



JUNE 2024 to JULY 2024

**EXTERNAL REVIEW OF  
GOVERNANCE  
LANCASTER AND  
MORECAMBE COLLEGE**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background to the External Review of Governance

Lancaster and Morecambe College is a small, single-campus General Further Education College (FE), based in Lancaster and serving a largely coastal rural area covering the communities of north Lancashire, south Cumbria, the city of Lancaster and the seaside resort of Morecambe. The College has recently celebrated its 200th anniversary.

The College offers a comprehensive range of technical education and training, which includes education programmes for young people, adult learning courses, apprenticeships, bespoke employer training programmes and Higher Education (HE). The College sees itself as an anchor institution, with strong links to local businesses that enable it to deliver an employer-led curriculum.

The College is a core member of The Lancashire Colleges group, a delivery partner of the National College for Nuclear and a founder member of the Lancashire and Cumbria Institute of Technology.

In 2019 the College, with wider partners, co-created the Morecambe Bay Curriculum, a place-based 'birth-to-25' offer embracing sustainability, climate change and the significant opportunity posed by Eden Project North.

The bulk of the College's learner funding is derived from its 16-18 provision, with the College set to exceed its allocation for 2023-24. The remainder of the College's income is made up of Adult Education Budget (AEB) and apprenticeships, with a small amount of FE and HE tuition fee income.

The College was last inspected by Ofsted in March 2020, achieving a 'Good' outcome for overall effectiveness and across all criteria except Learners with High Needs, which was judged 'Requires Improvement'. In the report of the last inspection, governance was commended:

*'Governors are fully informed about the quality of education which learners and apprentices receive. They frequently monitor the planned improvements to courses with a notice to improve. Governors receive monthly progress reports. They attend assessment boards and operational meetings to ensure that they are fully briefed and aware of the challenges within the college. They skilfully challenge leaders and managers and hold them to account.'*

Governors and senior leaders are keenly aware that the College is facing another inspection imminently, and are prepared for this to take place early in 2024-25.

The College's financial position is stable, and a continuation of a 'Good' financial health grade (calculated using ESFA measures) is forecast. At the July meeting, the Board approved a budget for 2024-25 that proposes an EBITDA of 2.3% and positive cash generation alongside increased costs, especially to the staffing budget. Governors have agreed to invest some of the College's reserves in its estate to ensure that it provides a high-quality learning environment for all its future students.

The Principal took up post in September 2023, having previously occupied a senior position at Lakes College. He is supported by an established Senior Leadership Team (SLT), most of whom have served at the College for several years.

The Board has experienced recent turnover of its Chair. In the past year, an experienced governor has covered the role on an interim basis, and a permanent Chair has been appointed to take over from 1 August. The Governance Adviser has worked at the College for several years and was appointed to her current position in 2017.

The Board last undertook a governance self-assessment at the end of 2022-23, using an approach aligned to the AoC Code of Good Governance for English Colleges. This resulted in an overall grade of 'Good' for governance, with several 'Outstanding' areas. The following were identified as areas for improvement:

- Stakeholder feedback.
- Teaching, learning and assessment reporting.
- High Needs provision reporting.
- Innovation.
- Review of curriculum to meet local skills needs.
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion performance.

This External Governance Review replaces the requirement for a 2023-24 self-assessment. The Board is aware of the requirement in the DfE conditions of funding, to undertake an annual self-assessment hereafter.

The Corporation agreed to commission an external review of governance as part of its 2023-24 business calendar. The review was undertaken in June and July 2024, with outcomes reported to the Corporation on 30 July. The methodology included a review of key documentation, an online survey, ongoing conversations with the Governance Adviser, observation of key committee and Board meetings, individual meetings with the incoming and outgoing Chair, committee Chairs, and other key governors, the Principal and other senior managers. The review considered the previous self-assessments, compliance with the sector Code of Governance and other governance improvement activities as part of its work. Full details of the scope of the review and the activities undertaken are contained in Appendix 1. The scope meets the requirements of the Department for Education Guide on External Governance Reviews in Further Education and the Post-16 Education and Skills Act.

Eleven governors and two members of SLT responded to the survey. Outcomes will be referred to throughout the report as appropriate.

Rockborn would like to thank members of the LMC Board and SLT for their time and cooperation with the review. Particular thanks go to Oona Cushen for providing us with the information we requested and responding to our questions promptly to support the smooth running of the process.

## 1.2 LMC Governance Structure

The College operates a minimal committee structure. In 2023-24, the full Board met nine times, on a rough monthly basis during term time (October, November, December, January, February, March, May, June and July). Additional strategy/development sessions were held in September and early March.

The Board is supported by the following committees, which each meet termly:

- Audit and Risk Committee
- Search Committee
- Remuneration Committee

Committees report to the Corporation via their minutes, accompanied by a verbal summary by the Chair in question, which enables all governors to raise questions.

In 2024-25, there are two less Board meetings planned, but this is counterbalanced by an increase in governor training events.

### 1.3 Composition and Membership of the Board

The Corporation has a determined membership of a minimum of 13 and a maximum of 20 governors (the minimum comprises nine ‘independent’ governors, two staff governors, one student governor, and the Principal). At the time of the review, there were ten independent governors, four of whom were appointed during the preceding year. One of the two staff governors was also appointed within 2023-24.

## 2. THE ROLE AND DUTIES OF CHARITY TRUSTEES AND FE GOVERNORS

### 2.1 Overall compliance

#### Summary of highlights

- Governors are well supported in understanding their statutory and regulatory roles by the knowledge and expertise of the Governance Adviser.
- The review identified no compliance or procedural concerns.
- The Board is supported by a robust set of constitutional and governance policy documents.

#### Commentary

All who completed the survey agreed (63% strongly in each case) that ‘Governors understand their roles and responsibilities’, and that ‘the governance/management divide is closely observed by all.’ From our meeting observations, there was evidence that governors understand their role and fiduciary duties well.

Governors are well supported from the point of induction and are given access to regular information, updates and training relevant to their role that keeps them up to date with changes in the statutory and regulatory framework for FE governance. Induction and training are covered in Section 8 of this report.

Governors’ roles and responsibilities, and the framework within which governance is undertaken, are set out in a governor role description, along with the following constitutional documents:

- the Instrument and Articles (the statutory constitution).
- a set of Standing Orders (local rules and byelaws for the conduct of business).
- Committee Terms of Reference (included in the Standing Orders).
- a Code of Conduct (Eversheds model) (included in the Standing Orders).
- a set of supplementary governance policies and procedures.

