FIFE COLLEGE BOARD OF GOVERORS

Independently Facilitated External Effectiveness Review: December 2020

Recommendations and Action Plan: as at 17 March 2021

Introduction

We are delighted that the External Effectiveness Review Report highlights that governance arrangements in place at Fife College are effective and fully meet the requirements of the Code of Good Governance for Colleges Scotland.

Board members concur that arrangements in place allow them to govern effectively and that they are sufficiently informed and involved in the work of the College. Board members and senior staff feel that there is openness and trust amongst all involved in Board business and that there is a good balance between constructive dialogue, effective challenge and mutual support.

The recommendations made in the report reflect the good progress already made and will allow the Board to further enhance its effectiveness and refine some of the good practice already in place, freeing up more time for creative governance processes.

The recommendations are listed below with a response to each, and an action plan has been drafted which will be regularly monitored to ensure progress is made.

Response to Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Review the format of the business report to include progress to date, target & variance, risk rating, management intervention (if required), outcome, timescale
Response: It is agreed that the business report should be slimmed down to incorporate strategic level information with links to additional information for those members who prefer more detail. The Reviewer has sent a recommended report format based on reporting progress against strategic objectives and KPIs which will be considered as part of the review process. Duplication of detailed information already covered by Committees should be avoided wherever possible. Where an objective/KPI is reported as "red" then more detailed information should be provided by way of a separate report or annex giving further insight into this with a view to bringing back into line or taking whatever action is considered most appropriate.

Recommendation 2: Review 'recommendations' on all governance reports to make clear to board members the intended outcome from the report. To assist the development of recommendations, report writers should consider board 'impact' from decision making

Response: The template for Board papers will be updated to include a section on Board impact from decision making. This would then help to clarify the recommendation or options being presented and ensure fit with strategic plan and the impact the decision will have on stakeholders and resources.

Recommendation 3: Review governing report format to include 'learner and learning implications' and 'financial health implications'

Response: The template for Board papers can be updated to include a section on "learner and learning implications" and the current section on "financial implications" can be amended to cover "financial health implications".

Recommendation 4: Review the expectations and contribution of senior staff to governing processes to develop confidence, openness and professional insight

Response: The new business report format should allow for Board information to be presented at a more strategic level, and linked more directly to KPIs and strategic objectives, allowing Board members to focus solely on issues within their remit. More operational targets and detailed information should be reviewed by the Executive Team, and there should be an assumption that exception reports will be provided where this is not the case.

During discussions, Board members and senior staff considered that relationships were already positive, and there was already openness as all questions are answered and information requested readily provided.

Board members commented that there should be an onus on Board members to read reports in advance of meetings to enable senior staff therefore to focus in on areas for discussion and decision making at meetings rather than outline the content of reports again in detail.

It was also suggested that it might be useful to "group" Board member questions and answer those generally rather than in detail, noting that some answers are already in the papers and have been missed or are at an operational level where detail could be provided offline if required.

Recommendation 5: Review the centrality of promoting equality and diversity through planning and monitoring of action plan implementation. Consideration could be given to a Nominated Member for Equality and Diversity to act as a champion

Response: The Equalities Mainstreaming Report is discussed in detail by the H&S and HR Committee and recommended for approval to the Board of Governors. Equality and Diversity is embedded into all areas of the College's work and after regionalisation, a specific sub Committee of the H&S and HR Committee was set up to give the Board assurance that this was the case. Once structures had been put in place, policies and procedures had been drafted and approved, and the College moved into a more settled period, this group was disbanded and oversight returned to the H&S and HR Committee. The Board does not wish to have "champions" but instead relies on Committees to focus on areas within its remit. Equality and diversity is therefore a key priority for all members of the H&S and HR Committee.

Recommendation 6: Consider the development, approval and monitoring of a learner voice framework

Response: The Board considers that the learner voice is already fully considered within its governance structure, eg via Fife College Students' Association update reports and learner surveys. However it would be useful to document the learner voice framework, based on current practice, to clearly show where learner feedback is systematically gathered and fed into the College structure. This document could be reviewed regularly at agreed intervals and considered by the Academic Quality Committee to ensure adequate coverage.

Recommendation 7: Consider the ways in which learner safeguarding and support is reported to the governing board and, importantly, there is assurance that the college's procedures and practices are effective. Consideration could be given to a Nominated Member for Learner Safeguarding to act as a champion

Response: A presentation is due to be made to Board members prior to the Academic Quality Committee on 9 June 2021 on Safeguarding / Corporate Parenting. Consideration could be given as part of that presentation to what information the Board would like by way of further assurance and how often this issue could be reported upon. The Board does not wish to have "champions" but instead relies on Committees to focus on areas within its remit. Learner Safeguarding is therefore a key priority for all members of the Academic Quality Committee.

