CITY OF BRISTOL COLLEGE - EXTERNAL BOARD REVIEW 2023

Background

Further Education colleges are required to have an external review of their governance every three years. City of Bristol College commissioned the Association of Colleges to undertake the review in Summer term 2023. The reviewer's report provided a general review of governance arrangements through an assessment against three main dimensions of governance:

Board Composition – knowledge and experience of members, strategy building and execution, oversight and control of finances and corporate leadership/governance; specific skills for effective strategic oversight of the corporation; attitude and mindset that focusses independent thought and a commitment to the principles of good governance

Board Structures – governing documents and arrangements of the Board; transparency evidenced by access that board members have to relevant information; frequency and rigour with which the board undertakes evaluations of individual and board performance

Board Interaction – inclusive team building including development and deployment of members in line with established principles of inclusion and good governance; productive relationships based on culture that allows for a good balance between challenge and collaboration underpinned by evidence-based decision making; collective responsibility of the board based on a clear delineation of responsibilities and accountabilities, alongside agreed processes that allow for joint ownership of decisions

Findings

The report's findings against these 3 Board dimensions are that:

'Governance at City of Bristol College is good, with a fundamentally positive Board composition, healthy Board structure and positive Board interaction. Inevitably there are areas where improvements could be made, but these are in the context of making the Board stronger in its operation, rather than in any sense weaknesses or remedial actions.

The overall conclusion on Board Effectiveness is that:

- There is evidence the Board is proficient and has impact on college strategy, effectiveness, and outcomes'

The report identified the Board's strengths and areas for development. Key points of strength identified included:

- Experienced governors with wide-ranging skills and experience, recently enhanced
- Good use of governors' particular skills in its committee memberships
- Pro-active consideration of Chair succession arrangements
- Systematic purposeful governance practices in strong committee system
- Good team ethic, spirit of inclusion, support for Executive Management Team
- Clear identification of issues and an appetite to focus on major strategic developments

- Positive impact on strategy and improved performance

The Board has an action plan, overseen by its Search and Governance committee, to address the areas for development identified in the review. Key points being addressed in the action plan are

- Wider diversity in membership to increase members representation of the demographics of the student and staff make up
- Continued active support for student governors and induction for governors
- A framework to ensure space for strategic discussions including focus on the key business of the college – its students and curriculum delivery
- Pursuit of a permanent Clerk appointment
- Use of governors to support the college's development and standing in the city
- Further development of the risk register