Governors are provided with a copy of the Instrument and Articles and the Standing Orders at the first meeting of each academic year. Governors have requested training on Teams to enable information to be accessible via the Governors' Teams Channel.

The review concludes that the constitutional and governance policy framework is robust and fit for purpose. Just one 'housekeeping' recommendation is made, which is to include a policy on the independence of the Clerk within the Standing Orders in the next review. Rockborn would be happy to provide an example for consideration.

All governors undertake an annual review of their entries on the Register of Interests, reconfirm their eligibility to serve as governors annually, and are asked to declare any new and continuing interests relevant to the agenda at each meeting.

In line with regulatory requirements, the College has adopted the Association of Colleges Code of Governance (rather than an alternative such as the Charity Code). The Corporation self-assessment questionnaire for 2022-23 was based on the key strategic headings contained within the code which enabled triangulation with a separate compliance audit and an overall judgement of 'Good' for governance.

## 2.2 Key Statutory Duties and Responsibilities

### a) Determination of the Educational Character, Mission and Vision of the Institution

#### Summary of highlights

Governors are confident that there is a strong 'single vision' about the College's purpose and position as a community institution, and its ambition to be a destination of choice for learners. 100% of survey respondents agreed (46% strongly) that '*Governors maintain a strong focus on strategy.*'

#### Commentary

During 2023-24, governors have worked closely with the new Principal on a review of the College's 2022-26 strategic plan, including a new set of values and underpinning behaviours. The final version came to the July 2024 Board meeting for approval, and governors expressed satisfaction that they recognised their contributions.

Each strategic objective is accompanied by one or more strategic KPIs, including financial targets and those relating to the quality of provision. Performance against these is assessed at each Board meeting, and strategic planning days are factored into the calendar of business to review the strategy in more depth. There is a desire among governors, and particularly the incoming Chair, to refine performance reports further by introducing more of an 'outcomes-focused' approach, including a single rolling KPI dashboard.

The overarching strategic plan is underpinned by several ‘sub-strategies.’ A number of comments were made that suggested that the total number of these could be reduced and that some (for example the estates strategy) are too wordy and could benefit from a more concise presentation.

The Corporation is aware of its new statutory responsibilities under the Post-16 Education and Skills Act 2022 and governors approved the 2024 Accountability Statement in May. In the survey, all governors agreed that ‘governors understand how the college meets local skills needs’, and this was evident in our conversations with governors and meetings observations. Nonetheless, the College is advised to prepare governors well for the meeting with the skills inspector as part of the next Ofsted visit.

## **b) Quality of teaching, learning and the student experience**

### **Summary of highlights**

Governors understand the strengths and weaknesses of teaching, learning and the student experience. Students are at the heart of Board discussions and decisions, including those relating to finance and resources.

### **Commentary**

Under the chosen governance structure, and in the absence of a dedicated committee, governor oversight of the quality of teaching, learning and the student experience is given prominence at Board meetings. Reports against student-related KPIs and a performance and progress report from the Vice Principal are scheduled for each meeting. However, a pragmatic approach to the frequency of reporting was taken at the meetings we observed, as there was little new information to report in the short space of time between them.

All survey respondents agreed that ‘governors understand the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning and the student experience’ and this was backed up at the Board meetings that we observed. Governors showed awareness of key areas of weakness for the College (e.g. maths and English, apprenticeships) and this was reflected in direct questions to SLT. Knowledge of strengths and weaknesses and the impact of any improvement activities will be essential when governors meet Ofsted at the next inspection.

Governors indicated in the survey that they were happy that there was an appropriate balance between the focus on quality and students, and finance and resources. This is a positive finding as we have observed that Board business can easily become dominated by financial matters in colleges with a similar governance structure.

The Corporation benefits from the skills and experience of several governors with education knowledge, but currently lacks a governor from a FE or school background, and this is recommended in the next round of governor recruitment.

Governors are provided with the opportunity to develop their knowledge further through participation in the annual Self-Assessment Report (SAR) validation process. A monitoring report on the College’s Quality Improvement Plan is brought to the Board at least termly.

The high numbers of ‘non-education’ governors that have recently joined the Board create a case for ensuring that new governors gain a rapid understanding of the College curriculum and student profile as part of their induction.



Another valuable way for governors to improve their understanding of the student experience between meetings is through engagement in college-based activities. Although governors are provided with opportunities, including attendance at curriculum assessment boards, take-up is variable. This is, therefore, an area for development that is covered in more depth in Section 8.

### **c) Ensuring the efficient and effective use of resources, the solvency of the Institution and safeguarding assets**

#### **Finance and Resources**

##### **Summary of highlights**

- Governors have strong oversight of finance and resources at Board meetings.
- The Corporation has a well-functioning and effective Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC), chaired effectively by an experienced governor with a broad HE and business development background. The membership includes other governors with skills and experience in accountancy, audit and risk.

##### **Commentary**

As with curriculum and quality, governor oversight of finance and resources takes place at full Board level. 92% of survey respondents agree that ‘Governors have strong oversight of finance and resources.’

Governors have recently approved plans to invest some of the College’s reserves in campus refurbishment which will enhance the learner experience and support the strategic ambition to be a destination of choice.

The Corporation has, in the past year, appointed a chartered accountant as a governor. This has brought valuable skills that enhance financial scrutiny. Governors should take care, however, not to rely on one governor too heavily. We, therefore, recommend that a second governor with a financial background is recruited. Experience of capital projects would also be helpful as the College embarks upon the new estates strategy. Governors are encouraged to attend training on FE finance, with several having participated recently in the AoC Finance Masterclasses.

Governors receive regular finance reports to each Board meeting which support their understanding of the College’s financial position. The management accounts are detailed and provide the right information against targets, KPIs and risk. The document would, however, be enhanced further by a cover sheet drawing governors’ attention to key issues and messages.

A top-level RAG rated summary of financial performance against annual KPIs is also included in the Principal’s termly update on achievement against strategic objectives to the Corporation. The report would be further enhanced by a summary of actions to address ‘Red’ rated areas where the KPI is not being met.

The Corporation received the proposed 2024-25 budget at its July meeting. Governors seemed familiar with the budget assumptions and there was a good discussion and strong questioning of some of the KPIs, especially an increase in the staff costs percentage. Whilst the reasons for this were explained well by management, the Board is advised to monitor the figure closely as it is significantly higher than the FE Commissioner benchmark and sector averages, even for a small college.



