

EXTERNAL BOARD REVIEW SUMMARY

The Department for Education, Skills for Jobs White Paper (January 2021) determined that Further Education Corporations would be required to have an external governance review every three years. The review at the Chesterfield College Group was organised by the Association of Colleges (AoC) and took place between March 2024 and May 2024 and was carried out by Joanne Platt.

The review focussed on how ethically the Board discharged its responsibilities and consistently applied the college values, the impact it makes on the lives of its students and staff, and how effectively the Board engaged with the process to develop the College's new strategic plan and the impact this had on the final plan.

The review comprised a scoping meeting, a desktop review of documents and website, a survey of all Board members carried out by the AoC, interviews with the Chair, Principal, Head of Governance, Chairs of Committees and Governors, and observations at Committee and Board meetings. The review looked three main areas of governance - board composition, board structure and board interaction.

The Board has experienced leadership in the Chair, Vice Chair and Committee Chairs, with skilled and committed Governors from senior leadership roles across a wide range of sectors, and Co-opted governors with specialist skills on committees. Governors are passionate about the college and ambitious for students. Governors are provided with a range of activities to meet with students, staff and employers and welcome the opportunities to triangulate data with staff, students and employers.

There are positive, supportive, respectful relations with the Senior Management Team and Head of Governance. Board and Committee papers are succinct, with the Board receiving four main reports, Corporate, Finance, Performance and Governance. Board members are respectful of each other and provide effective challenge to the Senior Management Team which is positively received. Risk is embedded in all reports to Board and Committees, with the Board having overall oversight. The Link Governor scheme provides additional assurance and insight into the key areas of Board oversight.

Decision making is collaborative and inclusive, with all Governors contributing to decision making.

The process to develop the new strategic plan was comprehensive and inclusive and included extensive consultation with students, staff and stakeholders. Governors found the information presented comprehensive and felt their views had been taken on board in developing the new plan. The reviewer identified many areas of effective practice, including the comprehensive approach to engagement with students in the development of the strategic plan, and the use of data for these consultations which demonstrated the importance the college places on the student voice.

The overall conclusion on Board Effectiveness is that **there is strong evidence that the Board is highly proficient and consistently impacts positively on college strategy, effectiveness and outcomes.**

The reviewer identified the following recommendations to improve governance still further: the introduction of a formal process for appraisal of the Chair, the introduction of written Link Governor reports to Board meetings and considering a reduction in the number of meetings. These will be actioned in the Governance Quality Improvement Plan for 2024/25. The next review will take place in three years' time, in 2027/28.

Sandra Cox

Interim Head of Governance

July 2024