

## Self-assessment on Management and Governance 2025-26

### 1. Management and governance arrangements

1.1 The comprehensive 'Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2024', which was placed before the Corporation on 10 December 2024, includes information regarding management and governance at the City of Portsmouth College (COPC). Arrangements are set out in full in the 'Statement of Corporate Governance and Internal Control' (pp42-49), which confirms that measures are appropriate in terms of the size and complexity of the College, as a provider of Higher Education in England.

1.2 It is the Corporation's responsibility to bring independent judgement to bear on issues of strategy, performance, resources, and standards of conduct. The Corporation meets four times per academic year and is provided with details of the overall financial position of the College together with other information, such as performance against funding targets, proposed capital expenditure, quality concerns and personnel-related matters, such as health and safety and environmental issues.

1.3 The Corporation and its supporting Committees have a clear and robust cycle of business, mapped against an annual meeting schedule. Strategically planned and considered agendas are in line with the core values of governance and include regular review of documents, such as Committee Terms of Reference, Standing Orders and Corporation and Committee business plans.

- 1.4 The Corporation discharges its responsibilities through several Committees:
- **Audit:** To scrutinise the robustness of the College's control framework and assess its application in practice.
  - **Finance & Resources:** To ensure value for money and maximisation of resources and to give assurance to Corporation on the suitability and appropriateness of the College's financial strategy and policies within the context of the College's overall objectives and strategy.
  - **Learning & Quality:** To give assurance to Corporation on the quality of the College's teaching, learning and assessment and to drive up standards.
  - **Remuneration:** To advise Corporation on the remuneration and conditions of employment for Senior Postholders.
  - **Search & Governance:** To lead on continuous improvement and best practice, advising Corporation on Corporation and Committee membership and general governance matters.
  - **Special:** To examine the case for the dismissal of a senior postholder.

1.5 Review of Higher Education provision is an integral part of Corporation business and reviewing documentation related to this area of provision falls within the remits of both the Learning & Quality (L+Q) and the Finance and Resources (F+R) committees.

1.6 The Learning & Quality Committee is attended by the Deputy CEO & Principal for Curriculum and Quality, who has overall management responsibility for HE. The specific purpose of this Committee is to scrutinise academic arrangements and outcomes, including quality, retention, and achievements. Amongst the reports it receives is the annual Self-Assessment Report, which summarises SAR documents from each curriculum area and the comments on HE contained within them, as well as feeding directly into the Quality Improvement Plan for the College as a whole.

1.7 In exercising its responsibility to monitor the College's financial strategy and policies, the Finance & Resources Committee receives HE documentation relating specifically to financial matters, such as annual revisions to the HE Fees Policy and HE Refund and Compensation Policy, as well as the crucially important Student Protection Plan.

1.8 In addition to L+Q and F+R, the Corporation's Audit Committee has the role of identifying all risks to the College, including any academic and financial risk associated with HE. The Committee meets termly and provides a forum for reporting by COPC's auditors and accountants. As a standing agenda item, the Audit Committee also considers the strategic risk register and updates the College's risk management policy on an annual basis.

1.9 Strategic overview is provided by Higher Education being carefully monitored by senior leaders through discussion of HE Strategy on the SMT agenda on a monthly basis. In this way, key objectives can be reviewed and the position of HE within the overall College Strategic Plan confirmed.

1.10 The Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education Partnerships at the University of Portsmouth sits on the Corporation as a COPC governor, and he is integral to the HE Partnership Group, which oversees collaboration activities. Not least through his involvement, the Governors have a good understanding of the College's existing HE provision and how it might increase in importance, as it develops strategically over coming years.

1.11 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Portsmouth also sits on the Corporation. Her expertise in Higher Education and the highly influential, senior position she holds within the University adds considerably to the insight provided for College Governors and further strengthens the partnership between the two institutions.

1.12 City of Portsmouth College is a large further education provider with a relatively small, yet growing proportion of HE activity. The College is spread across several individual sites and primarily caters for the diverse communities living in the urban environment of Portsmouth and its surrounding area. Until now, HE student numbers have always been below 100, but efforts to expand provision should see this figure exceeded in coming years.

1.13 Academic Award Boards organised with our awarding partners Pearson and/or the University of Portsmouth determine the outcome of our HE programmes and maintain appropriate standards of quality. In combination with other bodies mentioned above, these pivotal discussions contribute to the strategic oversight and future direction of Higher Education at City of Portsmouth College.