## **Audit, Risk and Assurance**

The Corporation has a well-functioning and effective Audit and Risk Assurance (ARA) Committee, chaired effectively by an experienced governor with a broad HE and business development background. The membership includes other governors with skills and experience in accountancy, audit and risk.

All survey respondents agreed (over half strongly) that, *'The Audit Committee provides effective oversight and assurance on internal controls, risk management and corporate governance.'*

The Committee sets its agendas according to an annual workplan that complies with the requirements of the Post-16 Audit Code of Practice. The Terms of Reference are comprehensive and refer to the requirements of HM Treasury's Managing Public Money.

Oversight of risk management by the Corporation is strong, with 100% of survey respondents agreeing (46% strongly) that, *'The Governing Body has strong and regular oversight of risk.'* The ARA Committee has had an impact on bringing about improvements to the presentation of the risk register, to allow the greatest focus on the areas of highest risk.

The ARA Committee Chair provides a comprehensive Committee report to the Board, and all governors are provided with the Committee minutes. This ensures full visibility of the Committee's business and encourages questions and discussion.

### **d) Senior postholders**

The College has four Senior Postholders for whom the Corporation has direct responsibility: the Principal, the Governance Adviser and the two Vice Principals. The Principal and Governance Adviser are appraised by the Chair and the appraisal of the two Vice Principals is delegated to the Principal. The Remuneration Committee meets twice a year to consider end-of-year and mid-year performance review reports on the Senior Postholders. Both Vice Principals are asked to attend the November Remuneration Committee to enable direct questions and feedback to and from Governors.

The approach to Senior Postholder performance oversight via the Remuneration Committee is clear, rigorous, and governed by a documented SPH Remuneration Policy. The Corporation has adopted the AoC Senior Postholder Remuneration Code and complies with its provisions.

Governors have provided strong, regular support to the Principal in his first year. Regular review meetings have supported him in developing effective relationships with the Board, understanding and meeting governor expectations, and developing improved reporting processes.

### **e) Other areas of legal and regulatory responsibility**

The Board agenda has a standing item for 'mandatory responsibilities' including safeguarding, health and safety, and equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) including SEND. This is good practice which ensures that any issues or concerns are brought to governors' attention promptly. Governors recently requested that Prevent should be added to the list.

## Safeguarding

Governors are aware of their responsibilities for safeguarding and Prevent. All survey respondents agreed (46% strongly) with the statement that ‘Governors have strong oversight of safeguarding and understand their own role.’ Governors receive safeguarding training on appointment, and this is refreshed annually to reflect any changes to Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE). The Safeguarding Link Governor role will pass from the incoming Chair to another long-standing independent governor at the end of the academic year. The Board receives regular safeguarding updates through the Vice Principal’s report to each meeting, as well as an annual ‘Supported Learners Annual Report’. It would provide useful additional assurance if the Safeguarding Governor were to, periodically, report their observations directly to the Board.

## Health and Safety

The Board fulfils its responsibilities for the health and safety of its employees and students through a termly report by the Vice Principal. At the meeting observed, governors engaged well with this item and requested improvements to the presentation of data to aid their understanding of trends in accidents and incidents.

## Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

EDI principles run, as a theme, through the Strategic Plan. Governance oversight of EDI is covered in more depth in Section 10.

## Sustainability

The College’s commitment to the sustainability agenda is evident in the new strategic plan and estates strategy. However, 15% of survey respondents disagreed that ‘governors are committed to sustainability.’ There may be movement on this, however, as the minutes of the June meeting reflect governor challenge, debate and desire for a more coherent strategy in this area. A focus on sustainability at a strategy day may help to increase the visibility of this work and allow governors with specific interest or experience to support it.

# 3. MEMBERSHIP, RECRUITMENT AND SUCCESSION PLANNING

## Summary of highlights

- The Board’s membership is made up of individual governors with a diverse range of skills and backgrounds which, together, enable constructive discussions and challenge to take place.
- The skills mix on the Board has been enhanced through the recruitment of several new governors including an accountant.
- Governors bring strong links to local and regional employers, the community and strategic partnerships.

## Commentary

The Board's current membership of fourteen currently sits just above its designated minimum of 13. The Standing Orders permit a maximum of 20 governors. It is understood that the recruitment of further independent governors is therefore planned.

Recommendations have been made in earlier sections that the Board would benefit from a governor with direct knowledge of teaching and learning, preferably in colleges, and from additional financial expertise.

Four of the current nine independent governors have been recruited in the past year. The introduction of new governors brings new knowledge and perspectives and increased diversity of thought. It is important, however, to recognise that it can take a full cycle of business before governors can settle fully into the role. The induction and ongoing support provided in this first year, particularly by the Governance Adviser and the Chair, will be critical to enabling governors to make a full contribution to college governance as early as possible.

As with most colleges, board diversity should also be a consideration in future governor recruitment. The Board is encouraged to review its membership profile against that of the local and college community, encompassing its gender and ethnic mix and a wider range of protected characteristics, and consider whether targeted recruitment is needed to attract applicants from different groups.

The Board has been led by an interim Chair during 2023-24. Her contribution has been highly valued and appreciated by fellow governors and management, especially as she has juggled this with a full-time job, and her term coincided with the Principal's first year in post. The new Chair is a retired Senior NHS Manager with a specialism in children's health and SEND, and strong local links.

The new Chair will play a key part in leading the Board forward with the Governance Adviser, supporting new members and developing relationships with the SLT. It will be important to ensure that her support needs are identified and met, as both Chair and a relatively new governor. Equally, her appointment will provide the opportunity to put in place a structure for periodic one-to-one reviews with governors, and for an annual Chair's appraisal.

The Board has a full complement of staff governors and one student governor, with work underway to recruit a second. As in many colleges, supporting staff and student governors is a continuous need so that they understand their role and can play a full and active role on the Board. Student governor engagement can be a challenge for colleges. However, when student governors are supported to play an active role in governance, this can have many benefits. Governors mentioned that the student governor had made positive contributions in the past year, although they were not certain if their suggestions had been acted upon by management.

A good example of student governor engagement seen elsewhere is a regular student governor report on the Board agenda. In one college where this worked particularly well; the report was based on original 'themed' research by the student governors (in this case student perceptions of EDI), with which they were supported by management. The report generated lively discussion at the meeting, and the student governors at this college seemed noticeably more confident in contributing to other Board discussions than is often observed.

