

External Board Review

Derwentside College

Reviewer: Marina Gaze

19th February to 25th April 2025

Executive Summary

The process set up for AoC External Board Review is based on statutory requirements set out in relevant Government legislation and as part of ESFA conditions of funding. AoC has developed and updated the framework following completion of the first round Reviews that was based on the ETF/AoC pilot Review framework. The Framework considers, but is not limited to, principles from Codes of Governance, the Education Inspection Framework, Office for Students requirements and the DfE's guidance on external board Reviews.

The objective of the Review is to identify the strengths of the organisation's governance and where there are development needs, developing actions based on sector good practice, to bring about governance improvement.

An initial scoping meeting was held prior to the Review commencing to outline the Review process and to identify any key areas of focus. Reference is made to the outcomes of the most recent External Review and actions taken to address areas for development.

Emerging findings have been discussed throughout the Review in a developmental and inclusive approach that supports college improvement and seeks to share best practice. An initial findings meeting was held prior to agreed completion of the final report to ensure factual accuracy.

The full report sets out the main findings made against the 3 Board dimensions in the Framework along with the key evidence that informs those findings.

Governance at Derwentside College is strong. Although some Board members are new, the Board is already highly effective with the capacity to improve further. The Board has made significant progress addressing the areas for development identified in the 2022 external review. A strong new Chair and new Board have been appointed. Two Vice Chair roles and a Senior Independent Governor role have been introduced, as has a Head of Governance role. The Board has implemented a new and effective committee structure, ensured the Remuneration and Performance committee manages Senior Post holder performance effectively, standardised and improved the quality of board reports, introduced annual appraisals for Board members, strengthened induction and training and increased opportunities for Governors to engage in a range of events with staff, students and stakeholders. Student involvement in decision making at Board level is an area currently being addressed.

The Board is well managed and well led. Oversight of finance, risk and education is robust. The relationship between the Board and the Executive is open and productive. The working relationship between the CEO/Principal, Chair and Head of Governance is very effective. Board members have an impressive range of leadership and strategic experience. They demonstrate a good balance of challenge and support in their work with the Executive. Governors are generous with their time and support. They show a healthy curiosity about students and their experiences and the local area. Board members are reflective and self-critical. They know where further improvements can be made and have the ability to make these improvements.

The following table summarises the headline strengths and areas for development:

BOARD COMPOSITION	
STRENGTH	AREA FOR DEVELOPMENT
1.Derwentside College has a governing body with a rich set of skills and experience including in finance, audit, law, human resources (HR), property and education.	1.Consider other Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) factors e.g. how many Board members attended further education colleges, were adult learners, care experienced etc. to help the Board consider how their backgrounds and experience may inform their perspective and approach and understand how reflective of the college's learners and staff they are.
2.Search and Governance complete a rigorous skills assessment and work effectively with an external recruitment partner to appoint new governors.	2.Continue the efforts to recruit a Governor with experience of Ofsted within the further education sector.
3.The Board is led by a highly respected Chair. Board members identified the Chair's skill set as a key strength of the Board.	3.Strengthen student representation in decision making at Board level.
4.The new Vice Chair roles provide support for the Chair and ensure succession planning for the Chair role.	
5.The new Senior Independent Governor role is highly effective in providing impartial advice to the Chair, Corporation Board and Executive Team, and in conducting the Chair's appraisal.	
6.The new full-time Head of Governance role very effectively supports the development of outstanding corporate governance.	
BOARD STRUCTURES	
STRENGTH	AREA FOR DEVELOPMENT
1. Corporation and committee meetings are well organised and well chaired. Committees work well independently and at Board level.	1.Continue to involve all Board members in developing strategy. Make use of options papers when helping them make decisions about the new strategic plan.
2. Attendance is high at corporation and committee meetings	2. Ensure that all governance reports are aligned to risk management and Board Assurance Frameworks so there is a joined up approach which quickly highlights the issues and feeds these into the parent documents quickly and easily.

3. Task and finish groups are used well to drive improvements	3. Consider introducing a single tracker which highlights all decisions made by committees, financial consequences and impact on risks and Board Assurance Frameworks.
4. Financial oversight is a key strength of the Board. Financial management and reporting to Governors is very strong.	
5. The Board is very well served by the highly organised Head of Governance.	
6. Board Assurance Frameworks provide assurance to the board that its key legal and regulatory obligations are met.	
7. Robust and transparent Annual Performance Appraisal of Governors, the Chair and Senior Postholders is now in place.	
8. Induction, probation and development help Governors quickly settle into their role and contribute to the Board.	
BOARD INTERACTION	
STRENGTH	AREA FOR DEVELOPMENT
1. The Chair and CEO/Principal are aligned in their ambition for the college to be outstanding.	1. Continue to provide opportunities for members to get to know each other and for new members to evolve in their roles and develop their understanding of the college and their focus on strategy.
2. The triumvirate has worked hard to develop a culture of openness, trust, reflectiveness and inclusion and to promote respect and diversity of thought.	2. Students are considered in decision making but not party to it. Continue to focus on succession planning for the Student Governor role.
3. The hard-working Chair is popular with and respected by Board members who appreciate his skillful management of the Board.	3. Continue to encourage all Governors to be highly engaged in college activities outside of meetings.
4. Interaction between Governors and the Executive is courteous, constructive and open with mutual trust and respect.	
5. Board meetings are participative and questions are freely raised and encouraged	
6. The Board actively listens to staff, and their feedback informs decision-making. Staff satisfaction scores are very high at the college.	
7. The Board has a clear understanding of local, regional, and national economic and skills needs, and actively works to support and address these needs.	

8. Board members rightly feel EDI is a strong part of the Board and the college's culture.	
9. Safeguarding and Prevent responsibilities are key to the decision making and governors are constantly supported to ensure they are fully trained and aware of all aspects.	

An area of best practice that others may learn from is the introduction of the Senior Independent Governor (SIG) role, established to provide impartial advice to the Chair, Corporation Board and Executive Team, and to conduct the Chair's appraisal. The SIG role also provides checks and balances for the Chair's role which the Chair welcomes.

Another area of best practice is Board Assurance Frameworks (BAFs) which have been introduced to provide assurance to the board that its key legal and regulatory obligations are met. Some board members have seen this practice in their other governance roles and encouraged its introduction to benefit the college. BAFs identify the various governance requirements and practices, with an assessment then made against each of these relating to internal control, the level of assurance and risk. Where gaps in control, limited assurance, or high levels of risk are evident, these are considered and added to the BAF Action Plan. The Search and Governance Committee oversee this, with the Head of Governance keeping the BAF and Action Plan up to date. The overall BAF is clearly linked to the AoC Code of Good Governance, demonstrating how the Code is met. This dynamic process plays a significant role in continuous improvement and the development of the Board.

