

External Board Review

Middlesbrough College

Reviewer: Rob Lawson

April 2023

Version	Approved by Board Reviewer	Date
Draft		
Draft for moderation		28/4/23
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Final		

Executive Summary

This External Board Review is based on the ETF/AoC pilot review framework. The Framework considers, but is not limited to, principles from Codes of Governance, the Education Inspection Framework and the DfE's current guidance on external board reviews.

The full report sets out the findings made against the three Board dimensions in the Framework with key evidence that informs those findings. The following table summarizes the headline strengths and areas for development:

	STRENGTH	AREA FOR DEVELOPMENT
BOARD COMPOSITION		
	1. Excellent array of skills and experiences on the Board	1. Improve report writing and presentation skills of some managers
BOARD STRUCTURE		
	2. Effective committee structure and risk management a particular strength	2. Increase the opportunities for governors to meet students
BOARD INTERACTION		
	3. Excellent relationship between SLT and the Board	3. Succession planning for a new Chair.

Fig 1

The overall conclusion on Board effectiveness is that: There is strong evidence that the Board is highly proficient and consistently impacts positively on college strategy, effectiveness, and outcomes.

Thanks and appreciation is recorded to all those who have engaged in this Review. Particular thanks to Zeta Foster, governance professional at Middlesbrough College who worked so hard to ensure that arrangements have been smooth and efficient.

Our Approach

This External Board Review was undertaken by Rob Lawson between January and April 2023, after an initial meeting in September 2022. Rob previously carried out several reviews of college Board effectiveness as part of the DfE pilot programme. He then carried out an audit of 23 such reviews on behalf of the FE Commissioner Shelagh Legrave. Rob is the Chair of Hull College and a National Leader of Governance appointed by the office of the FE Commissioner.

The Review has been conducted against the published AoC framework for FE College External Board Reviews as shown in Figure 3 below. The framework comprises 3 core areas for evaluation known as Board Dimensions – namely: Composition, Structure and Interaction.

Evidence has been drawn from a variety of sources, some published and others provided by Middlesbrough College, and triangulated to draw findings around an overarching question for each Board Dimension. The methodology followed a seven-stage approach:



Fig. 2

1 Composition

What attributes (skills, knowledge, mindset/attitude) do members of the Board possess currently and what additional attributes would allow the Board to better meet its objectives?

2 Structure

Do the current Board processes and structures equip members to optimally engage with each other to deliver the objectives effectively, with transparency and in compliance with regulations?

3 Interaction

Do the Board's culture and interactions between Board members allow for the most effective deployment of individuals and collective skills to meet the College's goals?

Overall Board effectiveness focuses on the core functions of the Board as a Governing Body and the extent to which the board culture delivers nine key outcomes which characterize highly effective boards –

Integrity: Commitment to Nolan Principles and the AoC Code (or relevant code)

Strategic: Setting a clear direction and objectives for the organisation

Quality: Progress and achievement of students effectively monitored and scrutinised

Financially Sound: Robust financial system and processes

Responsive: The board engages and has positive partnerships within the local community

Collectively Accountable: Responsibility for strategy and decisions and compliant with regulations

Inclusive & Diverse: Diversity and inclusion are central to decision-making and impact is measured

Reflective: Board performance and impact are thoroughly reviewed

Student Experience: Student voice is valued and student experience and safeguarding are central to decision-making



Figure 3

Rob met Chair Rob Davies and Head of Governance Zeta Foster in September 2022 for an initial scoping meeting at which the process of the review was outlined and agreed. A general review of governance at the college was agreed, with no tailored focus on any particular area.

Review Process

The Review process involved:

- An online survey/questionnaire sent out to governors in early January;
- A desk-top analysis of key college documents, policies and minutes of meetings;
- Attendance and observation at a Board meeting and four committee meetings;

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- Interviews with five Board members (including the Principal/CEO) and the Head of Governance

Survey:

32 surveys sent out, 23 responses received, a fair response (72 per cent).

Desktop analysis:

Time was spent looking at the wide range of documents including: policies; the strategic plan; governor CVs and profiles; the governor handbook; training plans; meeting schedules; the schedule of business; committee and Board minutes; skills audits.