Other examples observed at other colleges of active student and staff governor support include:

- Scheduled KIT (Keep in Touch meetings) between student/staff governors, the Principal and the Chair.
- A 'buddy' system with an experienced governor, to allow student/staff governors to touch base before formal meetings.
- Chairs to actively encourage student and staff governor contributions and invite opinions at meetings.
- All governors to actively commit to getting to know, and supporting, the student and staff governors.
- Student and staff governors to play a key part in organising college engagement activities for external governors.

## 4. GOVERNANCE PROCESSES AND PRACTICES

### Summary of highlights and strengths

- Meetings are well organised, smooth running and productive.
- The Governance Adviser, Chair and Principal form an effective 'triumvirate' that ensures that governance is planned and led effectively.
- Governance self-assessment is comprehensive and robust.

### Commentary

As covered in Section 2, the Corporation is governed by a robust set of policies, procedures and processes which are maintained by an experienced and proactive governance professional.

Governance business follows a clear annual schedule that covers all essential areas of FE Governance comprehensively.

Agendas are clear and informative and follow a standard structure that ensures that strategic items, including the Principal's Overview, are taken first. These are followed by a standard set of performance reports from the two Vice Principals, (Progress and Performance, and Finance and Resources) with other statutory and governance-related matters at the end of the agenda including committee reports and recommendations.

Minutes are clear, detailed and highlight discussion, decisions and actions clearly. A separate actions checklist enables governors to track progress and completion of actions easily. A further enhancement would be to RAG rate this table, to direct governors' attention to actions that are still in progress or overdue.

Papers for meetings are distributed electronically and are usually issued seven days before the meeting as required. Comments made in the survey, however, suggested that papers can sometimes be late.

92% of those who completed the survey strongly agreed that '*meetings run smoothly and are productive.*' A pre meeting between the Chair, Principal and Governance Adviser before each Board helps to identify key areas of focus and where most time is required for discussion

and decision making. Care is taken, however, to ensure that the meeting does not pre-empt the outcomes of the full Board discussion.

There is general recognition, however, that monthly Board meetings can create a heavy load for both governors and SLT. The planned reduction in the frequency of meetings in 2024-25 has already been mentioned. Some further suggestions from other colleges that might assist with time management include:

- The introduction of a 'consent agenda' approach, whereby items requiring approval or noting without discussion are grouped together and taken 'en bloc.' Governors can request an item is raised from the consent agenda for discussion if necessary.
- The use of timed agendas, not as a rigid time management tool, but as a means to plan and communicate the allocation of time to the most important items in advance of the meeting.
- All governors to take advantage of the opportunity to submit questions before the meeting, especially points of clarification or requests for further information.

Effective and timely production and presentation of papers helps to ensure that governors' limited time is directed to key issues, and that sufficient time is provided for discussion, scrutiny and challenge at meetings. In the survey, 92% of respondents agreed that '*papers for meetings are of a good quality and enable governors to do their job.*' However, when asked to suggest three improvements to governance, half of the survey respondents identified the need for more concise, focused papers. We recognise the work undertaken so far to streamline reports and support the Governance Adviser's plans to work with SLT on this further over the summer. We suggest the following aims:

- That all reports are prefaced by an executive summary that informs readers of key issues, risks, impact, options and recommendations in a 'two-minute' read. There is useful guidance available online on producing executive summaries. An example is provided via the link below:  
<https://www.boardintelligence.com/blog/the-definitive-guide-to-writing-an-executive-summary>
- The adoption of an 'outcomes and exceptions' approach to monitoring and assurance reports.
- The reduction of the amount of 'interesting but non-essential' information, such as detailed data and background reference material. An alternative would be to make this available on request or move it from the main pack to a supplementary papers pack.

The observance of 'taken as read' protocols for meeting papers is impressive and this which helps to free time up for discussion and keep meetings on time. However, for this approach to be effective, all papers need to be circulated on time, and should be concise and accessible enough for governors to absorb key issues before the meeting.

The 'reflection' item at the end of agenda is a good way to gain feedback on the meeting, but might need to be managed to ensure that it doesn't re-open discussions from earlier.

The governor pages of the website contain governor profiles, the Corporation and committee minutes, governance policies and procedures, and a governor recruitment page. The website does, however, need to be updated with the most recent information.

## 5. GOVERNANCE CULTURE, WORKING RELATIONSHIPS AND DYNAMICS

### Summary of highlights

There is a positive governance culture at LMC, based on openness and trust between governors and the SLT, and a shared commitment to students and the local community. This enables healthy and constructive debate and challenge at meetings.

*'I think key strengths are the level of challenge, support for the Senior Leadership Team and the breadth of experience around the table. The governor team have a good sense of camaraderie, and all want the very best for the college and to see it grow stronger each year.'*

Governors enjoy their role and are proud to be part of LMC.

Relationships between key individuals responsible for the governance of the College are positive and professional. The new Principal has worked well with the interim Chair and Governance Adviser to establish a positive relationship with the Board.

Senior staff perceive that the Board Corporation offers helpful challenge and that governors bring skills and knowledge that complement their own and add value.

The meetings that we observed were good humoured, relaxed and supportive and relationships seemed warm. We observed challenge, but this was constructive and respectful, and balanced with appreciation and support. Discussion and questioning were generally at an appropriate 'strategic' level and did not stray into operational detail.

As part of a middle management leadership development programme, managers attended both Board meetings we observed. This is a positive step, as understanding governance will be important should they move into more senior roles. It also supports the open governance culture. Their feedback on the experience should be of value to the governance team as well.

With high numbers of new governors, governors need to get to know each other to develop the Board team. This should be helped by the increased number of less formal training and strategy events in the 2024-25 calendar. The new Chair will have a role both by encouraging new governors' contributions in meetings, and by keeping in touch and offering support in between. A 'buddy' system for new governors might also be helpful in terms of onboarding new governors.

## 6. THE ROLE AND INFLUENCE OF THE GOVERNANCE PROFESSIONAL

The Governance Adviser and Clerk to the Corporation has worked in her current position at the College since 2017, having previously been seconded to the role from her position as Principal's PA. Prior to working in FE, the Governance Adviser worked in both charity and corporate governance and, previously, in finance. She has undertaken significant professional development relevant to the role.