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

Thanks and appreciation are recorded to all those who have engaged in this review. Particular thanks to the Head of Governance who has worked tirelessly to ensure that arrangements have been smooth and efficient.

Our Approach

This External Board Review was undertaken by Marina Gaze over the period 19th February to 25th April 2025. The methodology followed a ten-stage approach:



The Review process used with the Board of Derwentside College was as follows:

- An initial planning and scoping meeting was held on 19th February 2025 with Board Chair David Allsop, CEO/Principal Chris Todd and Head of Governance Elaine Gaines to agree the approach and set the timeframe for Review activities. It was agreed that the focus for the Review would be the standard framework exploring Board composition, Board structures and Board interaction.
- An online survey was issued to 14 Board members (not including the CEO/Principal) on 4th March. The survey produced a return rate of 100%, however one respondent noted they were too new to the Board to be able to respond to questions about the Board and left those sections blank.
- A desktop review was carried out of selected Board and key college documentation including, but not restricted to, Governance policies and Instrument & Articles (including standing orders, Code of Conduct, Terms of reference, Governor Role Descriptions, etc.) and process for review, Governance cycle and Business schedule for the year, Board and committee meetings packs and minutes, action taken to address the areas for improvement identified at the last External Review, Board member CVs, Induction documents and Governor training, Strategic plan and process for Governor involvement/sign-off, Management Accounts and

budget papers. The governance section of the college website was reviewed for currency and transparency <https://www.derwentside.ac.uk › governance>

- Face-to-face or on-line interviews took place with those people identified in the scoping document including the Board Chair, Committee Chairs, Senior Independent Governor, Staff Governor, Head of Governance, CEO/Principal, Deputy Principal and Vice Principal.
- The Reviewer attended the Corporation Board meeting on March 11th in person. She also attended the Quality and Standards Committee meeting online on March 10th and watched a recording of the Finance and Resources Committee meeting held on February 28th.
- Following completion of the evidence gathering phase, the first draft of the report was written and shared at an initial findings meeting where factual accuracy was checked and agreed amendments made.
- The report was subject to AoC moderation.
- The final report was presented to the Chair, CEO/Principal and Head of Governance on April 25th. The Board will develop an action plan based on the recommendations at the Away Day on 19th June.

The remainder of this report is structured to set out key messages across the following Review Dimensions and Board Outcomes:



Background to the Organisation

Derwentside College is a general further education college that operates from a single campus in Consett, a semi-rural location. It is not typical of traditional further education colleges as it has developed a specialism in apprenticeships which accounts for 55% of its provision. It also provides education programmes for young people and adult learning courses. Currently, there are 450 learners on education programmes for young people and 692 adult learners, all studying on courses at Entry Level and Levels 1, 2 and 3. The 1,836 apprentices are studying at level 2 to level 5, with most working at level 3. Derwentside College works with one subcontractor.

In 2023-24 the college's total income was £10.171m. The expenditure on staff costs in 2023-24 was 59% of total income, with the latest position for 2024-25 being 65%. The ESFA Financial Health Grade for 2023-24 was Good and the assessment for the current year is Good. The college is not subject to FEFC intervention.

At its last Ofsted inspection in 2022, the college was graded good for all aspects. However, the report states 'Leaders and managers have in place an appropriate governance board that meets frequently and whose members are fully aware of the college's strengths and weaknesses. A recent review of governance suggested various initiatives, including developing specialist roles on aspects such as safeguarding and teaching and learning. However, these initiatives have only recently been introduced, and therefore, it is too soon to measure their impact'.

The college commissioned an External Review of Governance in March 2022. The review was undertaken by Stone King. The key areas for focus were:

- Review the operation of board and committee meetings, starting with the formation and focus of the agendas, and including sharper reporting using a consistent reporting format and providing a clear recommendation to Board members. Every Governing Board agenda should give priority to the progress of the Board's strategic priorities, institutional financial health, strategic risks, improvement priorities, and teaching and learning. The conversion of the Development Plan 2021/22 one year plan, which derives from the Board's strategic plan (3 year), into a process against which progress is reported to every Governing Board meeting. The style of the Development Plan reporting needs to be able to clearly present to Board members the degree to which each Development Plan target is being addressed and achieved.
- The Governing Board should develop further an annual board review process which includes an individual Board member and a Chair review process to ensure structured reflection and continuous improvement is embedded into governing processes and practices. Reflection on meeting the requirements of the Code of Good Governance should be included in this process. The overall outcome should lead to an annual Governing Board Development Plan.
- Consideration should be given to how the Governing Board addresses the core purpose of Derwentside College i.e. education and training. Included in this consideration should be the potential for e.g. a Teaching and Learning Committee to assist the Governing Board.
- Board member induction and development needs to be strengthened to include a clearer and continuing focus on strategic priorities, teaching and learning, the Code of Good Governance, and the operation of the governance space.

Since then Board members have made significant progress in developing Corporate Governance which is described in the main body of this report. The 2022 Governance review findings and progress since the review are easily accessible on the Governance section of the college website.

Leaders work with local, regional and national employers to meet their skills needs. Larger employers include: County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust, Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys Trust, Home Group, North Yorkshire County Council and Northumberland County Council.

Derwentside College is a happy place. The college's most recent Internal Induction Survey for 2024-25 showed 97% of students are enjoying their course, with 97% also happy that their lessons are active and engaging. The latest internal employer survey conducted in November 2024 confirms that 95% of employers would recommend others looking for apprenticeship training; compared to a strategic target of 91%.

At the end of January 2025, the college's star rating for employer feedback was 4 (Excellent) which is the highest rating available with 172 employer reviews. The apprentice feedback score rating is currently 3 (Good) with 184 apprentice reviews. Staff are encouraging more apprentices to sign up to the service and log their views and analysing the individual statements of apprentice feedback to determine if there are any areas where focused action could be taken to support improvement.

The most recent staff survey issued in May 2024 had a response rate of 77%. The survey indicated that 95% of staff believe the College is well led and managed, 92% said information about strategic and operational goals and performance are communicated effectively and 99% of staff understand their role and the contribution they make to the goals for the college.

Board Composition

The attributes possessed by the Board that enable the effective strategic leadership

Background

Board composition refers to the attributes possessed by the Board that combine to enable effective strategic leadership. An evaluation of the Board's composition involved an analysis of the knowledge and experience of members that are essential for effective governance and strategic oversight and the attitude and mindset that fosters independent thought and a commitment to the principles of good governance.

The Board has 16 members, including 12 independent Governors and one co-opted Governor, two Staff Governors and the Principal/CEO. There are no Student Governors, but two students have expressed an interest in the role and will be invited to observe a meeting after Easter. The Chair, who has been in post for 14 months, is also the Chair of Search and Governance. The Chair is supported by two Vice Chairs and a Senior Independent Governor (appointed July 2024). Several Board members serve on more than one committee.

