

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT ANNUAL EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW



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1. Background

It was agreed that for the annual Board effectiveness review the same survey that was used last year should be issued to all Board members again this year so that a comparison between the outcomes of last year and this year could be made. The survey was issued in late April with a return date of mid May 2019. Responses were received from 10 members, out of a possible 18. The following report summarises the responses received and highlights areas of good practice and areas for further consideration and where improvement could be made.

2. Feedback from Board Members

The survey form was split into 5 parts and the report provides feedback received on each of these parts, as well as an overall summary of the main conclusions and recommendations for improvement.

Part 1 - Board Meetings

Overall the feedback is similar to last year and confirms that the Board members are satisfied with the frequency of Board meetings, the quality and quantity of information provided, and the process for Board member appraisal. In particular Board members confirmed that the Chair promotes a culture of openness and debate.

There were some areas identified where some further thought might be given to how to make improvements. In relation to the content of the agenda and time allocated for discussion the feedback indicated that there was a greater spread in scoring this year, although the average score remained the same. In light of the feedback obtained last year more time has been included to discuss strategic matters which has received favourable comment from members, but there is perhaps more work to be done on this. Some of the comments emerging are

- ▶ **Recent changes to allow a focus on specific items has allowed more in-depth scrutiny and discussion. Works well.**
- ▶ **There may be merit in better use of the Board Performance Dashboard, and using historical/potential shortfalls to drive the first part of the Board Agenda. The second half should be covering strategic issues which is currently well addressed via separate/focused session prior to the main meetings.**
- ▶ **Perhaps extend time for strategic discussion at start of meetings.**
- ▶ **We continually need to look at the volume of papers particularly given our committee structure which underpins the detail.**

The Board may wish to give further thought to the structure of its agenda and how it combines the development needs of Board members, the discussion of strategic matters and the consideration of its routine business that it needs to deal with.

Part 2 - Board Committees

The feedback shows an overall improvement in the scoring relating to frequency and timing of committee meetings and in the overall effectiveness of the committees – with the average score obtained for both of these being 5 (Ideal). There was a greater spread in the scoring in response to the use of co-opted members to support the work of the committees. The Board has established a Short Life Working Group to look at Board Diversity and one of its recommendations is that a pool of potential candidates for Board membership should be created and one way to do this is to co-opt members to a committee first, to let them gain experience of and an insight into the workings of the Board and committee structure within the College, before considering joining the Board. Co-option also provides another source of expertise and skills that the committees benefit from. The feedback supports this approach with the following comments being made:

- ◆ **Co-opting committee members is a way forward to enhance both diversity and quality of committee and ultimately Board decision making.**
- ◆ **Committees allow in-depth scrutiny which wouldn't be possible in a full Board meeting. Other members can seek reassurance of the level of work carried out in committees.**
- ◆ **Committee structure works really well and allows us to get into the necessary detail.**

Part 3 - Board Membership and Contribution

As for last year the feedback relating to the balance and skills of Board members and the on-going development for Board members is overall positive. However, there is a greater spread of responses ranging from 3 (adequate) to 5 (ideal) in each of these areas, although the average score remains much the same as that of the previous year. When asked to identify any development requirements which could enhance the Board's effectiveness there were some ideas proposed. Some of the feedback is provided below:

- ◆ **Increased inclusiveness is an area for further reflection.**
- ◆ **Require to ensure that the Board members are exposed to a much more diverse range of views within the community that the College serves.**
- ◆ **Perhaps more networking opportunities with Board members from other colleges.**
- ◆ **Individual members need to make use of the excellent opportunities offered by the College Development Network to keep up to date on emerging issues.**
- ◆ **I would love to take part in more development for the Board however this is a voluntary role and I am time poor. If there was an on-line learning option I would take that up.**

A similar point to this last point was raised last year and is an important one for the Board to consider. Board members are volunteers and do have other commitments. A balance needs to be struck between the development needs of the Board and the opportunities, along with the associated time commitment involved, to be provided. The Board has worked hard to provide a range of in-house development opportunities during session 2018/19 tied into Board meetings, with the attendance at these sessions being very good. The College Development Network (CDN) does already provide a range of information and various on-line modules through its governance network and members have taken advantage of these whenever possible. The Board may wish to reflect how best to take these suggestions forward and will monitor and review as necessary.

