

Minutes of the Proceedings of the Meeting of the Governing Body of Rose Bruford College of Theatre & Performance held on Thursday 20 March 2025 at the College

Present:

Jennifer Sims (Chair)
Professor Randall Whittaker (Principal and CEO)
Sud Basu
Dr Alex Bols
Anni Domingo
Helen Fairfoul
Geraldine Kelly
Dr Phoebe Patey-Ferguson (Staff Governor)
Dr David Reid
Janet Smith

In attendance:

Professor Stephen Farrier – Deputy Principal
Faye Dunn-Director of Operations
Rachael Wilson – Management Accountant for item 6
Stuart Page-Dean
Veronique Fricke-Director Corporate Affairs
Jim Benson – Secretary
Jakki Bardsley (Head of Academic Data Systems and Statutory Returns) for item 10
Andy Youell (the External Consultant) for item 10

2025/16 Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone and reminded all members and attendees of the need to keep all matters and papers relating to the meeting confidential.

Formalities

2025/17 Apologies

These were received from Daryl Burns (Staff Governor), Vivien Goodwin, Haydn Tudor Jones (Student Governor) and Michael Healy (Director of Finance).

2025/18 Conflict of Interest Declarations

The Secretary had a standing declaration due to his appointment at the University of East London and Helen Fairfoul has a declaration as a member of the Board of Governors at the University of Northumbria.

2025/19 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 January 2025

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 January 2025 were confirmed as an accurate record. It was confirmed that the shaded areas indicated where the minutes would be redacted for publication. The Secretary stated that minutes were only published for a year so there was

no need for a process to be established for reviewing redactions although this would need to be considered if a Freedom of Information request was received.

2025/20 Matters arising from the Meeting held on 23 January 2025

Staff Engagement Survey

20.1 The Deputy Principal stated that this would be an item on the agenda for the next meeting and available for discussion at the meeting of the Remuneration Committee.

20.2 It was noted that all other matters arising appeared on the agenda or had been attended to.

2025/021 Principal's Report [BG 1-4-1]

21.1 The Principal spoke to the paper and brought the following matters to the Board's attention:

i. That a second PhD student had completed their studies. The Deputy Principal and Dr Phoebe Patey-Ferguson were thanked for their efforts in supporting this which would enhance the College's ability to secure Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and European research funding. The staffing in the Research Office had been enhanced and a bid for a £300,000 AHRC Catalyst Award was submitted recently.

ii. The work being undertaken to enhance the biodiversity on campus with projects such as creating a native wildflower meadow, the rewilding to support natural ecosystems and installing swan pontoons to encourage the return of native species.

iii. That Graduation 2025 would be taking place on 11 and 12 September 2025 with morning and afternoon ceremonies on each day. The Honorary Fellows had also been confirmed.

iv. Discussions over the transfer of students from ALRA had re-opened with the OfS following a process of careful relationship building.

21.2 The Principal tabled a paper that provided a year on year comparison of undergraduate applications, offers and firm acceptances between 2020 and 2025.

2025/22 Finance Report-Financial Update [BoG 1-4-2]

22.1 Rachael Wilson spoke to the finance paper on behalf of the Director of Finance.

22.3 The Board agreed that financial information had improved and commended the Director of Finance and the Management Accountant on this. The Principal/CEO assured the Board that CEG reviewed UCAS and other admissions data on a daily basis and considered its impact on finances.

2025/23 Key points from minutes of committees [BG 1-4-3]

Audit and Risk Committee – 24 February 2024

23.1 The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee informed the Board that delivery of the Internal Audit Plan for 2024/25 was the main issue of concern discussed at the February meeting. This had been raised since the Client Partner was required to attend the meeting as the Internal Audit Partner had left the firm (Azets). The Principal/CEO advised that CEG had been in contact with the Internal Auditor and could confirm that the internal audit on Project Management was at the fieldwork stage, the Financial Management and Budgeting Setting audit would commence on 24 March 2025, the Admissions and Student Life audit would commence in April 2025 and the Cyber Security audit had been planned for May 2025.

23.2 In response to a question the Secretary advised that a decision as to whether the Internal Audit Plan for 2024/25 needed to be revised did not need to be made until June adding that if the schedule outlined by the Principal/CEO was adhered to there should not be a problem with delivery. He stated that the Internal Auditors were re-appointed annually, despite there being a five-year over-arching contract, so the Audit and Risk Committee could take appropriate action if required. It was noted that securing internal audit services had proved challenging.

23.3 The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee advised the Board that details on the Risk Register had also been received and had shown considerable improvement on previous iterations. The Board agreed that this was an important development for the annual assurance on risk that would be provided to the December 2025 Board meeting.