Six new Governors joined the Board during the academic year 2023-24 and in November 2024 four more Governors were recruited. The final term of office for one Governor ends in October 2025.

Of the respondents to our questionnaire, nine had been on the Board for one year or less, 64 per cent of respondents were male, 93% were white British. 21% were in the 35-44 age group, 29% were in the 45-54 age group, 29% in the 55-64 age group and 21% in the 64-75 age group. One respondent declared a disability.

So far across three corporation meetings this academic year attendance is 93%. Across five committee meetings this academic year attendance is 95%. To date one meeting has been rearranged as it was not quorate.

The college's Executive team consists of a Principal/CEO, Deputy Principal, Director of Human Resources, Vice Principal – Finance & Resources, Assistant Principal – Curriculum, Assistant Principal – Business Development & Technical Education, and Head of Quality and Standards.

Findings

Derwentside College has a governing body with a rich set of skills and experience in finance, audit, law, human resources, strategic marketing, economic development, estate management, and education. These include the Chair who is a chartered certified accountant with significant experience of external audit, advisory and inspection services and who was responsible for Audit Commission operations in the North of England. One of the Vice Chairs is a company secretary and corporate lawyer with particular expertise in advising on joint ventures, consortium agreements, infrastructure

projects, public procurement and corporate governance issues. The other Vice Chair has over 20 years' experience working in education in the North East, in both further and higher education encompassing academic and strategic leadership. The Senior Independent Governor was Vice Chancellor of Durham University and is the Chair of North East Ambulance Service, has been a Northeast LEP member, Honorary President of the North-East Prison Aftercare Society, and Board Member of the Universities and Colleges Employers Association. All other members also have impressive CVs. National and local employers are well represented on the Board, as are the public and private sectors including charities, local housing organisations, Arriva Ltd, HSBC and the NHS. All Board members' biographies and photos can easily be accessed online at [Derwentside College | Meet the Governors](#)

Since the last External Review of Governance in July 2022, much work has been done to improve and strengthen Board composition. Following a rigorous skills assessment conducted by the Search and Governance Committee an external recruitment partner (Peridot) worked with the Board to appoint new governors to the Corporation and its committees in 2023-24.

The impressive skills set of Governors was evident from the skills audit documentation and by their contribution to meetings where they use their expertise to support and challenge the Executive. All respondents to our survey agreed or strongly agreed that 'The Board collectively has the necessary skills and knowledge to govern the college'. The college's most recent skills audit, distributed in January 2025 shows that of 15 respondents:

- Affinity with Derwentside College who live, work or socialise in the geographical area served by the college was strong with 12 having high scores on this. All Board members I spoke to were proud to be on the board, and had a strong focus on community involvement. Several talked about wanting to use the skills they had developed 'to give back to the community'.
- Eight had a strong understanding and/or experience of governance, with 10 saying they had a clear understanding of the strategic role of a governing board and the difference between governance and management.
- Strategic leadership and planning are well represented with nine having experience of leadership roles in a public sector organisation, community enterprise or private sector entity and nine having experience of strategic planning and translating a vision into clear objectives.
- Financial oversight is very well represented on the board with 12 having a very good or excellent understanding of financial planning, monitoring, decision making, compliance and control and eight have an understanding of risk management processes and mitigation.
- Only one identifies as an expert for understanding of current national and regional policy relating to the FE Sector. Five had limited or no knowledge of the area. However, five have a strong understanding of Higher Education.

All respondents to our survey see the Board's skills and experiences as a key strength. They value the diversity of thought members bring. This diversity of thought was evident in meetings observed. Comments included:

- 'wide reaching, professional and highly skilled governors, who represent business and enterprise of the Consett area and have students at the heart of all decision making.'

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- 'A wide variety of knowledge and experience from various areas'
 - 'A relatively new and enthusiastic board who want to learn and have no hidden agenda or ego'

Some respondents to our survey stated that a further area for Board development was around getting to know each other and understanding each other's skill sets. To address this need and the intention to develop the Board's effectiveness working together, team building activities and a Board dinner are planned for the Away Day in June.

The Board are keen to recruit members based on knowledge, skills and experience that can contribute to strengthening the Board and ensuring that the Board's composition meets the composition of students and the community. They have recently secured a female Board member with an excellent skills set who identifies as Asian/Asian British.

Some Board members have a rich understanding of students' experiences in FE. For example, family members of the Chair have attended and are attending Derwentside and one Board member was an apprentice. The Board are working hard to increase diversity, but it may be helpful for them to consider other EDI factors such as how many Board members are from local communities, attended colleges, were apprentices, were adult learners, were care experienced etc. This would help the Board consider how their backgrounds and experience may inform each Board member's perspective and approach and to understand how reflective of the college's learners and workforce the Board are.

As the Chair, CEO/Principal and some other Board members recognise it would be useful to recruit a Governor with experience of Ofsted within the FE sector, to replace the highly skilled Board member who until recently filled this role.

Although Governors have opportunities to hear student voice, for example through forums and visits to learning, several respondents to our survey felt an area where the Board could be strengthened is student representation. Board members are trying a range of options to address this, for example, inviting potential Student Governors to observe meetings, co-opting them to Quality and Standards where they may feel they can have more input, and buddying them with other Board members who could mentor them in their roles.

The highly popular and respected Chair was appointed in December 2023 to lead the Board. Board members identified the Chair's skill set as a key strength of the Board. The findings of our survey closely correlate with the findings of the Chair's annual appraisal carried out by the SIG. Comments on the Chair in both our survey and the SIG's appraisal were overwhelmingly positive. He is seen as collegial, inclusive, hardworking and committed to the effective governance and future of the college. In the SIG's appraisal 'David was scored by Board Members across seventeen areas relating to Strategic Perspective, Leading Effective Governance, Communicating and Influencing, Building the Team, and Values and Behaviours. In sixteen of these categories David received a modal score of 5, or Strong Agreement that he is doing a good job. David received a modal score of 4 against Communications and Behaviour, which may reflect the fact that Board Members are unsighted on some of the Chair's work in this area.'

In response to feedback that some Board members would like to know more about what he does in between meetings, the Chair now has a standing item on each Corporation meeting to share a report setting out key issues facing the sector and sharing the impressive range of activities he carries out on behalf of the Board including liaising with stakeholders, meeting regularly with the CEO/Principal and Head of Governance and recruiting new Governors. The Chair is considering setting up a Chair's Group which would convene two or three times a year to discuss some of the key risks and opportunities facing the college and the sector.

New Vice Chair roles have been introduced and recruited to providing support for the Chair and ensuring succession planning for the Chair role. The new role of Senior Independent Governor was introduced to provide impartial advice to the Chair, Corporation Board and Executive Team, and to conduct the Chair's appraisal. The SIG role also provides checks and balances for the Chair's role which the Chair welcomes.

