



External Board Effectiveness Review

York College

March 2023



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INTRODUCTION

All colleges are required to undertake a board effectiveness review every three years following the various reforms set out in the [Skills for jobs](#) white paper to strengthen governance.

The Department for Education (DfE) governance guide (June 2022) recommended that the Governing Body should publish and maintain a summary of the outcomes of external governance reviews, and highlights from the associated action plan, on their website.

York College invited Governance4FE to undertake an external board review during the autumn term of 2022 with the review being undertaken over a number of days including meeting observations, 1-2-1 discussions with governors, senior leadership team members and the director of governance. The objective of the review was to support the Board in becoming a more effective decision-making body as part of the organisation's commitment to excellence in governance and leadership, and to better understand how governance can move the organisation forward and the impact of governors – both when sat around the board table, and externally.

The executive summary from the report provided by Governance4FE is set out below. This gives an overview of governance at the College from the independent external reviewer.

In addition, we have set out the main themes that have formed part of the College's action plan following the review.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FROM EXTERNAL GOVERNANCE REVIEW REPORT

SUMMARY OF REVIEW OUTCOMES & RECOMMENDATIONS

Within the overall review of the Board's effectiveness, this is a very positive report of a board and executive performing well and addressing the challenges of their sector. This is a summary of the review outcomes with the full report containing important contextual information, rationale, and evidence for all the recommendations made. The review considered the Board's effectiveness and governance maturity (emerging, developing, and mature) across 5 main areas of the Governance4FE framework.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

The Board demonstrates mature governance through having a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities and where responsibility and accountability lie, allowing committees to function effectively and governors to discharge their monitoring and oversight roles sufficiently. The Chair, together with the CEO has led a successful shaping of the Board to provide an appropriate balance of industry, community, and education focused governors in response to the challenges of the FE sector and the current strategic plan priorities. Through the provision of accurate and timely information, the Board is assured that the financial management systems and internal controls are robust, ensuring sustainability and solvency, and that the organisation is getting value for money. Oversight of compliance, assurance, and performance could be enhanced through use of a Board Assurance Framework – this would complement current risk reporting and audit committee activity.

RELATIONSHIPS

The Board demonstrates mature governance through there being a high degree of trust, confidence, and openness between the Board and the Executive. Board members demonstrate commitment and a satisfactory level of contribution. Extending the current practice of the Board's reflection, review, and development of its performance to include consideration of the impact it has on the Executive, and ultimately the college's performance, will help to strengthen relations further and improve the value add through governors' contributions.

ENABLING

The Board demonstrates developing governance maturity through effective management reporting – clearly linking reports to strategic objectives, it is timely, makes good use of a variety of presentation methods, and contributes to governors' ability to support and challenge appropriately. The Board is developing its work on stakeholder engagement – clarity and development of stakeholder engagement, the degree of input stakeholders have in shaping key decisions, and how such engagement shapes the curriculum and its impact on student outcomes and the local community.

ALIGNMENT

The Board demonstrates mature governance through regular discussions at Board level, and at specially convened meetings, allowing statements of corporate values to be refined, updated, and agreed. When the Board is deciding goals, objectives, and strategic decisions, it considers and discusses with management, different options, and scenarios early in the planning process. There is clear alignment by all in the boardroom on the picture of what the college is trying to create and deliver, and clarity on what the challenges are that the college currently faces.

TEAM

The Board demonstrates mature governance through active participation in development activity. A more comprehensive development plan to meet individual governors needs each year, would further support this work. The Board's diversity (demographically and cognitively) has been enhanced in recent board recruitment, through modifying recruitment efforts to specifically ensure wider diversity. This work is being expanded by the governing body setting and monitoring diversity principles and targets for Governing Body membership, and through the College EDI strategy detailing what the responsibility of the governing body is and what the measurable objectives are, so the Board can effectively monitor EDI performance and hold the Executive team and themselves to account.

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COLLEGE ACTION PLAN FOLLOWING EXTERNAL GOVERNANCE REVIEW

The Governing Body welcomed the findings of the review and wishes to place on record its appreciation and thanks to Fiona Chalk (Governance4FE) for a considered and thorough process and report.

The final report was presented to the Governing Body and senior leaders on the 8 February and included a set of recommendations. The reviewer outlined the findings and facilitated a discussion and exercise to capture themes from the recommendations to form an action plan, which now constitutes the Governing Body's roadmap for the next 12-24 months.

The action plan was submitted to the Governing Body meeting on the 28 March 2023 and approved.

Progress is being monitored through the People and Governance Committee and regular reports submitted to the Governing Body. The action plan focuses on the following areas:

- Enhancing Governors' external role;
- Further developing how Governors hear the student voice;
- Adopting an 'annual conversation' between Governors and the Strategic Leadership Team;
- Further developing the further education knowledge on the Board;
- Formalising the Board's role in relation to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion;
- Seeking more opportunities for debate amongst the Board.

The next external board effectiveness review is to be planned for the 2026 Autumn term.