1.14 With the support of a valued academic partner in the University of Portsmouth and the autonomy to make our own decisions on Higher Education, arrangements for the

management and governance of HE at COPC appear wholly appropriate to the size and complexity of our provision.

## 2. Appropriateness, adequacy, and effectiveness

### 2.1 Governance

2.1.1 City of Portsmouth College is fully committed to exhibiting best practice in all aspects of corporate governance and endeavours to conduct its business in accordance with the seven principles identified by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership). As such, COPC believes that its procedures are wholly suitable for the effective delivery of Higher Education in the context of the institution.

2.1.2 As outlined in the 'Statement of Corporate Governance and Internal Control', the Corporation adopted the 'Further Education Code of Good Governance' newly published by the Association of Colleges (AoC) on 23 July 2024, and believes that the College complies with all its provisions. It is recognised that, as a body entrusted with public and private funds, COPC has a duty to observe the highest standards of governance at all times, and in carrying out these responsibilities, it takes full account of the Code.

2.1.3 The AoC's 'FE Code of Good Governance' identifies the behaviours, outcomes and recommended practice of college governance, as well as indicating how these might be evidenced across a range of core principles in the areas of:

- Determination of aims and strategic oversight
- Responsibility and accountability
- Leadership and integrity
- Collaboration and stakeholder engagement
- Regulatory compliance
- Board and organisational effectiveness

2.1.4 Roles for the governing body to undertake inherent to these guidelines include:

- Formulate and agree the mission and strategy that defines the ethos of the College
- Be collectively accountable for the business of the College taking all decisions on matters within their duties and responsibilities
- Ensure there are effective underpinning policies and systems, which facilitate student voice.
- Foster exceptional teaching and learning
- Ensure that the College is responsive to workforce trends by adopting a range of strategies for engaging with employers and other stakeholders
- Adopt a financial strategy and funding plans which are compatible with the duty to ensure sustainability and solvency of the College
- Ensure that effective control and due diligence takes place in relation to all matters including acquisitions, subcontracting and partnership activity
- Meet and aim to exceed its statutory responsibilities for equality and diversity
- Ensure that there are carefully organised and clear governance and management structures, with well-understood delegations
- Regularly review governance performance and effectiveness

2.1.5 An external governance review was undertaken by Governance4FE in 2023-24 and the findings were presented to the Corporation on 26 March 2024. The report found that the College demonstrated 'a well-developed level of maturity of governance' when assessed against five areas: governance rules and structures; relationships; enabling; alignment; and team. The final recommendations were agreed in full and incorporated into the 2024-25 governance improvement plan.

2.1.6 City of Portsmouth College is an exempt charity as defined by Part 3 of the Charities Act 2011. The Director of Governance maintains a register of the financial and personal interests of the Members, who are also the Trustees for the purposes of this legislation. All Members must confirm that they have due regard for the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit and statements on behalf of the College outlining this commitment are to be evidenced in the 'Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2024'.

2.1.7 Governors undertook regular developmental activities 2024-25, including safeguarding training, and will continue to do so throughout 2025-26. The Principal's termly report to the Corporation keeps them fully abreast of sector developments and this helped them when reflecting on local government data when agreeing the new College's vision, mission, and objectives.

2.1.8 The Director of Governance has participated professional network meetings to remain up to date with changes in the sector and has also spent a year being mentored by a National Leader of Governance.

## **2.2 Management of Academic Standards**

2.2.1 Academic powers, rights and responsibilities for Higher Education providers have been set out in key pieces of legislation over recent years. The QAA has developed several documents that give guidance appropriate to this legislation and outline the duties on providers to set and maintain academic standards, including the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and the revised QAA Quality Code. Even though the QAA has stepped down from the role of Designated Quality Body (DQB) for the regulation of Higher Education and the Office for Students now focuses more specifically on ongoing conditions of registration in terms of determining the need for intervention than the QAA Quality Code, this document remains a valuable additional reference point in maintaining high-quality delivery.