The Governance Adviser is highly regarded and her influence on the effectiveness of governance is clear to see. In the survey, the strength of governance professional support was a key strength with all agreeing (77% strongly) that *'the Governing Body and Senior Team are effectively supported by the Clerk.'*

As previously mentioned, the 'triumvirate' of the Governance Adviser, Principal and Chair works well, with good relationships between all three parties.

## 7. GOVERNOR INDUCTION, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

New governors receive a comprehensive induction, including training on safeguarding and EDI. 84% of survey respondents agreed that *'new governors are provided with a full induction that provides the information needed to enable them to do the job'*, although longer-standing governors acknowledged that it was some time since they had received their induction. Several governors mentioned that the earlier new external governors can gain an understanding of how the College and FE Sector works, including education, finance, and safeguarding, the earlier they can play a full part at Board meetings. As recommended in Section 6, a 'buddy' system would be a useful additional source of support.

A good example seen in another Sixth Form College is the introduction of a three-stage induction for new governors, which enables governors to learn about governance, the College and the sector in manageable 'stages', and to meet key governors and members of the SLT.

Governors receive regular ongoing training relevant to their role and are provided with opportunities to attend external events. For example, several governors recently attended the AoC's finance masterclasses. The plan to increase the number of training and strategy meetings in 2024-25 is a positive step as this will provide both the time and flexibility to deliver content relevant to both the internal and external environment. In some areas, neighbouring colleges collaborate to deliver training on topics of common interest, and the Board might wish to consider this idea.

## 8. GOVERNOR ENGAGEMENT

Governor engagement emerges from the survey as a key area for development; a quarter of governors disagreed that governors engage frequently with stakeholders and understand their needs. Several cited time and work commitments as the main barriers to engagement.

However, there is also an understanding of the value of engaging with staff and students and experiencing college life, along with a sense that this will improve if plenty of notice is given of events and activities. The launch of the revamped link governor scheme in September 2024 is a positive step forward.

To ensure that any engagement scheme adds value, it should be accompanied by an opportunity for governors to report back to the Board. Many agendas now include a standing 'feedback item' for this purpose. This provides direct assurance to the Board and enables different voices and perspectives to be heard.



## 9. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION (EDI)

EDI runs as a theme through the strategic plan. Inclusivity is one of the three key values, and there is a clear strategic target to eliminate achievement and progression gaps for students based on gender, ethnicity, disability or another protected characteristic. In the survey, all respondents agreed that: ‘Governors lead a positive culture of equality, diversity and inclusion’ with 38% agreeing strongly.

Governors are currently provided with EDI reports for students and staff separately. Data on the student profile and achievement by different protected characteristics is provided in the Supported Learners Annual Report. Data and outcomes relating to staff are brought in the Annual Staff Report.

In many colleges, EDI is given prominence at the governance level by the development and approval of a specific set of objectives and an action plan to address any areas of weakness. Governors monitor in-year progress periodically and receive an EDI Annual Report which covers all aspects of how the college is working to achieve both its legal responsibilities and its EDI objectives. It is recommended that consideration is given to treating EDI as a standalone matter at LMC, to raise its profile at Board meetings.

Some colleges have invested in external consultancy and training on EDI as part of a planned strategy to embed cultural change. This is effective, although it does require internal resource to develop and implement an action plan. Organisations that offer this service include the National Centre for Diversity and the Black Leadership Group.

## 10. OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

Governance at LMC has many areas of strength, particularly in terms of culture, skills, shared vision and values, the student focus, financial oversight and the robustness of underlying processes.

There are no significant areas of concern.

Key themes to emerge from the review as areas for further development can be grouped as follows:

- Strengthening the skills mix of the Board around FE and finance.
- Managing change on the Board – providing support for the new Chair and new governors to develop the governance team further, whilst preserving the current positive culture.
- Gaining buy-in from all to strengthening governor engagement in college life.
- Reducing the time burden on governors and SLT by further streamlining reporting and processes.

## 11. SUMMARY OF KEY STRENGTHS OF LMC GOVERNANCE

- Well run and well managed governance arrangements. Underlying processes are strong, resulting in well planned and well organised business. Agendas, minutes and papers are high quality. Governors appreciate that effort is being made to streamline paperwork and use executive summaries consistently.
- Governors bring a broad and diverse range of skills, knowledge and perspectives to the Boardroom, including excellent local knowledge and links. These adds value to discussions and support informed decision making.
- Governor recruitment and succession planning is proactive and well managed by the Governance Adviser.
- Governors are well supported with a comprehensive induction and ongoing training.
- The governance culture is positive, open and constructive and is based on honesty and trust. There is good discussion and challenge at meetings, balanced with support and appreciation of management.
- The meetings observed were well chaired, well organised, good humoured, focused, productive, and inclusive.
- The new Principal has been well supported by the Chair and wider Board and has worked hard to establish positive relationships and ways of working.
- Strategic planning is well organised and effective. Governors are knowledgeable and highly committed to the college vision and values, and its students, and were fully engaged in the review of the strategic plan.
- Governors understand the strengths and weaknesses of teaching, learning and the student experience. Students feature prominently in board discussions, including those relating to finance and resources.
- The Governance Adviser is effective, influential and highly valued. The 'triumvirate' with the Chair and Principal works well.
- There is an ongoing commitment to managing the time demands on governors, and flexibility in the meetings schedule and efforts to reduce paperwork.
- There is strong oversight of finance, resources, estates and associated risk.
- The Audit and Risk Committee is effective and provides strong assurance to the Corporation. Risk management is robust.

## 12. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Prioritise a second 'finance' governor and a governor with an education background (preferably FE) in the next round of governor recruitment.
- Consider a range of measures to further improve meeting time management including:
  - Timed agendas.
  - The introduction of a consent agenda for items requiring approval or noting with no discussion.
  - Encouraging all governors to raise questions in advance of meetings, especially around points of clarification or requests for further information.
- Continue to work together to produce more concise, focused papers, including:

- The consistent use of an executive summary to inform readers of key issues in a two-minute read. This should include the management accounts.
- Introducing a supplementary pack for detailed appendices and interesting, but not essential, reading.
- Review the number of sub-strategies and consider a more concise presentation for those that are retained, including the new estates strategy.
- The Board should monitor staffing costs closely in 2024-25, as this is a key risk within the 24-25 budget.
- With high numbers of new governors and a new Chair, developing the governance team will be a priority through providing informal opportunities for governors to get to know each other, keeping in touch and the offer of support between meetings, and one-to-ones with the Chair.
- Provide regular support and development opportunities for the new Chair.
- Prioritise the induction for new governors to introduce them quickly to the role of governor, the College and the post-16 sector. A 'buddy' system for new governors would be a helpful addition.
- Consider the need for enhanced visibility of sustainability reporting.
- Review the frequency with which Safeguarding reports are brought to the Corporation, and provide an opportunity for direct report backs by the Safeguarding Link Governor.
- Governors to fully support the launch of the revamped link governor scheme to increase governor visibility, strengthen engagement and understanding of the student and staff experience and college life, and triangulate management reports.
- Review the scope for strengthening feedback to the Corporation for link governors, staff and student governors and those participating in college engagement visits.