A new full-time Head of Governance (HoG) role was introduced and appointed to in February 2024, to support the development of outstanding corporate governance. The HoG is currently working towards the Level 4 Governance Professional apprenticeship which she started in April 2024. She sourced the qualification herself as she wanted to upskill. She can give good examples of how her learning has impacted on her effectiveness such as writing papers for Search and Governance to debate link Governor roles, which in turn led to the development of the SEND strategy. She has reviewed all committee terms of reference ensuring they follow a set template and format and reviewed the Governors' appraisal process for Search and Governance, suggesting appraisals are done in stages with staggered approaches for probationary, new and established governors.

The HoG's role is valued and well supported by the Chair and CEO/Principal who both recognise its importance. The HoG feels she can go to the Chair and CEO/Principal with any queries or questions and that she can talk openly to them about ideas for improvement. She is further supported by others on her Level 4 and by her mentor who works at Trafford College. She finds being a member of the FE Clerks Network particularly useful for horizon scanning.

Board members identified the HoG's skills set as a key strength of the Board. They see her as a corner stone who brings the Executive and Governors together. They recognise she gives them good advice and ensures they stay focused on governance. She knows her role is to ensure the Board maintain a strategic oversight of the college and that it is for the Executive to delve into the operational. Her work supporting the Board is multifaceted and includes advice and raising awareness of what is happening in the sector. As a Vice Chair said 'Elaine has a very clear view of how Governance works and she supports everybody on the Board'.

The HoG presents reports on Governance Compliance, Membership and Succession Planning to Search and Governance to ensure they are informed about Board membership, terms of office and succession planning and that any necessary action can be taken.

Conclusions

The Review has identified that Board Composition is currently an area of strength which has some scope for even further development. The following table summarises headlines:

BOARD COMPOSITION	
STRENGTH	AREA FOR DEVELOPMENT
1.Derwentside College has a governing body with a rich set of skills and experience including in finance, audit, law, HR, property and education.	1.Consider other EDI factors e.g. how many Board members attended colleges, were adult learners, care experienced etc. to help the Board consider how their backgrounds and experience may inform their perspective and approach and understand how reflective of the college's learners and staff they are.
2.Search and Governance complete a rigorous skills assessment and work effectively with an external recruitment partner to appoint new governors.	2.Continue the efforts to recruit a Governor with experience of Ofsted within the further education sector.
3.The Board is led by a highly respected Chair. Board members identified the Chair's skill set as a key strength of the Board.	3.Strengthen student representation in decision making at Board level.
4.The new Vice Chair roles provide support for the Chair and ensure succession planning for the Chair role.	
5.The new Senior Independent Governor role is highly effective in providing impartial advice to the Chair, Corporation Board and Executive Team, and in conducting the Chair's appraisal.	
6.The new full-time Head of Governance role very effectively supports the development of outstanding corporate governance.	

Board Structures

The processes and structures that equip members to optimally delivery objectives, act with transparency and be in compliance with regulations

Background

Board Structures include all the arrangements for governance and the documents and processes that provide clear rules and procedures for conducting effective meetings. Operating in line with an approved code of governance and ensuring stakeholders have timely access to information to support transparency are key to good governance. This section also considers how the Board evaluates and reports on its performance and that of its individual members.

Since the last review a new committee structure has been introduced, replacing the previous Carver model. Audit and Risk (AR), Finance and Resources (FR), Quality & Standards (QS), Remuneration and Performance (RP), and Search and Governance (SG) are now all in place to support Corporation.

Full board meets five times a year. One of those meetings is an 'Away Day' with a focus on strategy. AR, FR, QS and SG committees meet termly. All meetings are at Consett and in person, but governors can join online. Remuneration and Performance meets twice a year. All committees can meet more frequently if necessary.

So far across three corporation meetings this academic year attendance is 93%. Across five committee meetings this academic year attendance is 95%. To date one meeting has been rearranged as it was not quorate. The Corporation attendance target is 80%.

The college has adopted the AoC Code of Good Governance. Board Assurance Frameworks (BAF) have been introduced which link to the six principles of the AoC Code of Good Governance and identify the various governance requirements and practices, with an assessment then made against each of these relating to internal control, the level of assurance and risk.

The SIG carries out the Chair's annual appraisal. The Chair holds annual individual meetings with governors either in the Spring or Autumn depending on when the Governor was appointed.

Findings

Current Board structures equip Governors well to optimally engage with each other to deliver the college's objectives effectively, with transparency and in compliance with regulations. Since the last review a new committee structure has been introduced, replacing the previous Carver model. Audit and Risk, Finance and Resources, Quality and Standards, Search and Governance and Remuneration and Performance committees are now in place. The previous Board membership was too small to support a committee structure, but the well managed recruitment and expansion of Board membership ensured there are enough members with the right skills for the committee structure. All committees operate to a business cycle, covering key business and agenda items throughout the year. This new structure allows the Corporation Board to be more strategic with the committees supporting the corporation and governing key areas of the college's business. Board members recognise the impact of the committee structure and that the use of committees being charged with specific tasks and scopes gives more time for each committee to delve deeper into any issues and address them accordingly.

Corporation and Committee meetings are well organised and well chaired. Chairing in all meetings observed was good and interviewees confirmed this was typical of all committees. Meetings cover a lot of material efficiently. The pace is brisk but members have time to challenge and ask questions. Board members recognise that committees work well independently and at Board level. As observed, reporting is well covered and scrutinised at Board.

Each committee has clear terms of reference which are reviewed annually and presented to Corporation for approval. Terms of reference have been updated for committees to ensure they refer

to Instruments and Articles of Governance. Governors had input into updating the terms of reference for their committees. The committee structure tables/ diagrams give a clear overview of the roles and responsibilities of each committee and the policies and frameworks they oversee. For example, the Audit and Risk terms of reference are clear that the Chair of the Corporation and the Principal cannot be members and that of the three members at least two must be Governors. In compliance with the Audit Code of Practice the AR produces a good annual report for corporation summarising the committee's activities for the financial year including a summary of work undertaken, attendance at committee meetings, any significant issues or matters of internal control, the committee's opinion on the adequacy of assurance arrangements, framework of governance and risk management, use of resources and safeguarding of assets. The quorum for meetings is 40% of committee membership. Terms of reference for Quality and Standards have a strong focus on teaching, learning and assessment and learners' experiences.

The Executive team are clearly accountable for the management of college business. Board members say the Executive demonstrate strong and compassionate leadership. This was evidenced in meetings with Governors and survey feedback.

