

External Board Review

In response to the Department for Education (DfE) requirements on strengthening governance, the College's Board of Corporation commissioned an external review of governance which took place between March – May 2024.

The Board engaged the Association of Colleges (AoC) and the review was undertaken by Sandra Prail MBE. The methodology followed a seven-stage approach and the published AoC framework for FE College External Board Reviews comprising of three core areas for evaluation (Board Dimensions) – namely, Composition, Structure and Interaction. Evidence was gathered from a variety of sources and triangulated to draw findings around an overarching question for each Board Dimension.

Executive Summary

Board Composition

The Board understands the needs to include members with an appropriate breadth of skills and experience and undertakes a regular skills audit that it uses to identify skill gaps and target Governor recruitment. The Board has a rich blend of experience and skill with some identified gaps. The Board recognises the importance of a healthy churn of Governors and Governors do not generally hold office for more than 8 years. An initial year term allows for a constructive process of reflection. Governors have a strong commitment to college values.

Areas for development include succession planning and a renewed focus on diversity as a strategic priority and ensuring the Board profile seeks to reflect the student population profile.

Board Structure

The post Ofsted inspection focus by the Board has enhanced its leadership and developed a richer source of evidence on which to govern the College. There is an increased understanding of the Board's core functions and Governors are taking a more active role in strategy development.

Areas for development include continuing to strengthen Governor engagements ensuring that Link roles have impact; continuing to strengthen the approach to risk and student voice; reviewing the use of technology in better enabling Governors to access, navigate and share key documents and considering formalising the Chairs meeting and potential for task and finish groups so that there is a deep dive structure for issues of concern.

Board Interaction

The Board of Corporation has a tone of supportive challenge. The culture observed at meetings was relaxed, humorous and inclusive. Opinions and contributions of all Governors are welcomed and valued and there are good opportunities to scrutinize proposals and ask questions.

Areas for development include developing and implementing an annual Chair appraisal scheme that ensures that the Chair's performance is constructively evaluated. Developing an effective Governance SAR process that has clear and relevant inputs and creates a SMART action plan that links to the College SAR and is evidence and risk led.

Conclusion

The overall conclusion on Board effectiveness is that the Board is proficient and has some impact on college strategy, effectiveness and outcomes.

An action plan has been developed to address the recommendations and areas for development within the report which was approved by the Corporation at the meeting held on 21 October 2024.