Attendance and observation:

Meetings attended:

- Search and governance (in-person February 15)
- Teaching and learning update/ training session (in-person February 15)
- Corporate services (in-person March 6)
- Audit committee (virtual March 10)
- Full Board (virtual March 13)
- Curriculum and Standards (March 27)

Interviews:

- Zeta Foster, Head of Governance (in-person February 2)
- Zoe Lewis, Principal/CEO (in-person February 15)
- Peter Studd, Chair of corporate services (in-person February 15)
- Dominic Lusardi, Link governor for digital and a member of the digital transformation group (in-person March 6)
- Iain Wright, Chair of audit (virtual March 10)
- Rob Davies (virtual March 13)

A draft report was shared with the Corporation Chair and governance professional to check for factual inaccuracies before being sent for moderation. Following moderation, a final report was sent to the college.

An action plan, agreed by the college, can be found at the end of this report. An analysis of the response to the survey can also be found in the appendices.

The remainder of this report is structured to set out key messages across the Review Dimensions of Board Composition, Structures and Interaction before concluding with a Judgement of overall effectiveness.

Board Composition

BOARD COMPOSITION

The attributes possessed by the Board that enable effective strategic leadership

Background

Middlesbrough College is a large FE and HE college headquartered on a campus in Middlehaven, Middlesbrough. The college incorporates two training providers:

- Northern Skills Group, a provider of apprenticeships, employer-led training and retraining, works with more than 2,000 business in the north east and Yorkshire
- TTE is a leading provider in technical training to the oil and gas, process, manufacturing and engineering sectors.

Middlesbrough College offers courses for a vast array of occupational sectors, from entry level to level 7, including postgraduate qualifications.

16-18 students attend the college from across Teesside and the Tees Valley, including the towns of Middlesbrough, Stockton and Redcar.

At its last full Ofsted inspection, the college was graded Good (October 2018) and the college's finances are graded Good by EFSA.

The Board adheres to the AoC Code of Governance, and this is reaffirmed annually. Self-assessment is also conducted annually, as is a skills audit.

Knowledge and Experience

The board consists of 23 members and 8 external members and is led by an experienced, well-respected and committed Chair, Rob Davies.

Board members include: an entrepreneur and chartered accountant; former senior manager at EFSA and Learning Skills Council (who is also the Board's VC); a senior leader from the North East Chamber of Commerce; a Chief Finance Officer at a housing organisation; a former deputy director (and head of FE) at Ofsted; a senior manager at a

large international bank; a local leader in public health; the head teacher at a local secondary school; an ex-MD at a large logistics company; the MD of an East Cleveland engineering company; a tech entrepreneur; an academic lawyer; an operations manager for a youth charity; a business consultant; a deputy CEO and Director of Learning at a schools trust; a former MP and Chair of the Commons Education, Skills and the Economy committee, who is now MD of reputation and influence at the Institute of Chartered Accountants.

It also includes two student governors and two staff governors.

The college is supported by eight co-optees, known as External Governors, who contribute through links into specific committees. For example, one through helping to recruit new governors through search and governance committee, and another who is an HR specialist.

Several of these external members are former governors who continue to contribute to the college; others are governors who may join the Board after serving an initial year.

This arrangement works well for the college, bringing further levels of scrutiny to committees, without the external members needing to commit any extra time to Board meetings or other Board activities outside of committee meetings.

Skills

A skills matrix/profile analysis completed in September 2022 outlines the range of skills and experiences of a high-profile and efficient Board. There is an excellent mix of governors with public and private sector backgrounds and the important areas of finance, education (FE and HE), legal and HR are covered. The vast majority of governors considered themselves to be 'senior managers' which gives the Board an impressive capacity to think – and act – strategically and understand the important dividing line between SLT and the Board.

(Further evidence of the wide range of skills and experience was clear through CVs sent through with other documentation for desktop review – and through the interviews completed.)

The skills matrix/profile analysis also showed 11 out of 26 members who responded thought they had a public profile – useful for governors to be able to promote the college – and about the same number lived or worked in the Tees Valley (14 out of 26).

Responses to the survey/questionnaire sent to governors in January recorded governors who had very recently joined the board (three months) to the chair who has been on the board for nine years – his term has been extended beyond the usual AoC recommended eight years in agreement with the Board. The average tenure on the Board is three years.

Governor profiles are available on the college's website (<https://www.mbro.ac.uk/about-us/governance/governing-body-minutes/governor-profiles>). This is a good practice and is evidence of an open and transparent approach to governance.