#### **Housekeeping points:**

- Include a policy on the independence of the Clerk within the Standing Orders.
- RAG ratings added to the Board actions log to show progress on completion.
- Update the governance pages of the website.

## APPENDIX 1

### SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE EXTERNAL GOVERNANCE REVIEW

The following scope was agreed upon with the Lancaster And Morecambe College Corporation. It takes full account of the DfE guidance on External Reviews of Further Education Governance, published in May 2022.

#### Scope

- Discharge of roles and duties as charity trustees and FE Governors.
- Culture.
- Impact of governance.
- Strategy.
- Equality and Diversity.
- Governor membership, recruitment, and induction.
- Governance professional experience, and interaction with the Chair, Principal and the Executive Team.
- Review the Corporation's interaction with students and other stakeholders.

#### Methodology and timeline

The review comprised the following activities:

| Month            | Task   |
|------------------|--|
| 4 June 2024      | Review started   |
| 10 June 2024     | Scoping meeting  |
| 14 June 2024     | Survey issued  |
| 18 June 2024     | Observation of Board meeting (online)  |
| 25 June 2024     | Audit Committee observation (online)   |
| 1,9,11 July 2024 | One to one meetings with Governance Adviser, Principal and CEO, Chair (interim and new), Vice Chair, Audit Committee Chair, Remuneration Committee Chair, both Vice Principals |
| 16 July 2024     | Corporation observation (in person)  |
| 24 July 2024     | Draft findings shared with Oona for feedback   |
| 30 July 2024     | Presentation of findings to Special Board  |
| August 2024      | Report issued  |

## APPENDIX 2

### ABOUT ROCKBORN MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS

**Rockborn Management Consultants (RMC)** are experienced education management consultants who tailor-make services to your organisation's needs.

We offer specialist, professional and pragmatic management solutions that range from helping you develop your strategic options, to providing expert advice and guidance on a wide range of organisational HR and change issues.

We have extensive experience of the sector and have an exceptional track record with regard to supporting boards and senior teams.

We take a personal approach to working with you and undertaking governance reviews. We do not have a 'one size fits all' approach and offer a bespoke review that meets your requirements and ensures sustainable improvement. This involves:

- Getting to know the organisation so we understand your values and culture to ensure proposed solutions will work in your context.
- Building relationships and providing a high-quality, personal, and reliable service
- Being available when you need us.
- Ensuring we use our extensive expertise and knowledge, and those of our associates, to provide you with the very best advice and guidance.
- Ensuring we add value - we will not replicate your existing governance self-assessment activities but will aim to complement them.
- Ensuring that qualified and personable experts work alongside you, not 'inspecting' you.
- And a real belief that, if you get the fundamentals right, the rest will follow.

### THE REVIEW TEAM

#### **Lead Reviewer: Melissa Drayson**

Melissa is a seasoned governance professional with a strong sense of what a good board looks like. Her governance experience has been gained primarily within the FE sector, where she has supported ten different college boards of governors over 20 years. She also has a working knowledge of academy, charity, and corporate governance. She has supported three separate FE colleges through merger and has undertaken several board reviews in her capacity as clerk.

As a consultant and trainer, Melissa has advised a range of educational institutions on their governance, from primary schools to universities. She currently works with the AoC delivering induction training and mentoring to new governance professionals as part of the ETF Governance Professionals Development Programme.

Melissa holds the ICSA (Chartered Governance Institute) Professional Diploma in Corporate Governance and is a part-qualified Chartered Company Secretary.

For 11 years, Melissa ran the induction training service for new governors in Sussex colleges. She also runs courses in minute writing and other committee skills for public sector workers.

In her spare time, Melissa is the Chair of the Trustee Board of an established charity in her hometown of Brighton.

#### **Associate Reviewer: Zoë Lawrence**

Zoë's governance career began with 20 years as a civil servant in the Department of Health. During this time, she led on several policy areas plus roles in private office, secretariat to the NHS Board, a secondment to a community health council, and the National Information Governance Board.

She completed her MBA from Durham University in 2000. After leaving the Department in 2012, Zoë transferred to the education sector, firstly in a secondary school and then in governance roles in FE where she has worked for the last seven years, bringing together the culmination of her governance skills and knowledge.

In 2022, Zoë completed her Postgraduate Diploma in Corporate Governance. More recently she authored the AoC Code of Good Governance to replace the 2015 version. She is Vice Chair of the London Region Governance Professionals Network.

#### **Associate Reviewer: Ian Valvona**

Ian is a senior leader in education, skills, and children's social care. He worked for more than 20 years in the Department for Education and its agencies to deliver children's social care alternative delivery models for central government and local authorities, as well as complex FE college mergers.

Since 2018, he has been the Chair of three London colleges including Kensington and Chelsea College following the Grenfell tragedy, and most recently as a FE Commissioner appointment at Croydon College.

#### **Company Director: Peter Ryder**

A highly respected and successful former college Principal (Leeds College of Technology and Tameside College) and previous Chair and then Chief Executive of the Greater Manchester Colleges Group (a partnership of ten FE colleges covering all boroughs across Greater Manchester), Chair of West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges and member of the AoC's Board, representing all colleges in the North West of England.

Now an independent FE consultant, Peter has been supporting and advising colleges since the announcement of the Area Based Review process in 2015.

Peter has extensive expertise in many areas including strategic reviews/option appraisals, working with boards, merger project management, college turnarounds and change management.

Peter has experience across a broad range of strategic assignments including the support of five colleges with strategic option appraisals, advising boards on their options, holding workshops with governors to evaluate future strategy, directly involved in two college mergers in an executive role, project managed a further six college merger processes, and most recently provided post-merger project management support to a college which merged with a college group, doubling the size of the organisation overnight and making it the third largest college in England.



