

Glasgow Clyde College

Externally Facilitated Effectiveness Review 8 March 2021

FINAL REPORT



Reviewer: Candy Munro
CDN Associate
candy.munro@btinternet.com
www.cdn.ac.uk

Contents

1	INTRODUCTION	2
2	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
3	EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW AGAINST THE CODE FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE IN SCOTLAND'S COLLEGES	4
3.1	Leadership and Strategy	4
3.2	Quality of the Student Experience	5
3.3	Board Accountability	6
3.4	Board Effectiveness	7
3.5	Relationships and Collaboration	8
4	RECOMMENDATIONS	9
5	ANNEX 1	9
	Document Review	10

1. INTRODUCTION

The Code of Good Governance for Scotland's Colleges (the Code) sets out the principles of good governance for colleges in Scotland. This review is against the 2016 Edition of the Code.

All colleges that receive funding from the Scottish Funding Council or a regional strategic body must comply with the Code as a condition of grant. Each board must state its adoption of the Code in its corporate governance statement contained within its annual financial statement.

The five principles set out in the Code provide a framework within which colleges are expected to develop their own policies and procedures.

The Code states that the college board must have in place a robust self-evaluation process. Para D. 23 states

'The Board must keep its effectiveness under annual review and have in place a robust self-evaluation process. There should also be an externally facilitated evaluation of its effectiveness at least every three years'.

'The Guide for Board Members in the College Sector' along with the 'Board Development Framework' provide additional guidance for college board members and college board secretaries.

Methodology

This external effectiveness review included several stages aimed at building up an overview of the board's effectiveness. The components of the review process were:

- Initial meeting with the Chair, Principal and Board Secretary to agree the scope of the review and the overall project plan
- Observation (*see note 1*) of a Board meeting (09.12.20)
- Desk review of core governance documentation, including agendas reports and minutes.
- Interviews with the Chair, Vice Chair, Chair of the Audit Committee, Principal, Student member, Staff member, two further board members and two members of the executive team
- Board survey to seek members' views of governance structures and processes
- On-line workshop to test review conclusions and recommendations (26.01.21)

¹ It should be noted that at the time of Covid-19 pandemic, governing board and committee meetings were taking place 'on-line'. Thus, reference to the observation of meetings should be understood as observation of on-line college governance meetings. Such meetings are obviously different from the dynamic of face-to-face governing meetings. However, given the circumstances, it is the effectiveness of on-line governing which is being commented on in this review.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a skilled and confident board which has matured and developed since the last external review in 2017 when it was a relatively young board.

The board is effectively led by the Chair who is well respected and fosters a culture of openness and mutual respect. The board provides a constructive balance of challenge and support to the executive team.

The quality of the student experience is important to the board but there is a feeling that recently greater focus has been on financial and other governance matters. The board are keen to address this.

The board committees work effectively and there is a high level of trust between the board and the committees. The Audit Committee provides an assurance framework covering the work of the committees.

Effective governance arrangements and documentation are in place and are reviewed on a regular basis.

The board is keen to take a more strategic approach and some recommendations have been made about how this might be achieved.

Although much work has been undertaken on the college KPIs further work is required to develop a RAG rated high level dashboard reporting on quantitative and qualitative measures.

3. EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW AGAINST THE CODE FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE IN SCOTLAND'S COLLEGES

3.1 Leadership and Strategy

This is a skilled and talented board which has a clear commitment to good governance. The board has matured since the last external effectiveness review in 2017, when most members were relatively new. There is a clear sense of the board working as a team.

The board has demonstrated effective leadership throughout the Covid-19 crisis providing constructive challenge and support to the college response.

The board is led by a skilled and effective Chair who balances challenge and support and is well respected by fellow board members. The board culture is both open and inclusive.

This is an effective board and much of the success is credited to the skills and experience of the Chair and subcommittee chairs. This is a strength but also a potential vulnerability. Succession planning is therefore important and the Chair and Vice Chair are mindful of the need to plan in the longer term.

Strategic planning is evidenced by the development of new Mission Vision and Values and a new 2020 – 2025 Strategic Plan which has been held back due to current challenges and uncertainties.

Areas for Development

The board are keen to take a more strategic approach, members currently feel that they receive too much operational information. To achieve this the aim should be to create more time for strategic discussion and innovation by reviewing reporting to the board and trusting the executive team to only flag key issues and report 'by exception'. This more focussed approach will however require board members to 'let go' of operational detail unless specifically raised by the executive team as an issue.

Effective reporting on KPIs underpins this approach. Significant work has been undertaken on KPI reporting, especially at committee level. However further work is required to progress the development of a RAG rated high level dashboard reporting on both quantitative and qualitative measures, including impact measures. This has been written into the new strategic plan, but further refinement will be required.

Board diversity and attracting a wider range of applicants for board positions has been a challenge, despite the college's best efforts. Given this and the need to succession plan the board might consider co-opting suitable candidates on to committees when appropriate. This can help fill skills gaps in committees and can provide a useful resource to help succession planning.

Another useful suggestion is timing the elections for staff members to allow a handover period between the incoming and outgoing staff members, allowing the incoming members the opportunity to shadow the outgoing member and observe a board meeting.

Recommendations

- Review reporting to the board to allow more time for more strategic discussion. The aim should be for high-quality low-density reporting
- Consider a board 'portal' as a digital tool for document sharing and collaboration
- Progress the work on KPIs and the new dashboard as a priority
- Consider the use of co-opted members on to board committees
- Consider the timing of staff elections to allow a more effective handover
- In the context of virtual meetings and new members joining the board, consider an 'extended bio' for each member to highlight the full range of skills and experience that each member brings to the board.