2.2.2 In accordance with these guidelines, both the University of Portsmouth and Pearson ensure that COPC delivery of Higher Education is appropriately set up to provide opportunities to demonstrate:

- the relationship between the intended outcomes of the programme and the expectations set out in the qualification descriptors
- that the volume of assessed study is sufficient to show that the learning outcomes have been achieved at the right level
- that the design of the curriculum and assessments is such that all students following the programme have the opportunity to achieve the intended outcomes
- that the qualifications offered are given a recognised and appropriate title according to their intended level

2.2.3 COPC belongs to several networks supporting academic standards in HE, including the Southern Universities Network and the HE Partnership Group with the University of Portsmouth. These trusted networks provide a positive opportunity to compare perceptions about Higher Education developments, as well as offering the chance to discuss issues and share best practice. Over the past two years, colleagues from COPC involved in the delivery of HE have given presentations to partner institutions at regional conferences organised by the University of Portsmouth focussed on 'FE>HE Transitions and Pathways' and the support offered to students accessing HE.

2.2.4 Through its membership of the AoC, the College also takes an active role in regional meetings with other colleges offering HE programmes from the London, South East and South West regions.

2.2.5 The process of assuring academic quality is further reinforced by the use of external assessors and examiners, who are experts in their particular subject field and are able to ensure that organisations are delivering programmes with:

- Appropriate standards referenced to subject benchmarks, FHEQ, and programme and module specifications
- Assessment processes that measure student achievement against learning objectives, are in accordance with awarding body regulations and College policy, and are comparable to the standards of other delivering organisations
- Fairness within the regulations of the awarding body

### 3. Public interest governance

3.1 City of Portsmouth College is confident that its management and governance arrangements fully uphold the standard public interest governance principles that are applicable to all providers of Higher Education. Evidence both in terms of our adherence to the AoC's 'FE Code of Good Governance' and specific to the College is given below in respect of the various principles.

3.2 **Academic freedom:** Article 14 of COPC's 'Instrument and Articles of Government' specifically relates to academic freedom and states that "*the Corporation shall have regard to the need to ensure that academic staff at the institution have freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, without putting themselves at risk of losing their jobs or any privileges which they may enjoy at the institution.*" In respect of this issue, the College has also taken steps to ensure that it meets all the expectations inherent to Condition E6, which comes into force on 1 August 2025 (*see also 3.7 below*).

3.3 **Accountability:** The AoC's 'Further Education Code of Good Governance' outlines various values and beliefs to be anticipated of governors and senior management at colleges, including that they should be accountable for all aspects of college business. In complying with this expectation the Corporation of City of Portsmouth College:

- has set out its responsibilities in the widely published 'Instrument and Articles of Government'
- has demonstrated how each responsibility is to be met in the 'Scheme of Delegation'
- conducts its affairs as openly and transparently as possible
- consults fully on its plans and delivery
- produces an annual report and audited financial statements

- ensures honest, accurate and timely information is made available about all aspects of provision
- receives regular reports on the number and types of complaint and how complaints are resolved
- consists of members who fulfil their duties in line with accepted standards in public life
- acts solely in the interests of the College at all times

**3.4 Student engagement:** COPC believes that students on all HE courses, as well as staff at all levels and other stakeholders, such as awarding partners and employers, make an essential contribution to effective programme review and also assist the College in evaluating and improving our procedures. We therefore ensure a high-quality HE student experience and an enhanced learning environment through regular course representative meetings, opportunities to capture student voice and online surveys. Learner opinions play a central part in HE discussions throughout the year and careful consideration of student feedback has resulted in genuine improvements to provision.

**3.5 Academic governance:** With thorough scrutiny at L+Q, the COPC Corporation confirms that it has confidence in the reliability of academic standards and the quality of the student academic experience at the College and underlines its positive view of HE provision.

**3.6 Risk management and Value for money:** In signing off and publishing the annual report and audited financial statement, the Corporation demonstrates its commitment to comprehensive corporate risk management and control arrangements that promote value for money and efficient use of the capital estate and technology, meet mandatory audit requirements, and produce accurate and quality-assured college data.

**3.7 Freedom of speech:** City of Portsmouth College supports the principle of freedom of speech and expression as one of its fundamental principles. The College ensures that staff and students have freedom to question, test, put forward new ideas, and express controversial or unpopular opinions, without placing themselves at any risk. Freedom of speech and expression are basic human rights that are protected by law and are upheld within COPC by encouraging external speakers, whilst recognising the College's responsibility for the personal welfare and safety of its students.

