

SUMMARY OF THE EXTERNAL BOARD REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE

An external board review was undertaken by Chris Jones Consultancy Ltd and concluded in June 2024. The review considered four aspects of governance, namely:

1. People – Do the people involved in governance have an appropriate combination of skills, knowledge and experience, and are they supported by effective induction, development and appraisal processes?
2. Process – Are the processes of governance comprehensive, efficient, effective and compliant with the college's governance code?
3. Practice – Is the conduct of governance based on a clear understanding of the differentiated responsibilities of the people involved, and supported by appropriate behaviours, stakeholder engagement and team working?
4. Impact – Does the board have an effective process to monitor and assess its impact on the college?

The overall finding was that College governance was effective.

The key strengths from the report included:

- The Board has a good range of skills and experience
- The Chair is experienced, and annual reviews are undertaken with all Board members
- Staff welcome the visibility and support of Board members
- Discussions with staff and students confirmed that the ambition and values approved by the Board as part of its strategy are experienced by those studying and working at the college
- In addition to being effective in oversight and accountability; the Board is effective in its stewardship role, enabling the College to be outstanding.

It was acknowledged that high standards are at the heart of all that we do, and we recognise that individually and collectively as a college we can always improve. Recommendations for improvement were accepted covering the following areas:

People

- Governor recruitment
- Equality, diversity and inclusion
- Governor induction

Process

- Consistency of reporting

Practice

- Management of meetings
- College self-assessment
- Board effectiveness.
- Confidential items
- Student and staff engagement
- Senior staff appraisal

This review was undertaken in accordance with [External governance reviews: guide for FE college corporations and designated institutions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/612222/External_governance_reviews_guide_for_FE_college_corporations_and_designated_institutions.pdf)

| | <u>Recommendation</u> | <u>Board Response</u> | <u>Action Plan Timeline</u> |
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| People | | | |
| 1 | The Search and Governance Committee should use the skills matrix to support the recruitment of any new governors to ensure the Board has a wider balance of skills. | Accepted. Implemented – recruitment activity undertaken in July 2024, followed by a skills audit analysis in Feb 2025. | March 2025 COMPLETED |
| 2 | The Search and Governance Committee should develop a timely succession plan for those members who have exceeded the recommended two term limit set out in the college's standing orders and the adopted code of governance. | Accepted. The frequency of Search & Governance Committee meetings has increased in the 2023/2024 academic year with succession planning being a standing item on each agenda; maintaining focus. A minority of terms of office have been extended with supporting reasons for doing so. | Throughout 2024/2025. Key agenda item in March 2025. COMPLETED |
| 3 | The Board could be clearer about its ambitions to make the Board more diverse and inclusive, taking into account the particular geographies and demographics served by the college. | Accepted. Continues to be a key focus, though recognises the challenges of governor recruitment and suitable skills sets. In keeping with the recommended practice in Principle 6 of the Code of Good Governance, the Board composition aims to reflect the communities the college serves. | Throughout 2024/2025 COMPLETED |
| 4 | The induction programme for new members of the Board should be expanded to include opportunities to meet the wider management team and other members of the Board and to include role specific training allied to committee membership. | Accepted. Induction to include relevant on-line training via the ETF's Governance Development Programme. Member of the College Management Team to attend relevant part of the induction session. | December 2024 COMPLETED |
| Process | | | |
| 5 | The Board should receive timely management accounts between meetings. | Accept in principle, though will only implement if financial circumstances change significantly. College has sustained outstanding financial health and currently there are no triggers to warrant monthly reviews. | December 2024 COMPLETED |

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| | | <p>Management accounts are considered at every F&R Committee and Board meetings.</p> <p>Agreed at Board on 9.12.24 that this was to be instigated should the outstanding financial health grading change from its outstanding status.</p> | |
| 6 | The use of report front sheets should be reviewed with report authors and Board members to ensure they are helpful in identifying key issues for consideration by governors | <p>Accepted on on-going.</p> <p>The design of the front sheet was considered by the Search & Governance Committee in June 2023 as part of the review of the Standing Orders. Agreed to retain the existing format.</p> <p>As at March 2025 the at the contents of front sheets had been reviewed across all committees and the Board. Use of AI continues to be explored.</p> | <p>March 2025</p> <p>COMPLETED</p> |
| 7 | The process for introducing business not an agendas should be clarified. | <p>Accepted.</p> <p>Explicit AOB (of an urgent nature) to be included on every agenda.</p> | <p>December 2024</p> <p>COMPLETED</p> |
| 8 | Reports from committees to the Board should highlight key matters for further discussion. | <p>Accepted.</p> <p>As per approved Committee Terms of Reference, a written summary of each committee meeting is circulated to the full Board by the Committee Chair. This has been further enhanced by the introduction of AAA (Advise, Alert, Assure) reports from committees for onward reporting to every Board meeting.</p> | <p>On-going throughout 2024/2025</p> <p>COMPLETED</p> |
| 9 | Chairs should identify agenda items which require greater attention during meetings. | Accepted. | <p>For monitoring throughout 2024/2025.</p> <p>COMPLETED</p> |

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| 10 | The Board should allocate more time for shaping the college's strategic direction, including by having more and fuller strategy events during the year. | Accepted in principle and to be implemented should it deemed necessary. The Board currently allocates a half day each year to discuss the college's strategic direction. This is supplemented by strategic discussions at Board and committee meetings. To date, a need for this has not been identified, though will be kept under review. | For monitoring throughout 2024/2025. COMPLETED |
| Practice | | | |
| 11 | Chairs should ensure all members make effective contributions to meetings. | Accepted. Chairs invite questions from all members at each meeting and upon receipt of meeting documentation there is also an opportunity for questions to be submitted in advance of meetings. | On-going throughout 2024/2025 COMPLETED |
| 12 | Board members should be invited to participate in the validation of the self-assessment report. | Accepted for the Board to explore options for additional involvement of the SAR process in 2024/2025. | March 2025 COMPLETED |
| 13 | The Board should consider opportunities to formalise and strengthen processes for hearing the views of staff and students. | Accepted. Already previously identified re: the student voice and forms part of the Board Action/Development Plan resulting from the Board Self-Assessment Review (SAR). | March 2025 COMPLETED |
| 14 | The Board and Clerk should review and update the practice of excluding staff and student governors from participating in all confidential agenda items. | Accepted. | December 2024 COMPLETED |

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| 15 | The Remuneration Committee should receive a summary of the outcomes from the annual reviews of the Deputy Principals. | Accepted. Actioned – Commenced at the Remuneration Committee meeting Oct 2024. | October 2024 COMPLETED |
| 16 | The Board should agree a process to determine its own effectiveness, including the effectiveness of meetings. | Accepted. Each committee completes an annual review and an overarching annual Board SAR is undertaken. Actioned – Features as an agenda item at the end of all meetings. There is also an opportunity to offer feedback via the Head of Governance following every meeting. | On-going throughout 2024/2025 COMPLETED |