Strategy Session

2025/24 Research performance: Preparation for REF/PhD developments- Presentation

24.1 The Deputy Principal delivered a presentation on preparation for the 2029 REF and general developments in respect of research and PhDs at the College. Two papers were tabled, one outlining the background to the REF and the key features of the REF 2029. The second paper covered the work of the REF Steering Group at the College and the programme of activities and events relating to the REF from 2025 until 2029. The following points were raised:

- i. While academic staff may have research as part of their contract, this could cover knowledge exchange or research relating to teaching. It was essential to determine which staff have or will need to have significant responsibility for research at the College.
- ii. It was essential to ensure that the full costs were reflected in bids for research and grant applications. Staff were being encouraged to submit research grant applications to build research at the College.

iii. Currently there were three external research applications that had been submitted seeking a total of £360k in funds. This consisted of three applications, two small and one large. Dr Marina Hadjilouca and the research office had submitted a bid for a £300,000 AHRC Catalyst Award in collaboration with the University of Belfast, Aalto University and the Cyens Centre of Excellence, Nicosia.

iv. The College, like all institutions, was required to have a Code of Practice in place to determine how the REF submission would be made and how outputs would be selected. This had an equality and diversity focus and would require staff to be trained and for there to be equality impact assessments conducted.

v. The quality of research would determine the extent to which changes might need to be made at the College to enhance research. This would determine whether research needed to be set out in staff contracts or whether activity could be determined by the Code of Practice. It was crucial to determine which staff currently had research provision in their contracts and what this ultimately covered.

vi. The development of early career researchers was inhibited at the College due to the intensity of the teaching requirements. Until the teaching burden had lessened, or the College could afford to buy out an element of time for staff to do research, this would be problematic.

24.2 The Board said it was pleasing to see the second PhD completion and looked forward to seeing further progress in this area.

2025/25 KPI Update: Focus on Issues and Milestone Reports [BG 1-4-4]

25.1 The Deputy Principal spoke to the paper stating that the KPI Dashboard was developed in response to the Board's request for the KPIs to be differentiated by each reporting cycle to aid scrutiny and for there to be a focus on specific sets of KPIs at each Board meeting. He added that the KPI owners had provided dates for delivery and highlighted the risk of meeting the stated deadlines. The Board was invited to comment on these.

25.2 The Board stated that it was good to see the progress being made on the student focused KPIs but noted that KPI 3 [Student Success Transformation | Performance above benchmark PTES] had not commenced yet it had been rated as 'on target'. It was confirmed that this meant to relay the fact that there were no anticipated impediments to the KPI being achieved. The Deputy Principal advised that it would be made clear when milestones were being achieved, or not as the case may be.

25.3 The Board requested that in future there be a 'deep dive' on a number, perhaps 25%, of the KPIs to give a sense of what was happening under each activity. This should be complemented with a one page summary sheet highlighting the progress with the KPIs overall.

Formal Business

**2025/26 Student Record System – Progress report [BG 1-4-5]
ESS (Unit E) highlight report-see separate document-BG 1-4-5a
Project Risk register-see separate document-BG 1-4-5b**

26.1 Jakki Bardsley (Head of Academic Data Systems and Statutory Returns) and Andy Youell (the External Consultant) spoke to the paper and advised the Board on progress being made with delivering the new student record system. It was reported that the implementation project was following three core principles:

- i. Implementing the system with minimal customisation;
- ii. prioritising core functionality in phase 1
- iii. leveraging the expertise of Unit-e to optimise system use and best practice.

26.2 The Head of Academic Data Systems and Statutory Returns reported that progress to date included:

- i. A Champion being designated within each department to promote the system and assist their teams throughout the transition;
- ii. that the hosted environment was now complete and staff would be granted access following the completion of required training;
- iii. curriculum data migration was approximately 80% complete;
- iv as soon as access was provided and training complete, a gap analysis would be conducted to ensure data accuracy and completeness
- v. ongoing meetings with Unit-e were taking place to review existing student data and to support the mapping and migration process;
- vi. a series of requirement gathering sessions, workshops and training sessions were scheduled throughout March and April with key stakeholders which was focused on completing phase 1 which would go live at the start of the 2025/26 academic year;
- vii. the system would go live for admissions at the start of the 2026/27 academic year

26.3 It was further reported that the following key actions would be taking place:

- i. A gap analysis would be conducted for the Curriculum area, with further analyses required for other areas once initial data migration was complete. This was a resource intensive exercise and would require active input from staff supported by Unit-e. There was likely to be the need to engage with an external consultant with expertise in both Thesis QL and Unit-e to assist with student data validation and testing.

- ii. The Database Manager and User Groups would need to establish protocols for managing data security within the database and to ensure appropriate access levels were assigned to staff.
- iii. Unit-e and staff in the College would need to collaborate on producing a terminology document that would be shared with champions and staff.
- iv. User Acceptance Testing was set to begin in mid-April, following the completion of staff training and data migration.