Working with education providers to improve strategic and operational performance

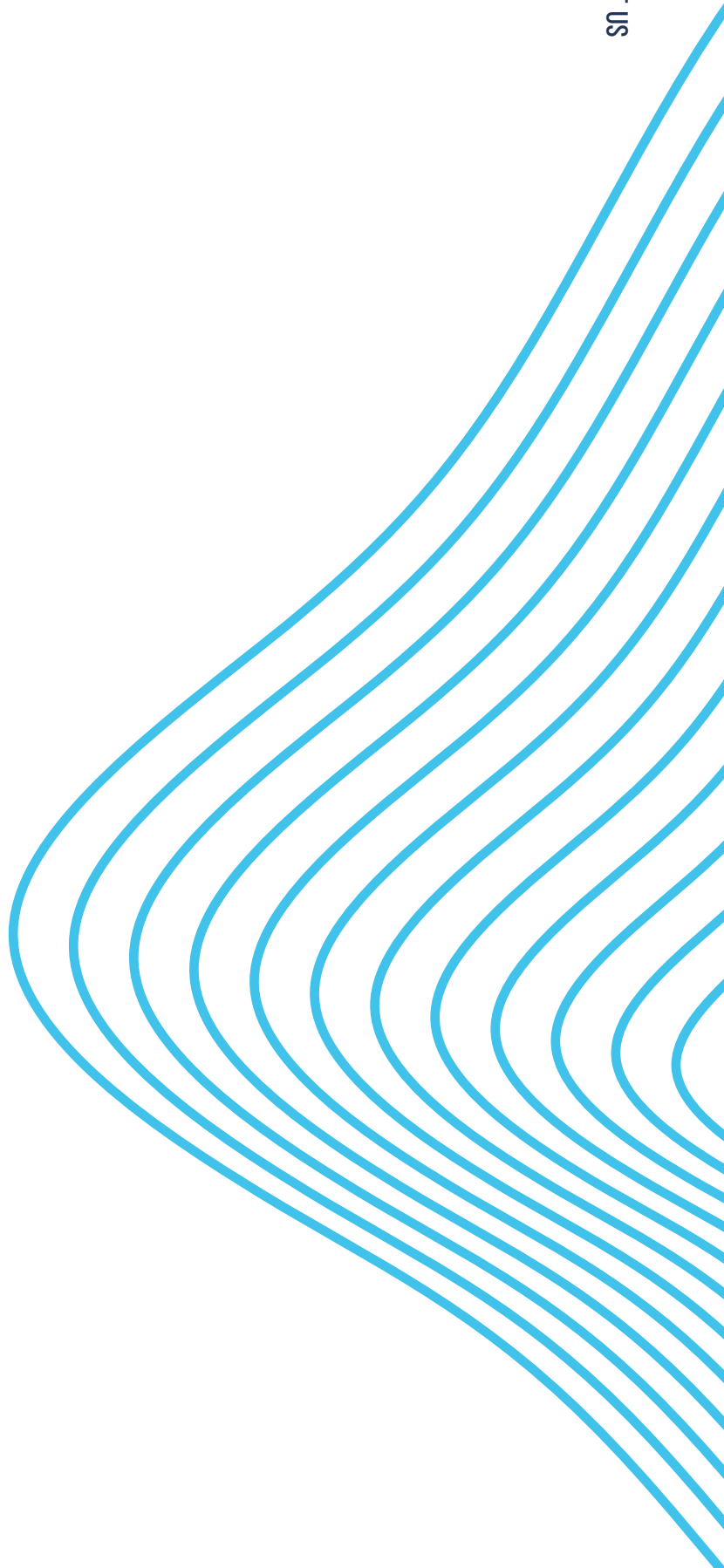


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 Not Yet Started

 In Progress

 Complete

## EXTERNAL BOARD REVIEW; ACTION PLAN

| Recommendation  | Board Response   | Timescale   | Progress (RAG Rating)  |
|---|--|---|--|
| Prioritise a second 'finance' Governor and a Governor with an education background (preferably FE) in the next round of Governor recruitment. | <p>The Search Committee, at its meeting held on 15 October 2024, agreed the proposal to recruit another Governor with finance experience to provide additional support and challenge.</p> <p>The Search Committee had previously identified school links as an area for recruitment, as well as property and business. Searches will now also include FE experience.</p> | <p>Start of 2025/26 Academic Year</p> <p>Start of Summer Term 2024/25</p> | <p>There is active recruitment ongoing, through the following channels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Advert on the Institute for Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW) volunteering website;</li><li>• Direct approaches to local accountancy firms and large businesses with finance directors;</li><li>• Adverts on social media and College website.; and</li><li>• Through existing networks and partner organisations, e.g. Chamber of Commerce.</li></ul> <p>There is active recruitment ongoing, through the following channels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Direct approaches to other relevant local education institutions, e.g. primary schools.</li><li>• Direct approaches to businesses operating within construction, surveying or architecture;</li><li>• Adverts on social media and College website.</li><li>• Through existing networks and partner organisations, e.g. Chamber of Commerce, CVS.</li></ul> |

| Recommendation   | Board Response   | Timescale   | Progress (RAG Rating)  |
|--|--|---|--|
| <p>Consider a range of measures to further improve meeting time management, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• timed agendas</li> <li>• the introduction of a consent agenda for items requiring approval or noting with no discussion.</li> <li>• Encouraging all Governors to raise questions in advance of meetings, especially around points of clarification or requests for further information.</li> </ul> | <p>All Governors these would be useful.</p> <p>Governors agreed this would be helpful in focusing agendas in the key strategic items for discussion.</p> <p>Governors are already requested to send points of clarification / requests for additional information in advance of the meeting.</p> | <p>November 2024</p> <p>November 2024</p> <p>November 2024</p>                | <p>Suggested timings have now been added to all Board and Committee agendas moving forward.</p> <p>Consent section now included on all Board meetings agendas, covering items for approval and items for receipt.</p> <p>The email notification with papers has been expanded to encourage Governors to submit questions in advance of the meeting. Some advance questions / requests have been received in advance and this will continue to be encouraged.</p>         |
| <p>Continue to work together to produce more concise, focused papers, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the consistent use of an executive summary to inform readers of key issues in a two-minute read.</li> <li>• introducing a supplementary pack for detailed appendices and interesting, but not essential reading.</li> </ul>  | <p>The need for more streamlined papers was identified by Governors prior to the review. Work is ongoing with the senior team to produce more strategic reports, alongside a data dashboard.</p> <p>All Governors agreed this would be useful in focusing discussion on key strategic items.</p> | <p>February 2025</p> <p>Start of Summer Term 2024/25</p> <p>November 2024</p> | <p>An experienced Governor is working with the Principal on the production of a data dashboard.</p> <p>All papers now required to have an executive summary. Further work on the content of executive summaries, to include clearer link to strategic aims is required.</p> <p>Board papers into three packs, where relevant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main strategic reports;</li> <li>• Consent; Approval</li> <li>• Items for receipt.</li> </ul> |

