

# West College Scotland College

## Externally Facilitated Effectiveness Review May 2024

FINAL REPORT 8 May 2024



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## 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 2022 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.24 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 to five years.’*

‘The Guide for Board Members in the College Sector’ and the ‘Board Development Framework’ provide additional guidance for college board members and college Professionals.

### 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 Governance Professional to agree the scope of the review and the overall project plan
- Observation of the 29 April 2024 Board meeting
- Desk review of core governance documentation, including agendas reports and minutes.
- Interviews with the
  - Chair
  - Vice Chair
  - Chair of Audit and Risk Committee
  - Vice Chair of Learning Teaching and quality Committee
  - Principal
  - Student Member
  - Teaching Staff Member
  - Governance Professional
  - Non-Executive Member
- Board survey to seek Members’ views of governing processes
- Board workshop to test review conclusions and recommendations

## 2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a strategic Board which benefits from strong leadership from a skilled and experienced Chair and is well supported by a confident and competent Governance Professional who has had a positive impact on the governance of the college since joining last year.

Compliance with the Code of Good Governance is kept under review using a Code of Good Governance Checklist, and mid-year review was reported to the Board. This provides assurance to the Board that the governance arrangements for the college are compliant with the five principles of the Code of Good Governance.

The quality of the student experience is clearly central to Board discussions and decision making.

The Board and the committees are supported by a strong and experienced Principal and executive team, and there is a constructive relationship between the Board and the executive team which is mature and balanced. Within the context of the current challenges faced by the sector the Board has confidence in and is very supportive of the executive team.

There has been some significant turnover in board membership, and as a result this is a relatively young Board with a high proportion of newer members. Consideration needs to be given to building confidence in newer members and establishing the new Board team. There is a clear appetite for more face-to-face engagement, members need time to get to know each other and to build effective working relationships, this will support the important teamwork element of Board effectiveness.

Reporting on strategic KPIs has been an ongoing challenge. The Board does receive a lot of useful data, but members are keen to see a clearer dashboard style reporting on KPIs. This is being progressed as part of the strategic planning process.

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

#### **3.1 Leadership and Strategy**

This is a committed and enthusiastic Board which benefits from strong leadership from a highly skilled and competent Chair who has established a learner centred culture which is inclusive, respectful, and open. All members are encouraged to contribute to Board discussions. Board decisions are made in the spirit of collective responsibility and are effectively summed up by the Chair.

The Board is responsible for determining the strategic direction for the college. The West College Scotland Strategy 2019-2025 is currently being reviewed and refreshed, recognising the significant changes in the financial and political operating environment and the challenges facing the college therein.

A Board Development day took place in January 2024 to form the basis on which the refreshed strategy would be developed. The new strategy will build on the College Vision and Values which was developed with all college staff and endorsed by the Board last year.

The Board considered the outputs of Board Development Day at the April Board meeting, and the proposed strategic priorities are clearly aligned with the Code of Good Governance. Board discussion articulated clearly how the strategic plan should reflect the culture of the college and form the basis for strategic decision making.

#### **Performance**

Establishing a framework of strategic KPIs has been a challenge, and members are keen for clearer dashboard style reporting on KPIs.

The Board currently receives a lot of useful data in the form of charts in the 'Corporate Strategy KPIs' report, but this would be improved by the addition of some supporting narrative.

The Board would benefit from a regular 'Strategic Business Report' which reports on performance against strategic objectives with some narrative reporting on any variances and management interventions. Consideration should be given to a balanced scorecard approach

The development of a balanced scorecard and a framework of strategic KPIs is part of the strategic planning process.

### 3.2 Quality of the Student Experience

The quality of the student experience is clearly central to all Board decisions, and the Chair ensures that a student focus is maintained at all times.

The Board ensures measures are in place for the effective oversight of the quality and inclusivity of the learning experience through the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee.

The main purpose of the committee is to:

- *Have strategic oversight of all learning, teaching, training, and skills development within the College, ensuring the highest quality of student experience and the development of a sustainable and innovative curriculum to meet the current and future skills needs of students, employers, and the Region.*

The Student Association report is first on the agenda following the minutes of the previous meeting. The Student Association report is well structured and provides a comprehensive account of activity and outcomes for the Board.

The student members make a positive contribution to Board business and their unique insight, skills and experience are valued by the Board.

### 3.3 Board Accountability

Board decision making is transparent and rigorous, and decisions are made in the spirit of collective responsibility. The Chair effectively sums up Board discussion and any decisions made. An Action Log enables Board members to track progress.

Board papers to support strategic decision are high quality and have a succinct executive summary. Agendas are well structured.

Board Papers for 2022/23 have been published on the college website and papers for 2023/24 are in the process of being published.

The college has a 'Code of Good Governance Checklist' which has been updated by the Governance Professional for 2023/24. This includes a RAG rating which enables Board members to quickly identify areas that require attention. A narrative is provided describing actions taken to address the sixteen amber rated areas. This provides assurance to the Board that the governance arrangements for the college are compliant with the five principles of the Code of Good Governance.