The policy framework underpinning freedom of speech extends to all staff in the performance of their duties, as well as to students presenting or exhibiting work produced during their studies. These inherent rights are seen as crucial for learning, allowing students to think critically, challenge and engage with different perspectives. The policy also precludes any actions that seek to halt lectures, tutorials, or other academic activity on the grounds of the opinions presented or that prevent students from attending any academic activity because of views that are lawfully expressed.

**3.8 Governing body and Fit and proper:** It can be evidenced from the 'Statement of Corporate Governance and Internal Control' in City of Portsmouth College's 'Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2024' that the composition, diversity, and skills mix of the Board is appropriate for the size, nature and complexity of COPC. The purpose, responsibilities and performance of the Corporation is outlined in this document, as well as the Terms of Office, which have been established in the best interests of the

College. All members of the Board are fit and proper persons, as are all other senior managers and individuals exercising control or significant influence.

**3.9 Regularity, propriety, and value for money\*:** The following ‘Statement of Regularity, Propriety and Compliance’ is taken from the ‘Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2024’.

*[\* additional public interest principle for providers in receipt of financial support]*

“As Accounting Officer, I confirm that the Corporation has had due regard to the framework of authorities governing regularity, priority and compliance, and the requirements of the College’s accountability agreement, funding agreements and contracts with ESFA and DfE, and has considered its responsibility to notify ESFA of material irregularity, impropriety and non-compliance with those authorities and terms and conditions of funding. I confirm on behalf of the Corporation that after due enquiry, and to the best of my knowledge, I am able to identify any material irregular or improper use of funds by the Corporation, or material non-compliance with the framework of authorities and the terms and conditions of funding under the Corporation’s accountability agreement, funding agreements and contracts with ESFA and DfE, or any other public funder. This includes the elements outlined in the “Dear accounting officer” letter of 29 November 2022 and ESFA’s bite size guides. I confirm that no instances of material irregularity, impropriety, funding non-compliance, or non-compliance with the framework of authorities have been discovered to date. If any instances are identified after the date of this statement, these will be notified to ESFA.”

**3.10 Independent members of the governing body\*:** The following table outlines the relevant professional experience of independent members of the Corporation of City of Portsmouth College, as well as indicating the Committees, on which they currently serve.

Independent Governors	Experience	Committee Membership
Shahalam Ali	Qualified chartered accountant. Currently works for BAE Systems as Senior Finance business partner.	Finance & Resources
Prue Amner	Career included working for Ofsted and the Learning & Skills Council. Former education consultant.	Learning & Quality Audit
Huw Chapman	Worked for Pall Europe for 29 years including nine years as UK Managing Director. Recently retired after five years as CEO at the training organisation PETA.	Learning & Quality Search & Governance
Mark Cooper	Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor at the University of Portsmouth responsible for the strategic development of UK education partnerships.	Search & Governance
Ashley Cullen	Former IBM employee leading finance, operational and support functions at country and European level as well as managing change management projects.	Audit
Alex Dartmouth	Qualified chartered accountant.	Finance & Resources

Graham Goddard	Former GFE Vice-Principal and lecturer in construction, engineering, plumbing, and building services.	Lead governor with responsibility for health & safety
Tim Jackson	FE Advisor to the DfE following retirement after 38 years in the FE sector, including 22 years as Principal & CEO.	Corporation Vice-Chair Finance & Resources Learning & Quality
Anne Murphy	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) at the University of Portsmouth. Prior to joining the HE sector, Anne spent 12 years working in the city.	Finance & Resources Search & Governance Remuneration
Shirley Nellthorpe	Former Skills Funding Agency senior manager liaising with colleges regarding funding rules and delivery of FE programmes.	Audit Learning & Quality COPC safeguarding lead
Robert Nitsch	COO at Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. Previously British Army HR Director responsible for 140k employees & volunteers in 270 trades.	Corporation Chair Finance & Resources Search & Governance Remuneration
Mike Stoneman	Deputy Director of Children, Families & Education at Portsmouth City Council. Previously Area Director for Hampshire and Isle of Wight Learning & Skills Council.	Remuneration Learning & Quality
Pauline Tiller	Director for various HE and FE funding agencies specialising in funding, audit and finance. Currently working for BDO LLP leading on FE and apprenticeships.	Audit