

Governance External Review Report

Prepared for The Trafford College Group
September 2023

Please note:
As of 8 January The Trafford College Group is now Trafford & Stockport College Group

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April 2023, The Education Training Foundation (ETF) in partnership with the Institute of Directors (IoD) were asked to undertake an independent review of the board of The Trafford College Group (TCG).

The objective of the review was to gain an understanding of the strengths of the board and the areas that need development. Core aspects of the review included succession planning, board diversity and skills audit, it also aimed at facilitating collaborative effort between the reviewer and members to co-design pathways to improving the effectiveness of the board. There was ongoing dialogue between the lead reviewer and governance lead for TCG. The framework and methodology used to undertake the review was developed by ETF and IoD in collaboration with governance experts and stakeholders in the Further Education and Training sector.

Reviewer to Define the Scope of the Review

The process involved interviews with the chair, governance professional, senior leadership team, key external stakeholders, sub-committee chairs and other members of the governing body; a survey; examination of a sample of governing documents and papers; an observation of 1 full board meeting and 4 committee meetings and two campus visits.

Principal Strengths

There is a culture of “we are in this together for our learners” which was evident from my interviews with governors and Executive Leadership Team. Governors gave examples of merger discussions and curriculum changes which they may not have agreed with initially, but through robust discussions within board meetings, they were able to agree by consensus, a way forward.

There is a strong and clear governance structure, which supports the collaborative and decision-making processes within the college. There are clear lines of delegated responsibilities and terms of reference for each of the committees which are reviewed annually and approved by the board.

Governors fully understand their roles and have brought considerable dept of experience and networks to support the college. There is a formal recruitment and induction process in place, governors are expected to undertake training both within the college and externally to build their knowledge of the Further Education sector.

Governors are passionate about learners and are keen to consider whether their actions and decisions are impacting positively on learners’ experiences and wider community. The student governor plays an active role in meetings and is supported to engage in meetings.

Governors are skilled and qualified for their roles, and the board has been refreshed with recent appointments. The board is utilising the expertise and knowledge of newer members and external agencies to continue to support their commitment to diversity. The board conducts annual skills review to identify any gaps, which are then filled through their recruitment process.

Governors set demanding key performance indicators, and these are monitored by the committees and main board.

The Board is well served by strong, independent governance professionals. There is over 60 years' experience of governance and education sector between them. They provide advice, support, and guidance to the governors, they play an active and lead role in supporting new governors. The Corporation Secretary played an active role in supporting the board and senior leadership team in merger discussions.

There is a collaborative and challenging relationship between the Corporation Secretary, CEO/Principal and chair which serves the college and board well. Regular meetings are held with the chair in setting the agenda for meetings.

Governors have worked closely with the senior leadership team to align their curriculum to local and regional skills needs, which has informed their Accountability Statement.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1:

The scheme of delegation could be re-examined with a view to delegating scrutiny and decision making to an appropriate level to alleviate board agenda congestion, with delegated decisions taken by committees clearly brought to the attention of the Board within their minutes and be open to clarification.

Recommendation 2:

All governors should clearly understand the process for, and progress of, succession planning for key board roles.

Recommendation 3:

Consider more intensive support for newer governors, through mentoring, support, and training.

Recommendation 4:

Governors should take advantage of the informal events organised by the Governance Professional.

Recommendation 5:

The Board reminded of key targets agreed with CEO and Principal.

Recommendation 6:

The Board should consider how it establishes and communicates its risk appetite.

Recommendation 7:

This process has already started, but further consider reordering agendas so that a significant amount of time is spent on the matters over which governors should have most influence.

Recommendation 8:

Continued promotion of governor participation in development programmes to improve understanding of sector and college performance.

Recommendation 9:

Upgrade of IT systems to allow for effective remote participation in meetings.