The Board also receives an Internal Governance Update which provides information on governance activity since the last Board meeting.

The college has five committees, each has a purpose and remit which is reviewed annually

- Audit and Risk Committee
- Corporate Development Committee
- Learning, Teaching and Quality
- Nominations Committee
- Remuneration Committee

Committee Chairs provide a brief report to each Board meeting which updates the Board on discussions at Committee meetings. The committees have the scope for 'deep dives' into key issues and effectively support the work of the Board by providing more detailed scrutiny and assurance to the Board. There is an appropriate level of trust between the Board and the committees.

The annual Audit and Risk Committee report to the Board provides assurance to the Board that risk is being effectively managed.

Work is ongoing to develop a more robust risk framework, and a session on risk appetite will be arranged for the Board in June 2024. This will form the basis for the Board setting the Risk Appetite for the college, balancing risk, and opportunity.

The Board is open to self-reflection and learning from experience as demonstrated by a recent event where members felt a key issue that was reported to the Board had not had the opportunity to be scrutinised at committee level. The governance implications were discussed by the Board and agreement reached that all such issues should be considered by the appropriate committee **before** coming to the Board.

### 3.4 Board Effectiveness

Both the Chair and the Principal are highly skilled and experienced, and they have established an effective working relationship based on mutual respect and an understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities.

The support of the Governance Professional is valued by the Board, recognising the important role they play in advising the Board and effectively supporting good governance. The changes introduced by the Governance Professional since joining the college last year have a positive impact on the governance arrangements of the college.

The Board provides an appropriate balance of constructive challenge, scrutiny, and support to the executive team, acting as a 'critical friend.'

Board members bring an excellent range of skills and experience to the Board, and the practice of co-opting individuals on to committees is used effectively to address skills gaps.

However, this is a 'young' Board with a high proportion of relatively new members, and two new members due to take up post soon. Building the new Board 'team' requires careful planning and consideration should be given to

- building the confidence of newer members, encouraging them to have a voice and use their skills and experience to provide constructive challenge and support
- enabling newer members to develop their understanding of the sector and the current challenges
- creating space for members to get to know each other and build effective working relationships. Widening the use of the 'governance space' would allow for more creative time for board members to explore significant strategic questions and opportunities

Succession planning is important as a further two long standing and experienced Board members leave the Board later this year.

The Board Development Plan is based on the 2023 internal effectiveness review. A mid-year review was shared with the Board at the February 2024 meeting.

A Board skills audit has been undertaken in order to

- identify any skills gaps on the Board, this was used to inform the selection criteria for Board recruitment
- identify any training needs which will form the basis for a schedule of training and development events, including the Board Member Induction Programme.

All Board members are encouraged to engage in training and development opportunities.

### 3.5 Relationships and Collaboration

The Board clearly understands the importance of working in partnership to secure the coherent provision of high-quality education in the region.

Two of the themes which emerged from the recent strategic planning session were

- **Working with others:** collaborating with other colleges and universities, being a trusted partner for businesses, working together to develop new solutions or products, keeping close to industry and being agile in our response.
- **Supporting economic growth:** considering the economic needs of our region, aligning to regional economic plans, understanding future demand, and responding to it,

## 4 RECOMMENDATIONS

1	<p><b>KPIs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing a framework of strategic KPIs has been a challenge, and members are keen for clearer dashboard style reporting on KPIs.</li> <li>• The Board currently receives a lot of useful data in the form of charts in the ‘Corporate Strategy KPIs’ report, but this would be improved by the addition of some supporting narrative.</li> <li>• The Board would benefit from a regular ‘Strategic Business Report’ which reports on performance against strategic objectives with some narrative reporting on any variances and management interventions. Consideration should be given to a balanced scorecard approach</li> <li>• The development of a balanced scorecard and a framework of strategic KPIs is part of the strategic planning process.</li> </ul>
2	<p><b>Building the team, building confidence</b></p> <p>This is a ‘young’ Board with a high proportion of relatively new members, and two new members due to take up post soon. Building the new Board ‘team’ requires careful planning and consideration should be given to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• building the confidence of newer members, encouraging them to have a voice and use their skills and experience to provide constructive challenge and support</li> <li>• enabling newer members to develop their understanding of the sector and the current challenges</li> <li>• creating space for members to get to know each other and build effective working relationships</li> </ul>
3	<p><b>Succession planning</b></p> <p>Succession planning for the Board is important as a further two long standing and experienced Board members leave the Board later this year.</p> <p>Succession planning and building the Board team should form part of the Board Development Plan.</p>

## **5 ANNEX 1**

### **5.1 Document Review**

1. Governance documents
2. West College Scotland Strategy 2019-2025
3. Committee Remits
4. Audited Accounts 2022.23
5. Board agenda and papers February 2024 and April 2024
6. WCS Internal Effectiveness Review 2023
7. WCS Board Development Plan 2023
8. Internal Audit Reports
9. Strategic Risk Register 2023
10. External Effectiveness Review 2020

#### **Footnote**

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