As laid out in the college's annual report on corporate governance 2021-2022, approved by the Board on March 13, 2023, the college undergoes an annual skills and competency audit. This process continues to be reviewed and refined by the search and governance committee to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

As reported in the college's governance self-assessment report of 2021/22: A revised Skills and Competency matrix has ensured that there is the right mix and balance on the governing body/committee structure, with the search and governance Committee using the outcomes to focus recruitment in Governing Body skills shortage areas. The revised matrix shows a good balance across the Governing Body.

The Search and Governance Committee strengthened expertise during 2021-2022 with appointments who have experience in schools, initial teaching training, finance, audit, digital, logistics, local professional business, health, and housing.

On the evidence of meetings observed I would agree with this assessment.

The report also concluded: *There is a stronger, and better balanced Governing Body, with excellent digital, finance, audit, school, health and local business sector representation as outlined above, to best support the needs of the College.*

All of the governors who responded to the review survey said the Board had the skills to understand and question final reports, and could consider key risks and decide on associated actions.

96 per cent of respondents said the Board had the skills and experience to lead organizational change, and the same percentage said the Board had the skills and experience to make financial plans and set budgets.

Of those governors who responded to the survey, 59 per cent were men and 41 per cent were women. 58 per cent of respondees were aged between 55 and 74; 96 per cent did not have a disability, with one governor preferring not to say.

The Board has worked hard to increase its diversity and now includes two governors with Asian backgrounds, one with African heritage and an Eastern European. The Board is confident that its make-up reflects the diversity of its student body and the local community.

There are several new governors who need assimilating into the culture of the college and Board, and educating about the wider sector – although feedback on the induction process (from interviews, from the survey and from information gleaned for the SAR) was generally positive. See **Inclusive Team Building & Development**

The audit committee is very effective, with some excellent challenges at the meeting observed, but it is short on numbers – at least two more relevantly-qualified governors are needed on the committee, otherwise quoracy may become an issue.

Attitude and Mindset

Governors interviewed and those who responded to the survey said the Board conducts its business thoroughly and professionally.

All of those who responded to the survey said the Board observed the Nolan Principles and had committed to the AoC Code of Governance. Governors interviewed reaffirmed this and that the Board annually recommitted to both.

85 per cent of those who responded to the survey said the Board listened to students and students' interests informed their decision making – and 88 per cent said governors listened to staff and that helped Board decision making.

96 per cent of those who responded to the survey said the quality of the student experience was central to their decision making, with governor not sure if this was the case.

Attendance was raised as an issue during the interviews and a fall in the overall attendance rate from 84 per cent in 2020/21 to 77 per cent in 2021/22 was noted in the corporate governance report and in the SAR. This is a realistic pay-off from having a busy Board incorporating many governors holding senior positions in their organisations. The chair was quite rightly determined to lower the Board's age profile and recruit new governors with current, relevant experience working in senior positions – the result of which is that the Board's overall attendance rate has been affected. However, it may be worth checking in with governors to see if their attendance would be improved if the dates/times of meetings were changed.

Governors attend meetings well prepared and in the meetings observed had clearly read the papers. They have a healthy curiosity about the college and the student body. A good diversity of thought was observed at every meeting attended.

Governors know the locality well and show a genuine commitment to the college, students and the area. The Board appears well networked into the local community (as evidenced in the survey and internal skills audit). Governor Rachel Anderson is Assistant Director of Policy at NEEC and the Board generally appears well networked into a good mix of sectors, with relationships at the important organisations on Teesside and many of the area's large businesses. Governors interviewed said the Board's contacts were at different levels within organisations, and not just at director level. These networks and contacts provide invaluable insights into local organisations, increase awareness of local skills needs and increases the college's collective knowledge of the local economy.

The Board is closely involved in strategy and strategic direction – governors attend and contribute to strategy workshops and meetings, and two strategic planning days a year.

Conclusions

The Review has identified that the Board currently has an excellent and impressive mix of skills, experience and perspectives.

The following table summarises headlines:

BOARD COMPOSITION	
STRENGTHS	AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT
1. A great balance of skills, experience and backgrounds – from the private and public sectors	1. Audit committee is very effective, but needs more members
2. Good diversity of thought	2. Look to see if changing dates/times of meetings could improve attendance
3. Well networked with a genuine commitment to the college and area	

Fig. 3

Board Structures

BOARD STRUCTURE

The processes and structures that equip members to optimally deliver College objectives.