When asked the direct question about individual development requirements, the responses included

- ▶ **Greater understanding of the learner journey.**
- ▶ **May be good to understand a bit more about our relationship with SFC.**
- ▶ **More regular, focussed, narrative updates about the political climate around the college sector in Scotland. I would like to develop my understanding of the “right now” issues facing the college and know, as a Board member, how I can support the College with advocacy and influencing.**

Others indicated that they were comfortable with the role and would continue to develop. There was also confirmation that members development needs are continually reviewed through the appraisal process.

Efforts are made to ensure that all the latest reports relating to the sector are circulated to the Board, either at Board meetings as part of the Chair or Chief Executive Reports or between meetings when such reports become available, or through the regular policy briefings issued by Colleges Scotland which are circulated to the Board.

In relation to improving the overall membership of the Board the comments ranged from

- ▶ **I think the representation on the Board is fine, and reflects a good mix of experience, ages and background.**

To

- ▶ **Creation of a more diverse talent pool of skills from which to recruit future board members.**
- ▶ **Continue to develop Board Diversity Action Plan.**
- ▶ **Regular reviews of the Board’s composition and specialist skills against the backdrop of a rapidly evolving social and empowerment landscape.**

There was also a comment that there was ‘a need to get Board members more tech literate to free up time and expense of photocopying and posting papers’.

Part 4 - Leadership and Strategy

The feedback in this section shows a much wider spread in scoring but the overall average remains the same as last year. The comments received help explain the matters raised by the Board members:

- ▶ **I think it would be difficult to evidence "The Boards contribution to improving the economic and social well-being in the West Region." It would be easier to evidence this as an output for the College as a whole, or from the actions of the Senior Management Team and the Principal.**
- ▶ **Perhaps a bit more focus on the Boards contribution to improving the economic and social wellbeing in the West Region at the board would be helpful.**
- ▶ **We need to develop critical questions around the Boards contribution to the economic and social wellbeing in the West Region and leadership of the Board in equality and diversity to help us improve in these areas.**
- ▶ **In current College governance structure Board has little influence over key cost drivers (People, Estates and IT) restricting its ability to develop and implement its strategic plan. SFC are currently incapable of providing continuity of funding for any meaningful multi-year forward looking strategy to be implemented. Board and Exec Team are currently managing a decline in the relevance/effectiveness of the college sector.**
- ▶ **We need more clarity from SFC on their expectation of us and in particular around estate capital plans.**
- ▶ **Dashboard reporting could be more frequent.**
- ▶ **Dashboard system for monitoring KPIs would move this aspect from good to very good.**

It is clear from this feedback that the Board members wish to take more action in the areas covered in this section and particularly in relation to the Board's contribution to improving the economic and social wellbeing in the West Region and in relation equality and diversity. This is a matter that the Board should return to in order to consider what action it wishes to take and how it wishes to move these matters forward.

Part 5 - College Executive

The feedback on the College Executive is very positive with most ratings being 4 or 5 (ideal). Board members have confirmed that there is a good working relationship between the Board and the Executive/Senior Management Team. Another commented that “we have a strong and engaged executive team”.

Part 6 - Student Experience

The feedback on the student experience shows higher scores have been obtained this year particularly in relation to the student voice and influence at Board meetings and the autonomy of the Student Association, with the majority of scores being 4 or 5 (ideal). However, the comments raised indicate that more could be done to put the student experience at the centre of the debate at the Board meetings. Some of the comments raised are:

- ▶ **Excellent work being done by Student Association.**
- ▶ **Things have definitely improved in this area however we still don't put the student experience at the centre of our thinking often enough... but that's not always easy.**

This latter point is one that the Board will need to consider further.

3. Conclusions and Recommendations

It is pleasing to note that overall the feedback is positive. There are a few areas where ideas for improvement have been suggested and the Board is invited to consider the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1:

the Board should give further thought to the structure of its agenda and how it combines the development needs of Board members, the discussion of strategic matters and the consideration of its routine business that it needs to deal with.

Recommendation 2:

the Board should consider how to capture a more diverse range of views within the community that the College serves and how this could be brought to the Board.

Recommendation 3:

the Board should continue to progress its action in relation to improving equality and diversity.

Recommendation 4

the Board should consider providing more information on the relationship with the Scottish Funding Council and consider providing more regular, focussed, narrative updates about the political climate around the college sector in Scotland.

Recommendation 5:

the Board should consider how it contributes to improving the economic and social wellbeing in the West Region and how it should evidence this.

Recommendation 6:

the Board and Committees should continue to monitor the development of the College dashboard and the kpi's used with a view to refining these as appropriate.

Recommendation 7:

the Board should give further consideration to ensuring that the student experience is at the centre of its discussions and actions.

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