All Senior Postholders now have appraisals and performance related pay. The terms of reference and function of the previous Remuneration Committee were reviewed and replaced by a Remuneration and Performance Committee which has been refocused to ensure that performance of the college's Senior Post Holders is managed effectively and is aligned to the college's strategic priorities. A Senior Postholder Remuneration Policy was introduced setting out the framework on which senior post holder remuneration is based, the principles behind it and the links to AoC remuneration code. The committee ensures that all remuneration recommendations are made in line with sector benchmarking, pay awards to other staff, and pay ratios between senior post holders and others.

Risk management techniques alongside the Board Assurance Framework (BAF) are constantly updated and reported to board members so key risks, pressures and issues are highlighted quickly and transparently alongside mitigation measures. Trackers exist for individual committees and Full Board, and work is underway to consolidate this into one document which highlights all decisions made by committees, financial consequences and impact on risks and BAF, to close the loop.

Task and finish groups are used well to drive improvements. For example a risk management task group with clear objectives looked at the college's approach to risk management by reviewing risk policies and procedures, identifying key risks, reviewing and best practice in external organisations, developing a risk assessment policy and devising a risk appetite statement. Volunteers were sought to join the group who met monthly for three months before reporting findings and recommendations to Audit and Risk in November and Full Board in December. A further session on Board risk appetite was held. Similar benefits have been seen from a Quality and Standards working group which developed a new quality strategy. A strategy task group has been set up.

Financial oversight is a key strength of the Board and financial management and reporting to Governors is very strong. The impressive Finance and Resources Committee has the correct balance of scrutiny, support and challenge. Committee members use their very strong financial skills set to

benefit the college. Monthly reports and year end projections are effectively tabled at committee and Board giving the Governors a clear, open and honest view of where the college is financially and impact of decisions being made. An ex- FE College Finance Director is currently being appointed as the Chair of F&R. The Corporation Chair initially took on the role to establish F&R as a functioning committee. The appointment of the new VP Finance was seen by members to have strengthened this area further, although as some respondents commented the new finance team needs time to bed-in. All respondents to our survey agree or strongly agree that 'The Board effectively balances financial management with ensuring value for money and maintaining the quality of its offer'. Survey respondents and interviewees were clear that financial management is key to all decision making.

Interviewees felt that Finance and Resources, with responsibility for financial management, Audit and Risk with value for money, and Quality and Standards with responsibility for quality, work well collectively at Board level to ensure an appropriate balance. As observed and seen in minutes, members challenge spend and seek assurance of value for money through discussions with senior leaders alongside formal committee structures. Through Quality and Standards and Full Board they seek assurance that financial decisions also meet the needs of students and staff and maintain quality.

The Board is very well served by the highly organised Head of Governance. A clear business cycle is set out in the instruments and articles of governance which the HoG uses to ensure that governors have the right information at the right time and to ensure that policy review is timely and appropriate. The HoG works with committee chairs and Executive leads to produce agendas. She ensures the Executive leads know which reports they need to produce by when. The HoG is about to review the business cycle for next year with the Executive leads so everything flows through properly. Governors appreciate her support. As one said 'The Head of Governance is consistently excellent in her work.'

Board members comment that the quality and timeliness of board papers is very high. Since the last External Review all reports presented to Corporation and committees have been standardised. The Chair of Quality and Standards shared a good example of a cover report template. On papers over three pages, executive summaries are used effectively to provide key information, with recommendations, risks and implications clearly identified. The agenda and reports set out clearly which items are for approval, which for note, which for review, which to receive and which to approve. The HoG and CEO/Principal delivered a workshop to the Executive to help them write Board reports with a strategic oversight. The CEO/Principal reviews reports before they are shared. The HoG checks that reports accurately reflect the agenda and intended purpose of items. Members were complimentary about Board papers which they say are well constructed and circulated in advance of meetings in sufficient time to digest.

Board meetings are participative and questions are freely raised and encouraged. All respondents to our survey agreed or strongly agreed that 'Governors have sufficient opportunities and time to thoroughly scrutinise proposals and ask questions.' Comments included 'Open access is given to all senior leaders and with papers going out one week prior to the meeting this gives adequate time to review and debate.' 'If more information is required, senior leaders will provide and present that at the meetings.' Committee and Board papers allow for timely review and both formal and informal

discussion. Board members reported good diversity of thought on the board, and this was apparent in the meetings I observed and in minutes.

The quality of minutes was described as 'excellent', with Board members agreeing they were clearly structured with the right level of detail. Minutes of the Board Corporation for the last three years are easily accessible on the Governance section of the college website.

The college has an established strategic plan with a clear set of strategic objectives, which has served them well. Some of the key objectives also form part of the Accountability Agreement and annual Quality Improvement plan. However, as the Chair, CEO/Principal and SIG recognise most Board members were not in post when the current strategic plan was introduced and the time is right to develop a new one. The CEO/Principal, Chair and SIG have set up a working group to lead on the work and have introduced a Strategic Plan Development Proposal which allows Board members to contribute more effectively at key points. The plan has a realistic timeframe which allows a comprehensive initial assessment, an external review of policy and strategy, a competitor analysis, insights on other colleges, senior team views, and a SWOT Analysis. The structure of the strategic plan will be carefully considered to ensure it aligns with other plans and strategies and to how it will be led and implemented over time. Stakeholders, employers and students will be engaged to test findings and refine the plan. A draft Strategic Plan will be ready for October 2025. Then the draft college mission and vision for the future and the core values will be determined. Corporation Board Approval of the Strategic Plan will be sought in December. With the strategic plan it might be useful to have options papers to help the Board make decisions.

Since the last external review Board Assurance Frameworks (BAFs) have been introduced to provide assurance to the Board that its key legal and regulatory obligations are met. This is a good example of best practice members have seen in their other governance roles being introduced to benefit the college. BAFs identify the various governance requirements and practices, with an assessment then made against each of these relating to internal control, the level of assurance and risk. Where gaps in control, limited assurance, or high levels of risk are evident, these are considered and added to the BAF Action Plan. Search and Governance oversee this, with the HoG keeping the BAF and Action Plan up to date. The overall BAF is clearly linked to the AoC Code of Good Governance, demonstrating how the Code is met. The BAF covers the six key aspects: Aims and Oversight, Responsibility and Accountability, Leadership and Integrity, Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement, Regulatory Compliance and Board and Organisational Effect. The HoG ensures the BAF remains up to date with key developments in the sector and corporate governance. This is a dynamic process and plays a significant role in continuous improvement and Board development.

Robust Annual Performance Appraisal of Governors is now in place, with the Chair appraising each Governor. This process captures the views of Governors and once complete, is developed into a report by the Head of Governance. Any themes or areas for improvement are clearly identified within this process, and are used to drive forward developments in governance. This is managed through Search and Governance. Strategy Away Days are used to consider governance. In May 2023, a workshop on governance developed a governance development plan. A similar exercise will be done this year once this external review is completed and any areas for improvement are clear.