Background

The board has adopted the traditional committee model, with six committees feeding into Corporation: audit and risk (4 meetings a year); corporate services (3 meetings a year); higher education (1 meeting a year); remuneration (1 meeting, but others if needed); search and governance (3 meetings a year) and curriculum and quality (4 meetings a year). There are also two SAR validations meetings held annually.

A calendar of meetings is scheduled well in advance and the Head of Governance holds an in-depth and detailed schedule of Board business.

A board portal is used effectively to distribute papers which are uploaded at least a week before meetings.

Findings

The college Board undergoes a comprehensive annual self-assessment process – the last of which was signed off in December 2022 and covered 2021 – 2022. This assessment also listed areas for improvements and development with detailed action plans, needed for 2023. The action points for improvements included finding a new chair, improving diversity on the Board and improving the student voice (all of which have been achieved). The action points for development included oversight of the strategic plan update and training and development. The Board's strengths are also listed and its overall effectiveness and its leadership and management were both graded as Good.

The Chair and Vice Chair complete annual 1-2-1 meetings with governors, with forms filled in to record any resulting actions. Specific forms are available for new governors – a good idea. These meetings help the Board’s succession planning process as well as giving governors an opportunity to give any feedback to the Chair.

The Chair’s performance is also formally reviewed annually, as is the Head of Governance’s performance, which is good practice.

Board members are heavily involved in setting strategies and strategic direction – the college is currently working on a new strategic plan and governors have been involved at every stage.

There is a good link governor scheme in place (improved last year and now with 14 governors involved in the scheme) which increases Board knowledge and improves triangulation. Link governors are expected to go into classrooms at least once a year. The Board is planning to extend the scheme even further. Governors also complete regular classroom walks.

There is a high level of transparency around the Board. The Board’s performance indicators are published on the college website (a comprehensive document including attendance, board composition etc)

Minute taking is very thorough and again provides external stakeholders with transparency in the conduct of the Board (minutes of meetings are also available on the college website)

The college is particularly strong on risk management. Each member of SLT has a risk area assigned to them and a governor sits on the SLT’s risk group, who observes how risk register is put together – a good example of governor involvement.

Each committee looks at risk in their own areas, and at the end of each committee meeting, their risks are reassessed. For instance, at the corporate services meeting on March 6, the areas of risk reassessed included reclassification, finances and the

proposed construction of a new building for TTE. Each committee then feeds back any changes to the audit committee who holds the risk register.

The head of governance reported during her interview that at a previous Board meeting the cost of living crisis was added to the risk register at the suggestion of a governor. And a knowledgeable and informed discussion on risk management was observed during the Board meeting of March 13 when student behaviour and a proposed Teesside campus for Eton College were added to the risk register.

Governors interviewed felt the college was prudent with risk.

All of the governors who responded to the survey said the Board could consider key risks and decide on associated actions.

Two governors interviewed said there was a lack of ‘togetherness’ on the Board (which started when Covid forced meetings on line) and would like to see more done to bring the Board together more in social situations – although there have been two social events already this year. The same governors felt there could be more collaboration between committees – could the search and governance committee be the link into the other committees as it includes all chairs?

Governing Documents and Arrangements

All key documentation relating to governance practice is in place and well written, and there is evidence of the monitoring of compliance. Governors interviewed all praised the professionalism of the widely-respected and experienced Head of Governance.

The governance SAR 2021/2022 reported: *Governance Arrangements - Strong and experienced governance arrangements including a competent Clerk to the Corporation who ensures the College meets its regulatory obligations, and supports all Governors and reflects the Ten Principles of Good Governance.*

Cover sheets could be improved. They have an informative ‘purpose of the report’ section and a recommendation area (whether the item is for discussion or decision), but

don't always have a succinct executive summary and an area to indicate whether the item has been considered at committee stage – and if so which one – would be helpful.

Supporting papers are detailed and contain a great deal of background information.

Matters arising section were clearly defined on a matters arising tracking sheet, and among the minutes read and meetings observed there was plenty of evidence to show actions were being followed up and closed down.

