Board meeting in July.

Academic and student items

9. STUDENT UNION (SU) UPDATE

9.1 The SU President reported on the delivery of 37 events during the BRU FEST festival with initial feedback being positive. It was further noted that the new UG student space had been well received. Student elections were underway. A venue for the Summer Ball had been secured at the University of Greenwich and it would be clearly communicated that this was an SU-led event. The President of the National Union of Students (NUS) had attended BRU FEST and the SU President was attending the 2026 Equity Conference that weekend.

9.2 A member requested that an update on the Equity Conference be provided at the next Board meeting. With thanks the Board **noted** the SU update.

Action: SU President

10. ACADEMIC BOARD MINUTES

10.1 The Principal reported on the meeting of the Academic Board held the previous day; minutes would be submitted to the Board at its next meeting in July 2026. The Academic Board approved the validation of seven new programmes starting in September, ratified professorial appointments and considered the annual complaints and appeals report which would also be submitted to the Board in July.

10.3 The Board **noted** the verbal update on the Academic Board meeting held on 6 May 2026.

Governance and Committee items

11. REMUNERATION COMMITTEE

11.1 The Chair of the Remuneration Committee reported on the meeting held on 20 April 2026 noting discussion on the parameters to inform remuneration recommendations for CEG members CEG in the Autumn and consideration of a proposed new Recognition and Facilities Agreement with the Unions. A member clarified that there had previously been an agreement in 2003 but that subsequent versions had not been signed by both parties.

11.2 The Board **noted** the minutes of the Remuneration Committee held on 20 April 2026

12. STANDING ORDERS

12.1 The Clerk noted that the 2019 Standing Orders had been reviewed and recommended by the Governance and Nominations Committee in February 2026 but were inadvertently omitted from the papers at the Board meeting in March. The Standing Orders required approval at a fully constituted Board meeting to be amended. The revised document removed duplication with other governance documentation, simplified language and incorporated more modern governance practices including provision for decision-making by electronic means.

12.2 The Board **approved** the Standing Orders.

Closing items

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

13.1 The Board **noted** the remaining meeting in 2025/26 was being held on 9 July 2026 starting at 2.00pm. Suggestions for the subject of the pre-Board development session were invited.

13.2 The Clerk noted that draft meeting dates for 2026/27 had been prepared but were being reviewed in light of discussions regarding the most appropriate timing to align with UCAS application, offer acceptance and enrolment data. The revised plan was to hold the annual strategic away day at the start of the academic year in September, followed by one Board meeting later that term. This would be a full meeting including approval of the financial statements however it was not uncommon across the sector for the Autumn meeting to have a full agenda. A further Board meeting would be held in the Spring and two Board meetings in the Summer term to allow for two iterations of the budget for the following financial year. Final dates would be confirmed as soon as possible.

Dawn Turpin
Clerk to the Board
14 May 2026

Appendix

Action tracker

Minute	**Action**
July 2025	
Minute 9, CFO	- review the format of the HR annual report and resubmit to the next meeting of the Board being held on 23 October. This action is paused pending implementation of a new HR system that will enable improved data monitoring and reporting.
May 2026	
Minute 9.2, SU President	- provide an update on the 2026 Equity Conference to the Board meeting in July