

## West College Scotland Board - 19 June 2023

### BOARD OF MANAGEMENT - ANNUAL INTERNAL EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW 2023

#### Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to provide responses from the self-assessment survey, which has been used as the basis for the draft Board Development Action Plan 2023.

#### 1. Background

In accordance with Paragraph D.23 of The Code of Good Governance for Scotland's Colleges, *"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 years. The board must send its self-evaluation (including an externally facilitated evaluation) and board development plan (including progress on previous year's plan) to its funding body and publish them online"*.

It was agreed at the 27 February 2023 Board meeting that, for the annual *internal* Board effectiveness review 2023, the same survey that was used in 2021 and 2022 should be issued to all Board members again this year. The survey was issued on Wednesday 29 March 2023 with a closing date of Monday 24 April 2023. Responses were received from 10 members, out of a possible 15. The following report summarises the responses received.

Relevant comments from the Chair and Board member one-to-one discussions held in autumn 2022 are also included in this report. These are reflected by an \* at the end of the statements, where similar points to those in the survey were raised. Additional comments to the survey are prefixed by an \*.

The Board last undertook an *externally* facilitated evaluation of its effectiveness in late 2019 with the feedback report being approved at the Board meeting held on 3 February 2020.

It is noted that two new non-Executive Board Members took up their first Term of Office from 1 December 2022 and one member's term of office ended on 31 January 2023.

#### 2. Feedback from Board Members

these parts, as well as an overall summary of the main conclusions.

##### Part 1 – Board Meetings

Feedback confirms that Board members are satisfied with the:

- Frequency of Board meetings.
- Distribution of papers for Board Meetings.
- How meetings are chaired.
- Board Members' contributions in meetings.
- Executive contributions in meetings.

- Overall effectiveness of the Board Meetings.
- Quality and quantity of information and advice provided to Board Members to support effective discussion and decision making.
- Chair promotes a culture of openness and debate.
- Content of the agenda and time allocated for discussion.
- Process for Board Member Appraisal.

There was one area identified where some further thought might be given to how to make improvements:

- Profile of the student contribution to Board Meetings.

Comments submitted on how the effectiveness of Board Meetings could be enhanced were:

- As a newcomer to the meetings, the rest of the board has been welcoming, making it easy for me to contribute. The meetings have been informative.
- Need more active student participation at Board meetings.
- The Board works well collectively. Members are respectful of each other and work to promote West College Scotland.
- Encourage more questions from Board members.
- I would prefer to receive papers 10 days ahead to give an extra weekend to review. I think the papers can still be very lengthy and exec summaries to documents are not always true exec summaries. It would be good to hear more from student representatives.
- Continue the practice of separate or extensions to meetings when discussing more detailed topics. \*
- More time/encouragement/support could be given to student representatives to contribute at meetings.
- Delighted to see in person meetings back and would encourage greater attendance in person. Discussions before and after meeting are great to get to know Exec and Board members better. \*
- The meetings themselves are very well-chaired and cover the required topics well with space for all members to contribute. The papers are still very dense and there are a large number of pages. As mentioned in previous years a dashboard or 'at a glance' report that identifies if key indicators and KPIs are on track would be very useful to get an overview of progress and help to navigate the amount of information provided. This isn't to say that the papers themselves are not well-written because they are of a high standard, this is more about meeting management. The Teams site is likely to be a helpful advance in terms of being able to refer to and navigate papers. \*
- The contribution of student members is currently a cause for concern as it has been very sporadic and also still feels like the students reporting to the board rather than functioning (as they should) as full members. It is to be hoped this will improve with the election of new student officers.

## **Part 2 – Board Committees**

Feedback confirms that Board members are satisfied with the:

- Amount of advice and direction provided to the Board Committees to discharge their remit and decision making.
- Opportunity to provide relevant information to the full Board at Board Meetings.
- Use of co-opted members to support the work of the committees.
- Input of the wider Senior Management Team to the relevant committee.

- The frequency and timings of committees
- Committee(s) effectiveness overall.

There were no areas identified for improvement in this section.

Comments submitted on how the effectiveness of Board Committees could be enhanced were:

- Having been recently appointed, I have had the opportunity to attend one committee meeting, which was a positive experience. My opinion on effectiveness will grow in time.
- Improvement seen on volume of papers to Committees. These could be more succinct.
- The Board and the Executive/Senior Team work well together. Papers are well prepared and presented. The recent changes to the report structure has been well received. The new sharepoint site will be useful and I look forward to seeing it further developed.
- Encourage more questions from Board members.
- On a number of occasions we have not had student representation at the LQTC meetings. It is important that the student voice is heard and therefore would be good if a vice student president could attend if the student president is not able to.
- Good level of debate and discussion in committees with good feedback and interaction with Exec staff attending and acting on queries or actions.
- The committees appear to function well.

### **Part 3 – Board Membership and Contribution**

Feedback confirms that Board members are satisfied with the:

- Balance and skills of Board Members.
- Effectiveness of the induction arrangements for new Members.
- Ongoing development for Board Members.

There were no areas identified for improvement in this section.