Some governors interviewed said Board papers were too long and contained too much detail, making it time consuming to read and understand papers before meetings. However, the reviewer didn't think the papers for meetings he attended were excessively long.

Governors also suggested that college managers would on occasion just read their reports out, when a simple summary of the report would suffice. Both of these areas are noted in the governance SAR areas of improvement/development, namely: *Monitor Improvements to written and verbal presentation of board papers and provide feedback to writers on progress. Advise and monitor improvements to strengthen and streamline board papers.*

On occasion, governors were observed becoming too involved in operational matters. An example of this was observed at a Corporate Services meeting on March 6 when governors got too bogged down in detail on a campus services report.

Governors should consider the introduction of RAG-rated pie charts as an easier way to present key information in a more accessible way. These charts are particularly helpful in immediately identifying areas of concern, particularly in financial reports.

Governors interviewed said student governor representation on the Board was patchy and more could be done to hear the student voice. In meetings observed, there was minimal or no student voice heard. There is an awareness of this and measures have been introduced to help – for instance the Vice President of the Student Union attends

Board meeting to bolster the board and in preparation for him joining in next year, while the Vice Chair of the Corporation attends Student Union meetings as a link governor.

Transparency

Minutes and agendas of full Corporation and committee meetings are available in an open governance area of the Middlesbrough College website (<https://www.mbro.ac.uk/about-us/governance/governing-body-minutes>). These minutes go back to 2020-21 – the college’s standard practice is to provide two years of minutes retrospectively and the current year (once minutes are confirmed).

Governance policies, procedures, documents and key information (including annual governance reports, in-depth training plans, governance performance indicators, financial statements and reports, and a calendar of meetings) can also be found in this area of the website. There are also profiles of governors. This is clear evidence of an open and transparent approach to governance, and a Board which acts with integrity.

Governors interviewed said minutes were sent out in good time, with little delay between meetings and them receiving minutes. Minute taking is thorough and provides the external reader and stakeholders with transparency in the conduct of the Board.

Evaluation

Middlesbrough College is particularly strong on evaluating the governance function. Documents supplied for the external review included a thorough and comprehensive governance SAR for 2021-22. This report included an overview of key strengths and developments, and a more detailed ‘strengths’ document as an appendix. It also included areas for improvement for 2022/23 and areas for development for the same time period.

The SAR graded the overall effectiveness, and the leadership and management of the Board as Good.

Key strengths the SAR listed (14 in all) included: strategic planning, succession planning, governor recruitment, challenge, committee structure, the Link Governor scheme, strong student and staff voices, strong self-assessment and comprehensive training and development.

Areas for improvement and development in the SAR included succession planning for the Chair, improving the diversity of the Board, improving the student voice on the Board, improving written and verbal presentations to the Board and an increased understanding and scrutiny of Higher Education regulatory reforms.

All of the governors who responded to the survey said the Board had robust financial management and considered value for money; 96 per cent of respondents said the Board values the input of key local employers and stakeholders on the area and sought to work with partners to meet local skills needs.

Conclusions

Middlesbrough College's board structure works well and provides the requisite platforms and opportunities for oversight, challenge and scrutiny.

The following table summarises headlines:

BOARD STRUCTURE	
STRENGTHS	AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Effective committee structure2. Agenda and minute reporting3. Processes of governance and evaluation4. Risk management a particular strength	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Coversheets could be improved2. Explore how to improve report writing to make them more succinct and to the point3. Explore how to improve the presentation skills of some managers4. Explore how to make the student voice louder

Board Interaction

BOARD INTERACTION

Behaviours and interactions which allow for an inclusive culture that encourages effective challenge and impactful collaboration

Background

The interaction observed between governors and SLT is respectful, courteous, good-humoured and mature. There is a good degree of scrutiny and challenge, but challenge is made in a positive and respectful manner and is received well by SLT.

The impressive make-up of the Board, which includes a former deputy director (and head of FE) at Ofsted, means collectively governors have the skills, confidence and experience to challenge well. Governors interviewed and the latest SAR both reported that challenge had markedly improved over the past year.

The CEO/Principal cited an example of persistent challenge from one governor which led to a revitalized career strategy. She added another governor's scrutiny had directly improved the college's approach to English and maths provision.

A direct challenge around cyber security had led to one governor playing a vital part in improving the college's approach to cyber attacks and online security.