3.2 Quality of the Student Experience

The quality of the student experience is clearly important to board members and the input from student members is valued. However, there is a concern that the student experience is being overshadowed by financial and other governance issues.

Student reports are well received and students make a valuable contribution at board and committee level.

Areas for Development

The Learning and Teaching Committee plays an important role in monitoring the student experience and providing assurance to the board, but the board are keen to rebalance board discussions to focus on the quality of the student experience.

Recommendations

- To ensure a clear focus on the quality of the student experience add a board report from management on the student experience. This would be a standing agenda item which would be the first item following the previous minutes and matters arising. The report would cover key strategic issues that may impact on the student experience and report on progress against action plans
- Consider adding 'impact on the student experience' as an addition to board papers and board decisions
- Reintroduce strategic engagement with class representatives with the aim of enhancing board visibility.

3.3 Board Accountability

The Articles of Governance are comprehensive and fully compliant with the Code. They are reviewed on an annual basis by the Nominations Committee.

There is an effective committee structure in place, and the committees have an important role in scrutiny and challenge, especially in relation to the more detailed KPIs. This supports effective decision making by ensuring that the board is properly informed.

The OD committee has a key role in promoting positive staff relations, identifying areas that require improvement and the detailed scrutiny of staff related KPIs.

The Audit Committee reviews compliance with the Code and provides an assurance framework for the work of the other committees.

There is a high level of trust between the board and the committees and effective working relationships with senior staff supporting the committees.

Areas for Development

Board members would benefit from a clearer understanding of the ROA and the important contribution that the college makes to the economic and social wellbeing of the areas it serves.

Recommendations

- Consider 'mapping' the college contribution to local economic and social structures. This might involve inviting key speakers and setting time aside for less formal discussion. For example, a 30-45 minute slot before board meeting with a 'hot topic' for discussion. Attendance by board members would be on a voluntary basis.

3.4 Board Effectiveness

This is an effective board with a clear understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities involved in good governance and that collective responsibility and accountability underpin all board decisions.

The board demonstrates teamwork and respect and there is an appropriate level of challenge and support to the executive team.

The Chair, Principal and Board Secretary work effectively together. The work of the board is supported by an annual plan for board business and a Board Development Plan (2020/2021).

New members receive an induction and a new Induction Pack is being developed.

Areas for Development

In the context of virtual meetings and how this can limit board interactions creating space for smaller discussion groups would encourage greater dialogue between members.

Consideration should also be given to planning post COVID and the transition from entirely virtual meeting to a new, possibly blended, approach to board and committee meetings. See the CDN research report on 'GOVERNING A COLLEGE USING VIRTUAL MEETINGS' which makes some useful recommendations. [CLICK HERE](#)

While board members benefit from induction training members are keen to understand what other training might be available and how training might be tailored to individual board member needs. See the CDN [Governance Development Programme](#)

Recommendations

- Consider building in opportunities for small ‘group chat’ into board meetings
- Consider the recommendations in the ‘Virtual Governance’ report when planning the transition out of virtual meetings.

3.5 Relationships and Collaboration

The board must work in partnership to secure the coherent provision of high quality fundable further and higher education.

Since the last review, the college has developed a new Mission, Vision and Values and a new strategic plan (which is on hold for the moment). Throughout this process, the board has demonstrated a commitment to partnerships and collaboration.

Areas for Development

Some members would welcome more information on the regional economy and national priorities and the impact on colleges.

Recommendations

- As above in Section 3.3 Accountability consider ‘mapping’ the college contribution to local economic and social wellbeing and setting time aside for informal sessions to which key external speakers are invited.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

1	<p>Leadership and Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review reporting to the board to allow space for more strategic discussion. The aim should be for high-quality low-density reporting • Consider a board ‘portal’ as a digital tool for document sharing and collaboration • Progress the work on KPIs and the new dashboard • Consider the use of co-opted members on to board committees • Consider the timing of staff elections to allow a more effective handover • In the context of virtual meetings and new members joining the board, consider an ‘extended bio’ for each member to highlight the full range of skills and experience that each member brings to the board
2	<p>Quality of the Student Experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure a clear focus on the quality of the student experience add a board report from management on the student experience. This would be a standing agenda item which would be the first item following the previous minutes and matters arising. The report would cover key strategic issues that may impact on the student experience and report on progress against action plans • Consider adding ‘impact on the student experience’ as an addition to board papers and board decisions. • Strategic engagement with class representatives would enhance board visibility
3	<p>Accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider mapping the college contribution to local economic and social wellbeing. This might involve inviting key speakers and setting time aside for less formal discussion. For example, a 30-minute slot before each board meeting with a ‘hot topic’ for discussion. Attendance by board members would be on a voluntary basis.
4	<p>Effectiveness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider building in some opportunities for small ‘group chat’ into board meetings • Consider the recommendations in the ‘Virtual Governance’ report when planning the transition out of virtual meetings.
5	<p>Relationships and Collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As above in Section 3.3 Accountability consider ‘mapping’ the college contribution to local economic and social wellbeing and setting time aside for informal sessions to which key external speakers are invited

5. ANNEX 1

Document Review

1. Articles of Governance incorporating the Scheme of Delegation and Standing Orders
2. Board Development Plan 2020/21
3. Committee Remits
4. 2019-20 Annual Audit Report from the External Auditor and Letter of Representation
5. Financial statements
6. Board agenda and papers (9 December 2020)
7. Published Board minutes 2020
8. Committee minutes
9. Board member profile
10. Audit Committee Annual Report
11. External Effectiveness Review Jan 2017
12. Register of training for board members
13. Board member role description
14. College Strategic Plan

Footnote

The reviewer would like to thank the Chair, Board Members, Principal and Board Secretary for their assistance and insight with this external effectiveness review.