Search and Governance oversee the development of corporate governance throughout the year and continue to strengthen the college's approach to self-assessment. Governance is considered as part of annual self-assessment against the Ofsted framework. The Quality and Standards Committee lead this work, and governance is considered in the assessment of leadership and management with actions being taken forward within the Quality Improvement Plan. These processes have worked very well for the Board over the last couple of years and have driven many positive developments during this time.

Board members understand and demonstrate a strong commitment to the Nolan Principles. All respondents to our survey agreed or strongly agreed that 'The Board consistently demonstrates a commitment to the Standards in Public Life (Nolan Principles) and upholds the college's values.' As part of the appointment process, members remembered the importance of the Nolan principles being stressed. The college values are aligned to the Nolan Principles of Trust, Respect, Excellence, Enjoyment and Enterprise, and demonstrated through the wide ranging governance structure, put into place to ensure that Governors and senior leaders have a holistic understanding of the college, its students and key stakeholders and the delivery model it works to. At the last away day in June 2024, the Board identified values and behaviours which it would uphold and these were added to the suite of values and behaviours adopted by Governors, leaders, staff and learners. They noted that the Nolan Values and college values are regularly included on board agendas and aims, and any issues are addressed positively and proactively if and when they occur. As one Vice Chair said 'The Head of Governance provides strong and consistent leadership on this along with the Chair and senior executives. I am confident that under Elaine's guidance and advice the college is strong on this. As a company secretary and corporate lawyer myself I am very assured by Elaine's role and involvement in this aspect'. Board members were confident that the Board acts with integrity and honesty and in an open and transparent manner.

The Lead Governor for safeguarding role is well established with a clear role description. A new Lead Governor for safeguarding has recently been appointed. His experience running housing associations where he was responsible for supporting vulnerable tenants and providing support for staff working with these tenants, equips him well for this role. He has already reviewed policies and procedures, met the safeguarding lead and identified key areas of focus. The internal audit report shows that policies and procedures are sound, so he will focus on ensuring the board know what data is telling them, and are assured that policies and procedures are applied effectively. The HoG is requesting that Search and Governance consider appointing a SEND and Inclusivity Lead Governor. The CEO/Principal is looking to realign college structures and roles to meet this new Ofsted requirement and considering how a Lead Governor would align with these changes.

Induction and development procedures have been strengthened significantly providing Governors with a valuable introduction to the college. Recently appointed Governors explained how they met with the CEO/Principal and/or Chair, and HoG to go through key documents and principles including the code of conduct and register of interests and conflicts. Induction includes observing a Board meeting, having a college tour, completing identified training including Prevent and safeguarding, and accessing key documents including the AoC Code of Conduct, ESFA college financial handbook, and strategic documents including college vision, mission and values, annual accounts and college SAR.

Some said they found meeting staff and learners particularly helpful. Induction helps Governors quickly settle into their role and contribute to the Board as was observed in meetings.

The probationary period is well designed to help both new Governors and the Board consider if they are right for each other. Potential new Governors observe three meetings and then have a conversation with the Chair around reflective questions which they complete before the meeting, before they are signed off. This ensures new Governors are a good fit, are not too operational, and understand how the Board works and their role in it.

Board members benefit from ongoing, tailored training. Several had accessed short ETF courses and online AoC sessions to complement their role, reminding them that principles of governance are transferable, but also understand how they are applied in FE. Board members found the self-directed learning worked well for them, and helped them focus on specific areas such as managing public money, what it means for colleges to be in the public sector, and leadership and governance.

Governors' annual appraisals are now well-structured. The HoG issues an individual self-reflection questionnaire for Governors to complete which prompts members to think about the work of the Board and their contribution to governance of the college. It covers engagement, personal reflection on contributions, operation of the board, alignment with Governor values and behaviours. This is used as the basis for the appraisal along with information the HoG provides on attendance.

The robust appraisal of the Corporation Chair is carried out by the Senior Independent Governor. The Chair's appraisal form, completed by all Board members, asks questions to clarify, among other things, if the Corporation Chair is committed to the college and its ethos, able to lead others as a first among equals, has the authority and personal integrity to elicit respect, has the capacity to think strategically and is able to challenge and refresh the status quo. Following the appraisal meeting in January the SIG presented a paper setting out findings to the March Corporation Board meeting.

Search and Governance appraise Senior Postholders who are appointed by and accountable to the Board. Corporation receives and considers the appraisals. Going forward the appraisals will take place in September/October to enable a review of the previous academic year alongside the relevant AoC Benchmarking Data. After this has been considered, the Remuneration and Performance Committee will make a recommendation to the Corporation Board in December.

Conclusions

The Review has identified that Board Structure is currently an area of strength which has some scope for even further development. The following table summarises headlines:

BOARD STRUCTURES	
STRENGTH	AREA FOR DEVELOPMENT
1. Corporation and committee meetings are well organised and well chaired. Committees work well independently and at Board level.	1.Continue to involve all Board members in developing strategy. Make use of options papers when helping them make decisions about the new strategic plan.
2. Attendance is high at corporation and committee meetings	2. Ensure that all governance reports are aligned to risk management and BAF so there is a joined up approach which quickly highlights the issues and feeds these into the parent documents quickly and easily.
3. Task and finish groups are used well to drive improvements	3. Consider introducing a single tracker which highlights all decision made by committees, financial consequences and impact on risks and BAF.
4.Financial oversight is a key strength of the Board. Financial management and reporting to Governors is very strong.	
5. The Board is very well served by the highly organised Head of Governance.	
6.Board Assurance Frameworks (BAFs) provide assurance to the board that its key legal and regulatory obligations are met.	
7. Robust and transparent Annual Performance Appraisal of Governors, the Chair and Senior Postholders is now in place.	
8.Induction, probation and development help Governors quickly settle into their role and contribute to the Board.	

Board Interaction

Behaviours and interactions which allow for an inclusive culture that encourages effective challenge and impact collaboration

Background

Board interaction looks at the recruitment, development and deployment of diverse members in line with established principles of inclusion and effective governance and how productive board relationships can support collective responsibility and accountability.

The CEO/Principal used the findings of the last external review to move on some Board members and introduce the new Chair and HoG. Board members have been carefully recruited and allocated to committees based on their skills. Search and Governance make EDI a key factor in governor recruitment and have worked hard to secure a more diverse board. Several governors have been on the Board for less than a year. It has been a challenge to fill the Student Governor role with a student who has the time and ability to contribute to decision making.

