

Tameside College – External Governance Review (April 2024)

In January 2021, the Department for Education's (DfE) Skills for Jobs White Paper set out various reforms to further education. Chapter four included a section on 'strengthened governance for colleges', in which the DfE outlined a future requirement for colleges to undertake an external board review every three years, with an annual self-assessment to 'level up governance'.

On 22 May 2022, the DfE published its guidance '[External governance reviews: guide for FE college corporations and designated institutions](#)'. This guidance explains the purpose and benefits of external governance reviews and how to approach them. Notably the College must have an external governance review between August 2021 and July 2024, and every 3 years thereafter.

The identified benefits of an external governance review include:

1. an expert, independent view of governance effectiveness, impact and boardroom culture, bringing fresh insight and broader governance perspectives;
2. stakeholder confidence that a board understands its responsibilities, is accountable and committed to continuous improvement;
3. an opportunity to build on strengths and to address any identified weaknesses;
4. encouraging openness and enhancing board members' engagement in governance development and good practice.

The College's External Governance Review was carried out by Fiona Chalk (Governance4FE) in the period January to April 2024, with a report presented to the Board on 30 April 2024. Governors accepted the report and were content for the Executive Summary of the report to be published on the College website. This is included below:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUMMARY OF REVIEW OUTCOMES & RECOMMENDATIONS

Within the overall review of governance effectiveness, this is a positive report detailing many effective governing practices. This summary of review outcomes should be read in conjunction with the full report as the report contains important contextual information, rationale, and evidence for all the recommendations made. The review considered the Board's effectiveness and governance maturity across the 5 main areas.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

The Board demonstrates strengths in clearly defining roles, responsibilities, and expectations, with a thoughtfully designed structure, backed by experienced governors. Governors maintain good oversight of the college's strengths, weaknesses, and financial health, understanding education quality measurement systems and curriculum rationale. Areas for development include enhancing governors' advocacy roles outside meetings and improving board and committee reporting by focusing more on impact than activity and clarifying executive summaries. Review the efficiency of Sharepoint in effectively supporting governance and consider implementing a Board Portal application is recommended for better governance efficiency, fitting with strategic digital innovation priorities.

RELATIONSHIPS

The Board showcases strengths in constructive challenge with positive executive responses, integrated board development, and strong, trustful relationships underpinned by a partnership model between governors and executives. Development areas include a review of hybrid board meeting effectiveness, enhancing the reporting of impact of governor training on governance performance, and improving stakeholder engagement by ensuring decision reports reflect stakeholder consultation. Additionally, creating opportunities for more social interactions between board members and stakeholders outside of meetings, are seen as areas for consideration.

ENABLING

Governors utilise various methods to support and challenge college operations effectively, including a link member scheme, campus visits, attendance at SAR validation meetings, and benchmarking. Decision-making benefits from considering multiple options and scenarios, with a strong sense of psychological safety fostering open discussion. Developments suggested are to formalise link scheme participation and increase campus visits, formalising feedback mechanisms for link visits, and introducing a concise committee chair report to streamline and strengthen assurance processes.

ALIGNMENT

The Board oversees college culture, and further engagement could enhance this. Strategic discussions and risk management are strengths, with clear KPIs agreed by governors. Development involves enhancing reporting on achievement against the strategic priorities, ensuring thorough oversight of achievement of strategic goals.

TEAM

There is a clear commitment to improving governance. Diversity in recruitment enhances decision-making with a variety of perspectives sought. Development areas include aligning the skills audit more closely with strategic priorities, specifically by adding digital/AI expertise, and implementing a detailed succession and contingency plan for senior leadership to ensure continuity and leadership development.