When asked to identify any development requirements which could enhance the Board's effectiveness, the following comments were submitted:

- So far, everything has been positive.
- CDN has programme but unsure how well used or good they are?
- No.
- The "focus on" sessions have been useful to develop knowledge along with the strategy days. These should continue. \*
- Time to get to know other colleagues' skills and knowledge. \*
- Would assist if SFC attended a meeting each year to advise Board members on the focus of their role for the next 18 months and provide some insight onto best practice when working with them.
- More publicity for CDN events and encouragement for board members to attend could be useful, this is part of the development plan.
- CDN is ok however timing of events can often clash with work commitments. Would be good to have ability to access training offline.
- I would like to see a more formal approach to board development, making full use of the services provided by CDN. While notice of development events is forwarded, I would hope with the new governance professional we could move to a more structured approach to this. I don't see any specific development requirements for

board members but more opportunities for professional updating on sector issues and contact with key sector agencies to gain a better understanding of their work would I'm sure be of benefit in informing discussion.

- \* Welcome a session on 'business world for WCS'.

When asked about individual Board member development requirements that would enhance contribution, responses were:

- I am satisfied with the development thus far.
- Not at this juncture.
- No.
- The CDN courses are very helpful for Board Members
- Just continuing knowledge and understanding of the FE and HE sectors to support strategic direction.
- Meeting SFC.
- More financial/management accounting training at a general level could be useful. \*
- None at present.
- As above, a more structured approach to development opportunities would be welcome, with promotion of training opportunities rather than just circulation of CDN emails. I don't have any overt requirements but am keen to take up opportunities when they arise.

In relation to improving the overall membership of the Board, the following comments were submitted:

- Need clarity on process for recruitment of co-opted members and maximum duration of their term.
- Following guidelines provided in Board Diversity SLWG.
- Perhaps the use of co-opted members to provide additional expertise - eg in estates.
- Continue to aim to increase diversity of thought and experience when we recruit and put effort into making the student board members more engaged and effective across the whole work of the board as they are full board members.
- \* Recruit Board members with business acumen and entrepreneurship.

#### **Part 4 – Leadership and Strategy**

Feedback confirms that Board members are satisfied with the:

- Access to and provision of information on Scottish Government priorities to inform decision making and the development of College Strategic Priorities.
- Access to and provision of information on Scottish Funding Council priorities to inform decision making and the development of College Strategic Priorities.
- Contribution of the Board to determine the College Strategic direction.
- Collective responsibility of the Board and Executive to activate the overarching College Strategic Priorities.
- Board's contribution to improving the economic and social wellbeing in the West Region.
- Leadership of the Board in equality and diversity.

There were a few areas identified where some further thought might be given to how to make improvements including:

- Approach to monitoring and reporting on agreed KPIs.
- Approach to monitoring and reporting on agreed KPIs associated with committee priorities.

Comments submitted on how the leadership of the full Board could be enhanced were:

- Being new to the board, I will wait and see on most of these questions. However, with respect to Scottish Government and SFC, I am leaning towards dissatisfied as their priorities appear to change faster than can be actioned.
- Not sure what our impact on improving local economic and social well-being is.
- The development of KPI dashboards are helpful and could be expanded. \*
- Dashboard reporting against KPIs is something we have been discussing for quite a long time and would be welcomed. \*
- College needs to better measure strategic outcomes and measure how effective they are at progressing towards them. Require a new way of thinking and measuring to create the measures. Recommend a SLWG to achieve this.
- Challenging times with Scottish Gov and Funding council - their communications of education being a priority are often at odds with what they deliver to the sector. Principal/CEO report covers this area at the Board - it may be worth a separate update at the board (pre read paper) on Government direction/programme/actions since the last meeting.
- As noted above I would like to see a more structured approach via a dashboard to reporting on KPIs and progress.
- On access to Scottish Government and SFC priorities I feel that my knowledge of this is more through my own personal development rather than through the board and I would like to see more information provided to contextualise board discussions. Again this may be something that will come with a new governance professional.

#### **Part 5 – College Executive**

Feedback confirms that Board members are satisfied with the:

- Experience of the efficiency and effectiveness of the Executive in serving the Board.
- Effectiveness of the working relationship between the Board and the Executive / SMT.
- Clarity of the role and responsibilities of the Board and the College Executive.

There were no areas identified for improvement in this section.

Comments submitted on how improvements could be made were:

- There is a clear delineation of responsibilities of the Board and Executive/Senior Team. The relationships are excellent and provide the backdrop for open and honest conversations.
- Strong accountability by the Exec and also respect to Board members when undertaking role. I've been impressed with Exec contributions and would struggle to suggest how they could further enhance their role to the Board.
- I think this is an area where things work well.
- \* Board members available to executives to informally bounce ideas and/or test thinking.

#### **Part 6 – Student Experience**

Feedback confirms that Board members are satisfied with the:

- Quality of the student experience is central to Board decisions.
- Autonomy of the Student Association.

There was one area identified where some further thought might be given to how to make improvements:

- The student voice and influence at Board Meetings.

Comments submitted on how improvements could be made were:

- Need more consistent and active student voice and attendance at meetings.
- The student voice has become stronger over recent years. Board members have offered mentoring sessions for the President and VPs.
- See previous comment on the support for student representatives to have confidence in their roles at the board meetings. It may be that Covid has affected their ability to attend in the past but face to face interaction with board members, rather than written reports are more effective at informing board members of student issues.
- Good updates by the SA in the board papers - it would be great to be able to be able to attend some of the SA events as a Board member to see first hand the work they do and get to meet students and staff.
- See previous comments on the contribution of student members. I think the board as a whole is sensitive to the student experience in making decisions.

### **3. Conclusions and Recommendations**

Overall, the feedback is positive. There are a few areas where ideas for improvement have been suggested. The above were considered by the Board on 24 May 2023 to form the basis of the Board Development Plan 2023 proposed under Paper 8.2.