Findings

Interactions between Board members are well organised to allow for the most effective deployment of individual and collective skills to meet college goals. The strong Board has been strengthened further by recent appointments. As one said 'There are no difficult characters. They all seem set on building a board'. There is a strong 'can do attitude' among Governors. Relationships were described as collegial and constructive, with members wanting the best for those they serve. The CEO/Principal, who has been in post for several years is seen as a very effective communicator. As some Board members are new they do not yet all know each other well. New Governors will benefit from further development of their understanding of the college for example, visiting curriculum areas and attending learner voice and employer forums. Members recognise that as is common when many non-executives are new, it takes time for a Board to find an appropriate equilibrium position and to evolve in their roles and understanding. As the new Chair of the recently established Audit and Risk committee said 'we are at the forming and storming stage' and are moving to norming and to performing. Further team-building work is planned for the away day in June. Some members identified this should lead to a stronger challenge function.

The Chair and CEO/Principal are aligned in their ambition for the college to be outstanding. Board members recognise and appreciate that the relationship between the CEO/Principal, Chair and HoG is warm, courteous and productive. The triumvirate have worked hard to develop a culture of openness, trust, reflectiveness and inclusion and to promote respect and diversity of thought. As one said 'The Board now feels much more of a collaborative place to discuss opinions and those opinions are listened to.' The triumvirate have set the right tone for the Board, with 64% of respondents to our survey strongly agreeing with the other 36% agreeing that the Board values and welcomes diverse opinions and contributions. Comments included 'The Chair sets the tone: facilitating, inclusive, but

with an appropriate level of challenge.’ ‘There is very much an openness to discuss, share ideas, innovate and act with honesty and integrity.’ Members feel they can speak openly at meetings and voice their opinions, so good diversity of thought is apparent.

As evidenced by this review and the SIG’s appraisal the hard-working Chair is popular with, and respected by, Board members who appreciate his skillful management of the Board. Board members feel meetings are very pro-active and questions and scrutiny where applicable are encouraged. The Chair is also respected by the Executive team who the SIG noted through the appraisal ‘especially appreciated David’s calmness, ready availability, and willingness to offer sage advice.’ The Chair has been involved in the improvement journey for several years having previously been Vice Chair. He is open and honest and keen to develop the Board. He commits a significant amount of time to the college and provides a good mix of support and challenge.

Members recognise that the Board acts with integrity and honesty and is open and transparent. Governors work well together and recognise each other’s expertise. They enjoy being Governors and their involvement with the college. They are proud of the college and committed to its success and the success of the geographical area. All Governors interviewed were energetic, enthusiastic and keen to hear the outcomes of this review so they can further improve governance. They feel students and serving their needs are at the heart of the business of the Board.

There were many positive indicators of an effective culture. In observed meetings, Governors had the right balance between support and challenge. They were quick to offer practical support, for example sharing training resources and contacts and discuss issues further outside of meetings. Interaction between Governors and the Executive is courteous, constructive and open with mutual trust and respect. A very high 79% of respondent to our survey strongly agreed with the statement, ‘The Board works effectively with the Principal/CEO and senior team, with a relationship built on trust, honesty, and transparency’, with the other 21% agreeing. As the Deputy Principal said ‘they are very generous with their time and effort’. Governors recognise and thank Executive members for their hard work and for producing and presenting papers. Executive members respond constructively to challenge and see the value of the Board. The Deputy Principal says she now looks forwards to Quality and Standards meetings as members understand Q&S and their questions are well thought through. She finds the Board Chair and the Quality and Standards Chair supportive.

The Executive recognise that Board members value their expertise, get the level right, are curious and want to know more without becoming operational. The Executives are clearly accountable for the management of the college’s business. Comments included:

- ‘Harmony between the Chair of the Board and the Principal is clear and constructive.’
- ‘Participation of the Executive Team is evident at all Board meetings and Committees. Again a great balance of support and challenge to ensure robust structures, procedures and policy.’
- ‘Relationships are visibly warm and supportive.’
- ‘The Board has confidence that the senior team is doing a good job for the college.’

The SIG's appraisal of the Chair confirmed that 'The Chair feels well supported in what is a demanding role. David receives excellent support from Executive Team members and has built very constructive relations with the CEO and the Head of Governance.' Board members are supported well to do their roles. In addition to the very effective induction and tailored training, new committee chairs felt well supported by the Chair in their new roles.

Governance has impact. Longer standing Executive members say governance has improved considerably and they now value it. The Executive recognise that they take things to the Board which require direction and are encouraged by the Board to think of risks, benefits, necessary support and possible reputational damage. Committees are active, for example, Q&S members used their significant expertise to develop the quality strategy which helps the Deputy Principal focus on how to achieve the college goal of being Ofsted outstanding. Financial expertise to support and challenge the Vice Principal is excellent and the VP is clear what Board members want from her in terms of financial reassurance. She and experienced FR members are working through agreed priorities for example the estates strategy which is in the BAF. Accountability is clear.

Staff input in decision-making was seen as a strength in our survey with 43% strongly agreeing and 53% agreeing that 'The Board actively listens to our staff, and their feedback informs our decision-making process'. Staff satisfaction is very high at the college. There are two Staff Governors and other staff regularly attend meetings. Staff views are canvassed informally at various events attended by Governors. Staff Governors can express their views and participate in discussions that inform the decision making process. The Staff Governor interviewed felt Staff Governors were encouraged to provide their opinions as a staff member, made to feel that their opinion is valued and that they provide a meaningful insight into cross college staff feedback. Governors agreed that there are very good opportunities for staff voice and that this is evident in committee structures. Some members felt there could maybe be more engagement directly with staff.

The Board has a clear understanding of local, regional, and national economic and skills needs, and actively works to support and address these needs. The Board has representatives from many professional bodies, local enterprises and the community as a whole. There is a clear focus on ensuring that the college inputs in to the national, local and regional skills needs and priorities. The Board is clear in its aim to benefit local communities. The Accountability Agreement gives detail on how this is achieved. The Strategic Plan is clear about the how the work of the college will make a significant contribution to the economy. Members have a good understanding of what the college can offer and curriculum is discussed at full Board. DFE feedback shows that the college offers a significantly higher proportion of provision that meets local skills needs than other colleges.

Much improvement has been made since the last review to Board members' engagement with stakeholders. In our survey, stakeholder collaboration was seen as a strength of the Board with 50% of respondents strongly agreeing and 50% agreeing that 'The Board collaborates effectively with external stakeholders, including employers.' A significant amount of work takes place to ensure that there is an ongoing dialogue with a range of stakeholders. Most learners are apprentices which necessarily involves building close relationships with employers and other local stakeholders. There is a strong employer network and opportunity for employer voice. The Board receive regular reports

on employer surveys. Satisfaction levels are high. At the end of January 2025, the college's star rating for employer feedback was 4 (Excellent) which is the highest rating available.

The Chair and Executive do much work to engage with external stakeholders as evidenced by the stakeholders update presented at March Corporation. Members engage in regional groups such as the combined authority and LSIPs. Full external stakeholder mapping is present and is an integral part of meetings and associated reporting. All Governors know they can participate in Board engagement activities, such as meeting staff and learners, curriculum area tours, learning visits and joining learner forums. However, not all do and some members suggested it would be useful to encourage all Governors to engage in some activity outside of meetings. Some commented that although the involvement of the Executive board members and Chair was good 'the rest of us could get more involved'.