| Recommendation   | Board Response  | Timescale                      | Progress (RAG Rating)   |
|--|---|--------------------------------|---|
| Review the number of sub-strategies and consider a more concise presentation for those that are retained, including the new estates strategy   | Governors undertake an annual update of the Strategic Plan and this will include the underpinning strategies.   | Start of 2025/26 Academic Year | The number and format of strategies underpinning the Strategic Plan will be reviewed by the Governance Adviser over the Spring and Summer term, to align with the Strategic Plan Update for 2025/26.  |
| The Board should monitor staffing costs closely in 2024/25, as this a key risk within the 2024/25 budget.  | Governors monitor staff costs regularly through the oversight of the monthly management accounts.   | End of Spring Term 2024/25     | A benchmarking exercise will be undertaken by the Governance Adviser in the Spring term, to enable Governors to have clearer context. Consideration will be given to the impact of any financial decisions on budget outturns.  |
| With high numbers of new Governors and a new Chair, developing the governance team will be a priority, though providing informal opportunities for Governors to get to know each other, keeping in touch and the offer of support between meetings and one-to-ones with the Chair. | There is an existing opportunity for informal networking prior to each Board meeting and further opportunities will be developed with Governor input. | End of Spring Term 2024/25/    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Chair is in the process of completing one-to-one meetings with all Governors.</li> <li>• A date for the annual Governors' Dinner in late Spring/early Summer being identified.</li> <li>• A Governors 'What's App' group has been suggested and feedback will be sought.</li> <li>• Further feedback will be sought from Governors on the type of events/activities that they would find beneficial.</li> </ul>  |
| Provide regular support and development opportunities for the new Chair.   | In addition to the training and development opportunities provided to all Governors, specific training and events are offered to the Chair.           | End of Summer Term 2024/25     | <p>To December 2024:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Half termly individual meetings with the Principal and Governance Adviser;</li> <li>• Invitation to attend the national Chairs' Leadership Programme;</li> <li>• Membership of the Association of Colleges' (AoC) Chairs and Vice-Chairs Network;</li> <li>• Arrangements in progress for the Chair to visit every curriculum and support area in the 2024/25 academic year.</li> <li>• An experienced external mentor to be sought for the Chair.</li> </ul> |

| Recommendation  | Board Response  | Timescale                                       | Progress (RAG Rating)  |
|---|---|---|--|
| <p>Prioritise the induction of new Governors to introduce them quickly to the role of Governor, and the post-16 sector. A 'buddy' system for new Governors would be a helpful addition.</p> | <p>There is an induction programme available, with optional and compulsory items.</p>   | <p>End of Spring Term 2024/25</p>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All Governors are offered a range of induction training opportunities within the first year, including internal and external training.</li> <li>• All Governors have been enrolled on the Education and Training Foundation's (ETF) Governance Development Programme.</li> <li>• All Governors will be given the opportunity to request a 'buddy/mentor', either internally or externally.</li> <li>• Staff and Student Governors invited to join the AoC Staff or Student national networks to link with Staff or Student Governors from other colleges.</li> <li>• Search Committee to review the induction and training programme in the Spring term.</li> </ul> |
| <p>Consider the need for enhanced visibility of sustainability reporting.</p>   | <p>Governors will review the current sustainability reporting and determine where visibility can be increased in the cycle of business and what should be reported.</p> | <p>Strategic Planning Day<br/>15 March 2025</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revised Sustainability Strategy and objectives to be launched by the Principal in January 2025.</li> <li>• Session to be included on the agenda for the Strategic Planning Day to consider sustainability, and reporting measures, in more depth.</li> <li>• Opportunity for a Governor to join a working group on sustainability, that will also include staff and students.</li> </ul>  |
| <p>Review the frequency with which safeguarding reports are brought to the Corporation and provide an opportunity for direct report backs by the Safeguarding Link Governor.</p>            | <p>Following discussion, Governors suggested that a termly report, to include delivery and narrative, would provide a more focused discussion.</p>                      | <p>Spring Term 2025</p>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governor feedback from all Link visits now included as a standing item (under Any Other Business) on all Board agendas.</li> <li>• Annual Supported Learners Report.</li> <li>• Safeguarding included in the internal audit five-year planning cycle.</li> <li>• Focused termly report on safeguarding.</li> </ul>  |

| Recommendation   | Board Response  | Timescale   | Progress (RAG Rating)  |
|--|---|---|--|
| <p>Governors to fully support the launch of the revamped Link Governor scheme to increase Governor visibility, strengthen engagement and understanding of the student and staff experience and College life, and triangulate management reports.</p> | <p>Whilst all Governors support the aims of the Link Scheme, it is acknowledged that it is harder for those Governors who work full-time to be as active as they may wish.</p>                  | <p>End of 2024/25 Academic Year</p>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff teams are as flexible as possible in arranging visits, attendance at events etc. Suggestions from Governors are welcomed as to the focus of their visits. The aim is for every Governor to have completed one visit during the academic year.</li> <li>• List of events sent out at the start of each term, with a reminder for second half term events to enable Governors to select specific link events, subject to availability.</li> <li>• Crib sheet to be produced to explain the types of meetings and events, e.g. Assessments Boards, along with list of links for each Governor, to allow cross-triangulation.</li> <li>• In addition, there is a standing invitation for any staff member to observe either a Board or Committee meeting to better understand the role of Governors.</li> </ul> |
| <p>Review the scope for strengthening feedback to the Corporation for Link Governors, Staff and Student Governors and those participating in College engagement visits.</p>  | <p>The Chair will be more proactive in seeking feedback from Governors and for inviting Governors to specifically contribute on items covering their linked areas and cross-college themes.</p> | <p>To be fully implemented by end of Spring Term 2025</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governors will be requested to provide informal feedback from any visits undertaken between Board meetings.</li> <li>• Governors will also be asked to complete a short evaluation form after each Link visit.</li> <li>• A summary of visits and feedback to be include in future Termly Governance Reports.</li> </ul>  |