Good examples of challenge directly observed for the review included a strong, persistent challenge around a legal dispute around a new build at the Corporate Services meeting on March 6, and some really good questioning of the college's approach to English and maths at the curriculum and standards meeting on March 27.

SLT handled challenge well – with members of executive accepting challenge in a thoughtful and professional way.

The latest SAR reported: *Challenge - More effective challenge as a result of improving knowledge base at Governing Body and Committee meetings from Governors and External Members. This has been furthered during 2021-22 with a number of joint meetings of the Governing Body and specialist committees allowing for governors to widen their knowledge base.*

As governors pointed out in the 1-2-1 interviews, the majority of challenge and scrutiny occurs at committees and not at board level. While further comments are invited at full board, the committees are tasked with scrutinising topics and issues in detail.

There was no evidence of groupthink, with evidence of diversity of thought in committee and the Board meetings attended.

There was evidence of a high level of triangulation – through committees and a comprehensive and well-established Link Governor scheme. However, most governors interviewed said they did not meet enough students and would like more opportunities to meet them. This would add to the Board's ability to triangulate.

The triumvirate relationship between Principal/CEO, Chair and Head of Governance appears strong, although there are no regular arrangements for meetings. The Principal/CEO and Chair meet at least every three weeks, so it might be worth looking at diarizing regular triumvirate meetings.

All governors interviewed and surveyed were comfortable with their responsibilities as trustees and compliance with the Code of Good Governance. 96 per cent of those who responded to the survey said the quality of student experience was central to decision making – one governor said they weren't sure.

Governors also understood the importance of equality and diversity in decision making. All of the governors who responded to the survey said EDI was a 'clear consideration in decision making.'

Governors felt an integral part of strategic thinking and creating long-term strategies, as evidenced in both the 1-2-1 EGR meetings and through the survey.

The Head of Governance is an asset to the Board and is well respected by governors and the SLT. She is very well organized, her minutes are well written and there appears to be good and open communication with individual Board members. The relationship between the triumvirate is particularly strong, and is based on trust and respect.

As evidence by the results of the survey and through the 1-2-1 interviews with governors, the Board recognizes the importance of equality considerations along with safeguarding. All of the governors who responded to the survey said EDI are a clear consideration in Board decision making; similarly 100 per cent of those interviewed understood their responsibilities for safeguarding and Prevent, and were kept up to date with relevant information.

FINDINGS

Inclusive Team Building & Development

Governor training is taken seriously, as evidenced through those who responded to the survey (96 per cent said they were provided with training which assisted them to be an effective governor, with one governor reporting this statement was somewhat true). Training was also seen as a strength by the majority of governors interviewed, and through the latest SAR which reported: *Comprehensive Governance Training and Development Plan is in place and monitored termly by the Search and Governance Committee. The structure is regularly revised and during 2021-22 the ETF Governance Development Programme was offered as was individual opportunities to build knowledge for new governors.*

Seventy per cent of survey respondents agreed the induction process was good and informed them about the college, their responsibilities and the operation of the Board. Thirty per cent 'somewhat' agreed with the statement. Some of these responses, however, came from governors who were inducted in an older process before improvements were made.

In their interviews two governors said they would have liked to see more financial information about the college, and to have been given a wider perspective about the FE sector. These governors had been on the Board for some time, so perhaps had not experienced a more detailed approach to induction that has been introduced.

Committee membership utilizes the individual strengths and backgrounds of governors, with governors being supplemented by five external appointees on committees, each with expertise in specific areas. Iain Wright, for example, has the perfect background and experience to chair the audit committee – which he does very well.

There was a concern from several governors interviewed that they did not meet enough students and would like to understand their experience at the college better through more interaction with them. They would like more opportunities – formal and informal – to meet students, and not just through the Link Governor scheme.

Productive Relationships

A helpful governor terms of office document outlines governors' positions on the Board and their start and finishing date for terms of office. This shows a number of governors are coming up to end of their time on the Board so succession planning and recruitment is needed – this was fully addressed at a search and governance committee meeting on February 15.

At the meeting there was a good, sensible and pragmatic discussion about recruitment and what skills would need to be replaced on the Board. HR, health, HE and community engagements were identified as areas where the Board could focus. This was excellent evidence of succession planning for the Board and committees.

At the same meeting a formal training plan was agreed, the AoC Code of Governance was reaffirmed and an extension of the Link Governor scheme also agreed – all to be taken to the Board as recommendations.