Student interests are actively considered by Board members in their discussions as observed during this review, for example the impact that removing the need for adult apprentices to take functional skills exams would have on their ability to progress in their careers.

Although Board members feel students are at the heart of the college's day to day business and that there is a strong focus on the delivery of high quality student experiences, student focused decision making is a key area they highlight for further development. In response to the statement 'The Board listens to students and student interests are actively considered and central to our board decision making', 36% strongly agreed, 43% agreed and 21% were neutral. Some Board members reported seeing limited evidence of learner views being taken into account when making strategic decisions. As one said 'The students are considered in decision making but not party to it.' Despite continued efforts to address this, several commented on the lack of learner representation on the Board. It has been a challenge to fill the Student Governor role with a student who has the time and ability to contribute to decision making. More focus is needed on succession planning for this role with possibly one or two more student governors needed to sit on the boards to facilitate this.

Board members rightly feel EDI is a strong part of the college's culture. EDI is specifically itemised in Board papers and meetings and is always key to decision making. Board members demonstrate their commitment to EDI in meetings. Equality Impact Assessments are linked to policies. All respondents to our survey agree or strongly agree that 'Equality, diversity, and inclusion are core considerations in our Board decision-making.' Search and Governance make this a key factor in Governor recruitment and have worked hard to secure a more diverse board. The SIG has joined an AoC national network on EDI, one of the issues he wanted to know more about in FE, and he will share his reflections with the Chair and CEO/Principal. The Board and Executive team continue to strive to increase diversity and EDI is considered as a key element of the decision making process.

A high 64% of Board members strongly agreed with the remainder agreeing that 'The Board understands its responsibilities for safeguarding and Prevent, and is well-informed about how the college fulfils these duties'. Safeguarding and Prevent responsibilities are seen as key to the decision making and Governors are constantly supported to ensure they are fully trained and aware of all aspects. As Governors note, compliance with Prevent is properly reported to the Board. They feel that

there is a robust Safeguarding Committee and Board Assurance Framework. New members were impressed by the Board's understanding of these issues and the arrangements for compliance and training. The Board has received training on the new sexual harassment requirements. The Board receives reports on how the college fulfills these duties and has a safeguarding lead Governor to ensure oversight and scrutiny of the policy, procedure and practice.

Conclusions

The Review has identified that Board Interaction is currently an area of strength which has some scope for even further development. The following table summarises headlines:

BOARD INTERACTION	
STRENGTH	AREA FOR DEVELOPMENT
1. The Chair and CEO/Principal are aligned in their ambition for the college to be outstanding.	1. Continue to provide opportunities for members to get to know each other and for new members to evolve in their roles and develop their understanding of the college and their focus on strategy.
2. The triumvirate has worked hard to develop a culture of openness, trust, reflectiveness and inclusion and to promote respect and diversity of thought.	2. Students are considered in decision making but not party to it. Continue to focus on succession planning for the student Governor role.
3. The hard-working Chair is popular with and respected by Board members who appreciate his skillful management of the Board.	3. Continue to encourage all Governors to be highly engaged in college activities outside of meetings.
4. Interaction between Governors and the Executive is courteous, constructive and open with mutual trust and respect.	
5. Board meetings are participative and questions are freely raised and encouraged	
6. The Board actively listens to staff, and their feedback informs decision-making. Staff satisfaction scores are very high at the college.	
7. The Board has a clear understanding of local, regional, and national economic and skills needs, and actively works to support and address these needs.	
8. Board members rightly feel EDI is a strong part of the Board and the college's culture.	
9. Safeguarding and Prevent responsibilities are key to the decision making and governors are constantly supported to ensure they are fully trained and aware of all aspects.	

Overall Board Effectiveness

In assessing overall Board effectiveness, we have focused on the core functions of a Governing Body:

- setting and communicating the college educational character, strategy and goals
- holding executive leaders to account for educational performance and quality of the college and performance of staff
- exercising effective control to ensure that funds and assets are protected and legal obligations are met

We have looked at the way in which you observe the Nolan Principles and your adopted Code of Governance and the extent to which the culture of the Board focusses on outcomes. Key Board outcomes are shown below:



Governance at Derwentside College is strong. Board members put the success and well-being of students at the heart of their decision making. They are ambitious for the college to be Ofsted outstanding. The Board is well managed and well led. Oversight of finance, risk and education is robust. The relationship between the Board and the Executive is open and productive. The working relationship between the CEO/Principal, Chair and Head of Governance is very effective. Board members have an impressive range of leadership and strategic experience. They demonstrate a

good balance of challenge and support in their work with the Executive. Governors are generous with their time and support. They show a healthy curiosity about students and their experiences and the local area. Board members are reflective and self-critical and know where further improvements can be made. Although some Board members are new, the Board is already strong and effective with the capacity to improve further. The Board has made significant progress addressing the areas for development identified in the 2022 external board review which are clearly displayed in the Governance section of the college website <https://www.derwentside.ac.uk/governance/external-review-of-governance/>

Concluding Judgment - The Board is highly proficient and impacts positively on the college's strategy, effectiveness and outcomes.

Recommendations and Action Plan

This Review has drawn a number of conclusions about the strengths of the college and areas for development.

We make the following recommendation which have been discussed with the Chair, CEO/Principal and HoG and been accepted. It was agreed that the action plan should be developed by the Board at the Away Day in June which the reviewer will help facilitate.

Summary of Recommendations *(taken from each of the 3 dimensions)*

- 1** Broaden the skills audit document to encompass diversity of the board and how it reflects the current student and staff population. Ensure ongoing maintenance of the skills audit document which enables easy gap analysis so that the wide range of skills can be maintained and succession planning implemented, The ambition to widen the Board's diversity and to recruit a Governor with experience of Ofsted in Further Education should continue be acted on.
- 2** Continue to pursue recruiting, mentoring and developing Student Governors so their voice is part of the strategic decision making process. Focus on succession planning for the role, including considering mentoring and co-opting potential Student Governors.
- 3** Continue to develop a new strategic plan for the college and involve all Governors in developing strategy. Make use of options papers when helping them make decisions about the new strategic plan.
- 4** Ensure that all governance reports are aligned to risk management and BAF so there is a joined up approach which quickly highlights the issues and feeds these into the parent documents quickly and easily. Introduce a single tracker which highlights all decisions made by Full Board, committees, financial consequences and impact on risks and BAF to close the loop.
- 5** Continue to develop the Board as a high performing team recognising that several members are new to the college and FE. Encourage all members to be involved in wider Board engagement outside of meetings.