26.4 The Board was asked to note the Unit-e Project Risk and Issues log and the Project Highlight Report where it was stated that the project was currently running around 1-2 weeks' behind schedule. It was stated that an assessment of any impact to the overall project deadline would become possible once requirements have been ascertained for the main workstreams. The following points were raised:

- i. That retaining historic data was a separate exercise but the importance of doing this was understood along with the need to ensure that it was done so in accordance with data protection legislation.
- ii. The new system offered considerable improvements for students including provisions for how welfare information could be retained. It would also enhance compliance requirements in respect of UKVI. The capacity to conduct learning analytics in the area of student welfare would be extremely useful.
- iii. Audit and Risk Committee would need separate assurance that the system would provide reliable statutory data returns as well as functioning effectively for administrative purposes. While it was noted that system functionality was within the scope of the Internal Audit, independent assurance would need to be provided on the effectiveness of the system.

26.5 The External Consultant advised that his role was in part to provide independent assurance on the delivery of the project and this would cover the systems' ability to meet OfS and HESA reporting requirements. He added that the current system would be retained until there had been a complete migration of all required existing data. He agreed to provide the Board with periodic updates on the progress being made on migrating specific areas of data. The Board thanked the Head of Academic Data Systems and Statutory Returns and the External Consultant for their report. They further advised it was essential to ensure that historic data on the College alumni was retained.

2025/27 Office for Students Consultations and Communications [BG 1-1-9]

27.1 The report was noted by the Board including the resurrection of the Freedom of Speech Act, although without the imposition of the statutory tort and regulatory oversight of Students' Unions. In response to a question, the Deputy Principal stated that CEG provided executive oversight of freedom of speech and viewed this from a student, staff and risk perspective. Reports on this were provided through the Prevent Return, periodic updates and would also be covered in meeting the requirements of the new OfS E6 Condition of Registration in respect of sexual harassment and misconduct.

27.2 The Secretary advised the College's freedom of speech policy and matters such as the external speakers policy would need to be reviewed once the regulation on free speech was known. The Deputy Principal advised that free speech had not been a big concern at the College and measures such as the appointment of free speech officers, one being Dr Phoebe Patey-Ferguson, had helped when issues emerged. Dr Phoebe Patey-Ferguson added that much of this advice was an extension of her work on anti-censorship.

2025/28 Confirmation of Re-appointment of Board Members [BG 1-4-7]

The Board confirmed that appointment of Anni Domingo as an independent member of the Board for a further three years.

2025/29 Appointment of Chair of the Board of Governors [BG 1-4-8]

29.1 The Chair left the meeting for this item.

29.2 The Chair of Governance and Nominations Committee advised that current Chair of the Board, Jennifer Sims, was due to conclude her term of office in December 2025 but was likely to stand down in October 2025 or at the latest at the AGM in December 2025. He advised that Governance and Nominations Committee had recommended an internal appointment be made if possible. The Governance and Nominations Committee would drive the process and would seek input from other Board members, particularly if a member of the Committee were to express an interest in the role. The Board made the following comments:

- i. That while there were many ways in which the Chair role could be undertaken, it was important that the internal focus aspect of the role was understood by the appointee.
- ii. It was important for the appointee to understand the journey that the College and the Board had been on and the strategic direction. This was not the right time for an external appointment.
- iii. As well as providing leadership, the appointee would need to understand the strategic ambition of the College and the ambitions the Board had for enhancing the student experience.
- iv. That while the Governance and Nominations Committee would drive the process, precisely what arrangements would be put in place for involving other Board members would be determined once expressions of interest had been ascertained.
- v. Details regarding fiduciary responsibility and working with the Audit and Risk Committee to closely monitor the financial performance of the College needed to be amended to ensure the role Audit and Risk Committee of was not compromised.
- vi. Details regarding delegating responsibilities to the Vice Chair needed to be amended and extended to include the Senior Independent Governor.

29.3 The Board confirmed it was content with the proposed timetable. The Secretary was asked to amend and publish the advert and job description for the Chair of the Board.

29.4 The Chair rejoined the meeting.

2025/30 Appointment of the Secretary of the Board of Governors

30.1 The Secretary left the meeting for this item.

30.2 The Board confirmed the appointment of Dawn Turpin as Secretary to the Board in succession to Jim Benson. Ms Turpin would formally take up duties after the meeting of the Board on 8 May 2025. Mr Benson would complete his duties following the servicing of the meeting on 8 May 2025.

2025/31 Any other business

There was none.

2025/32 Dates of meetings

Board of Governors meetings in 2024/25 [starting at 2pm]:

Thursday 8 May 2025

Thursday 10 July 2025

Board of Governors meetings in 2025/26 [starting at 2pm]:

Thursday 23 October 2025

Thursday 27 November 2025+AGM or Thursday 4 December 2025+AGM

Thursday 22 January 2026+Away Day

Thursday 19 March 2026

Thursday 7 May 2026

Thursday 9 July 2026