

External Governance Review 2023

An External Governance Review was carried out during the 2022/23 academic year by Fiona Chalk, Governance4FE.

The review concluded that:

There was evidence that there was effective governance in place at the college and that the governance arrangements were fit for purpose.

The following table summarises some of the headline strengths and areas for development identified in executive summary and detailed findings:

| Strengths | Areas for Development |
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| <u>Effective Governance and Strong Relationships</u> The board and executive are performing well, especially in the wake of the Principal's recent passing. There is a strong, constructive relationship between the newly appointed Principal and the Chair of Governors, and the boundary between governance and management is well-observed. | <u>Improving Strategic Focus in Meetings</u> Board meetings are sometimes too focused on operational details rather than strategic oversight. A more integrated reporting mechanism and a clearer work plan aligned with strategic priorities are needed to shift the focus to higher-level discussions. |
| <u>Self-Aware and Reflective Board</u> The board operates with self-awareness and a reflective mindset. The Chair's quality is seen as a key factor in the positive regard for the board and its committees. | <u>Clarifying Roles and Accountability</u> A comprehensive Scheme of Delegation is needed to clarify where responsibility and accountability lie within the governance structure. |
| <u>Value-Adding Expertise</u> Governors add significant value through their expertise, as shown by their contributions to key strategic decisions, such as the merger with Otley college. The recent recruitment has brought in a good balance of skills and a wide range of perspectives. | <u>Enhancing Board Diversity and Succession Planning</u> While recent recruitment has improved skill balance, there's a need for a more formal succession plan to increase transparency and achieve greater diversity in ethnicity and social/economic backgrounds. Exit interviews for departing governors would also be beneficial. |
| <u>Rigorous Scrutiny and Improved Data Reporting</u> Governors provide rigorous scrutiny through their committee work. Data reporting is being continuously improved to support effective decision-making, and the use of a board portal facilitates information sharing. | <u>Maximising Technology and Training</u> While the Board Portal is helpful, further training is needed, particularly for new members, to ensure its full functionality is being utilised. |

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| <u>Commitment to Strategy and Engagement</u> Governors have a clear understanding of the college's strategic priorities and have opportunities to contribute to strategic planning. There is a "link governor" scheme in place that allows for engagement with staff and students, and external stakeholders are also involved in strategy events. | <u>Strengthening Governor-Stakeholder Engagement</u> The Executive should provide more guidance to governors on which stakeholders to engage with and what messages to convey. There is also a need for greater engagement with student and staff voices to balance internal and external reporting. |
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Following the review an action plan was drawn up which encompassed the recommendations from the External Governance Review and the College's own self-assessment. Progress on this was reviewed by the Board's Governance & Search Committee and reported at Corporation throughout each academic year. It was also included in the Board's Self-Assessment.

An Internal Audit of Governance took place in April 2024 and the progress that has been made/was planned to address the areas for improvement identified following the External Governance Review were scrutinised. The Internal Audit of Governance was given an assurance level of significant with no recommendations made.

The next External Board Review will take place in January 2026. AoC have been appointed to carry out the review.