Recommendation 8: Review the standing committees of the governing board – for contribution to the achieving the board's responsibilities and to release time for more creative governing processes

Response: The Board reviews its Committees on an annual basis and considers that the Committees currently in place work well and do not require to be changed. The New Campus Project Board is a temporary Committee and will disband once its work has concluded. If the new format of report detailed in recommendation 1 is in place, this should streamline discussions and priorities and it is anticipated that this will free up time for more creative governing processes. In addition, time can be made available for this during Strategy and Development Days.

Recommendation 9: Consider ways to evolve the Audit and Risk Committee agenda to include the operation and usefulness of direct learner-facing systems and controls

Response: Board members have concluded that this is not something that would be useful at this time. The internal audit plan scopes out the areas to be reviewed on a 3-5 year basis, based on areas of strategic risk, to ensure a balanced approach is taken and to avoid duplication. It was felt that this recommendation may result in duplication and would take up valuable staff time doing something that would not add significant value.

Recommendation 10: Review the communication of committee deliberations to the governing board to ensure all governing board members are taking account of the work of committees on behalf of the board

Response: Board members consider that Committee business is fed back to the Board at meetings during regular reports and in the summary paper provided at each meeting with links to the minutes. However there may be scope to develop a system where each Committee evaluates what it has achieved each academic year and formally feeds this back to the Chair's Committee and/or the Board of Governors. This could be part of the annual self-evaluation exercise and may improve the robustness of that process. In this regard, there are informal processes in place too where members raise issues as appropriate with the Chair, Principal, other members our Board Secretary. These routes are also important for the work of the Committees. The Committee Chair can also notify the Chair/Board Secretary when they have particular issues they wish to raise at a Board meeting.

Recommendation 11: Reviewing the effectiveness of each board and committee meeting can identify aspects for continuous improvement in agenda formation, reporting, decision making, member engagement

Response: An additional agenda item will be added to the end of each meeting to discuss how the meeting went / where improvements could be made and can be piloted for a 6 month/1 year period.

Recommendation 12: Aim to develop stretch targets for a higher level of compliance with the Code of Good Governance

Response: A review of compliance against the updated Code of Good Governance once approved will be undertaken and Board members can thereafter review where stretch targets would be appropriate, taking into account strategic priorities for the Board and/or the college.

Recommendation 13: Consider a regular (annual) stakeholder mapping exercise for the board and senior staff to appreciate and develop relevant and productive stakeholder engagement, communication and accountability

Response: Stakeholder mapping has been undertaken by the Executive Team and has been used in as the New Campus activities, external engagement and the College's Incident Response and Communications Plan. The Board could periodically review the stakeholder map and stakeholder engagement and offer advice on support on how to progress these.

Action Plan

No	Actions	Date	Responsible	Progress
1	To review the format of the business report to include progress to date, target & variance, risk rating, management intervention (if required), outcome, timescale (rec 1, 4 and 8).	December 2021	Wendy Brymer / Executive Team	
2	To update the Board paper template to include sections on Board impact from decision; financial health implications; and learner implications (rec 2 and 3).	December 2021	Marianne Philp / Executive Team	
3	To document the existing arrangements in place to gather learner feedback and views (learner voice framework) and present this to the Academic Quality Committee (rec 6).	September 2021	Iain Hawker / Craig Walker / Lisa Calderwood / Sarah Kerr / Marianne Philp	
4	To consider if further information on safeguarding would be useful to the Board or a Committee following on from the presentation on Safeguarding / Corporate Parenting in June 2021 (rec 7).	June 2021	Board	
5	To pilot extending the Board's self-evaluation process to include the preparation of an annual reporting system back to the Chair's Committee and/or Board. This would demonstrate the value added by each Committee and its achievements over the year and may also incorporate areas for improvement (rec 10).	May/June 2021 for reviews Sept 2021 for Committee review	Marianne Philp / Committee Chairs	
6	To pilot the addition of an additional agenda item at all meetings reviewing how the meeting went and any improvements that could be made (rec 11).	September 2021	Marianne Philp / Committee Chairs	
7	To undertake a review of our compliance with the (updated) Code of Good Governance and	2021-22 (after updated Code is issued)	Marianne Philp / David C Watt / Executive Team	

No	Actions	Date	Responsible	Progress
	thereafter identify stretch targets to enhance Board oversight of key areas (rec 12, 5, 6, 7).			
8	To periodically review the stakeholder map and stakeholder engagement and make recommendations as appropriate (rec 13).	December 2021	Hugh Hall / Sue Reekie / Executive Team	