The issue of recruiting a new Chair, however, needs addressing. Rob is a popular, respected and effective chair and his term of office ends in 2025 at which point he will have been Chair for ten years.

In their interviews, governors praised Rob’s performance, but there was an element of concern about the next chair, with several governors believing a succession process needed to be started.

Governors interviewed felt confident in asking challenging questions and were also confident that staff and student governors were carefully listened to when giving their perspective.

Governors also noted good inter-personal relationships on the Board and said they felt able to take on difficult issues facing the college professionally and with collective responsibility.

Conclusions

Interactions between SLT and the Board, and between governors, is effective. The Board also gets on well together, although some governors think more should be done to bring them together more. There is plenty of sound evidence that levels of scrutiny and challenge are high.

The following table summarises headlines:

BOARD INTERACTION	
STRENGTHS	AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT
1. Professional working relationship between Board and SLT	1. Explore how to improve interaction between governors

2. Good diversity of thought and a high level of triangulation	2. Increase the opportunities for governors to meet with students
3. Board is particularly strong on training and development	3. Ensure any new governors are assimilated quickly into the culture of the Board and college 4. Explore succession planning for the Chair

Overall Board Effectiveness

In assessing overall Board effectiveness we have focused on the core function of a Governing Body:

- setting and communicating the College educational character, strategy and goals;
- holding executive leaders to account for educational performance and quality of the College and performance of staff;
- exercising effective control to ensure that funds and assets are protected and legal obligations are met.

We have looked at the way in which you observe the Nolan Principles and your adopted Code of Governance and the extent to which the culture of the Board focuses on outcomes. Key Board outcomes are shown below:



Fig. 6

Middlesbrough College has a high-performing, energetic and ambitious Board that puts the wellbeing and success of its students at the heart of its decision making.

At meetings observed and through minutes and documents read, there is clear evidence of a high level of scrutiny and challenge.

The relationship between the Board and SLT is excellent, as is the relationship between the triumvirate (although regular meetings should be diarised).

The Board is particularly strong on risk management, governor training, compliance and evaluation.

The overall conclusion on Board effectiveness is that:

There is strong evidence that the Board is highly proficient and consistently impacts positively on college strategy, effectiveness, and outcomes. Plans are already in place to address some of the areas identified for development.

The way in which Middlesbrough College approaches and manages risk is a an area other colleges could learn from, and would make a good case study.

Recommendations and Action Plan

The Review has drawn a number of conclusions about the strengths of the college's Board and areas for development. Some recommendations are applicable to the key areas reviewed, composition, structure and interaction and fall into key themes. In all cases, the recommendations are suggestions for board improvement and are not intended to overshadow the overall effectiveness of the Board's operation where a lot of good practice is noted.

The following seven recommendations are among those identified in the review:

1. **Recruit more governors to the audit committee.** The committee is effective and very well chaired, but is short of numbers and needs more relevantly-qualified governors to ensure the college's outstanding approach to risk management isn't diluted.
2. **Improve the student voice on the Board and awareness of the student experience.** Attendance by a student governor was described as patchy and more needs to be done to ensure governors meet more students, increasing their knowledge of the college, the student experience and increasing opportunities to triangulate.
3. **Explore how to improve the presentation skills of some managers:** Some managers were observed simply reading out reports rather than summarizing a report, drawing out salient points and then asking for questions.
4. **Look to see if changing dates/times of meetings could improve attendance.** Last measurement of overall attendance recorded was 77 per cent, with a fall from 84 per cent the previous year. Worth exploring whether changing days and/or times would improve governor attendance.
5. **Explore how to improve report writing so background information is more succinct and to the point.** This would ease the burden on busy governors who struggle to read through and understand 200+ pages of agendas, minutes and papers before meetings.

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6. **Think about how interaction between governors could be improved.** Several governors in interviews – and through the survey – said they wanted to know more about their fellow governors, and to feel more like a team.
 7. **Start planning to recruit a new Chair.** The current Chair is popular and well-respected on the Board and has extended his term of office – however, he will step down from the Board in 2025 and a recruitment process needs to start to replace him.

Board EBR action plan to be agreed with Rob, Zeta and Zoe

Issue	Action	Intended outcome	Named lead	Timescale
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				

Fig. 7