**The Lanarkshire Board**

**Externally Facilitated Effectiveness Review**

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# **Introduction**

The Code of Good Governance for Scotland’s Colleges (the Code) sets out the principles of good governance for colleges in Scotland. This review is against the 2024 Edition of the Code.

All colleges that receive funding from the Scottish Funding Council or a regional strategic body must comply with the Code as a condition of grant. Each board must state its adoption of the Code in its corporate governance statement contained within its annual financial statement.

The five principles set out in the Code provide a framework within which colleges are expected to develop their own policies and procedures.

The Code states that the college board must have in place a robust self-evaluation process. Para D. 24 states

*‘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 to five years.’*

‘The Guide for Board Members in the College Sector’ and the ‘Board Development Framework’ provide additional guidance for college board members and Governance Professionals.

**Methodology**

This external effectiveness review included a series of stages aimed at building up an overview of the board’s effectiveness. The key elements of the review process were:

* Initial meeting with the Chair, SIM, Governance Professional and the Executive Advisor to the Chair to agree the scope of the review and the overall project plan
* Observation of the 17 March 2025 Board meeting
* Desk review of core governance documentation, including Board and committee papers, see Annex 1.
* Interviews with 12 Board members including the Chair, Vice Chair, SIM, both Principals, student, and staff members and each of the Committee Chairs
* Board survey to seek Members’ views of governing processes
* Board workshop to review the conclusions and recommendations from the EER

# **Executive Summary**

This is an external effectiveness review of the combined Lanarkshire Board (Regional Strategic Body) and the New College Lanarkshire Board (Regional College). Under the current structure South Lanarkshire College is assigned to the Lanarkshire Board.

The Lanarkshire Board (RSB) will be dissolved on 31st July 2025 by Scottish Government and New College Lanarkshire (NCL) and South Lanarkshire College (SLC) will become two distinct Regional Colleges.

The transition from a RSB to a smaller and simpler structure as a Regional College presents a range of opportunities for the New College Lanarkshire (NCL) Board to spend more time on strategic decision making, operate as a team, and continue to innovate and focus on the needs of NCL students.

The transition is being carefully planned. It will be important to ensure that the Board of NCL has the right number of members with the blend of skills and experience required by the college. This will require succession planning and building the ‘new’ Board as a team, which should be a priority.

This is a strong Board with an excellent range of skills and experience amongst the membership.

The launch of the NCL Strategy 2030 is an opportunity to harness the enthusiasm and commitment of the Regional College Board around the new strategic plan. Board members have been engaged in the development of the new strategic plan.

The Board benefits from strong leadership from an experienced and skilled Chair who encourages contribution from all members, builds consensus, and effectively sums up Board discussions and decisions.

There is a constructive working relationship between the Board and the executive team based on respect and a mutual understanding of each other’s roles. This is an engaged and supportive Board.

Compliance with the Code of Good Governance is monitored and reported to the Board through a compliance checklist which is maintained by the Governance Professional.

# **Effectiveness Review against the Code for Good Governance in Scotland’s Colleges**

## Leadership and Strategy

This is a large and complex Board which has faced some significant challenges over recent years. Despite this the college has maintained a focus on the quality of the student experience and has continued to be innovative and develop new courses, and funding streams.

The Board is effectively led by a strong Chair, and high levels of satisfaction in the strategic leadership of the Board were expressed in the Board survey. Board culture is constructive, inclusive, value driven and transparent. Despite the size of the Board participation is encouraged from all members who feel that their contribution is valued.

Decisions are made in the spirit of collective responsibility and are effectively summed up by the Chair.

NCL members have been fully engaged with strategic planning and the development of the NCL 2030 Strategy which will launch in September 2025. Members participated in a strategy development day in February 2025, which involved agreeing a clear purpose for the college.

The strategic planning process has included consultations with trade unions and staff as well as external stakeholder engagement.

The Board should agree on a set of strategic KPIs to underpin the strategy. Members should expect to receive regular strategic business reports on progress against the agreed KPIs with a supporting narrative highlighting any variances and executive team interventions.

The transition to a smaller regional board and the development of the new strategy presents an opportunity to harness the enthusiasm and commitment of NCL board members around the strategic plan and the building of the ‘new’ board team.

## Quality of the Student Experience

The quality of the student experience is clearly central to board discussions and decision making.

The Curriculum, Student Affairs and Outcomes Committee has oversight of the quality and inclusivity of student experience and ensuring that learning provision meets the skills requirements of both local and national economies. To ensure the student perspective is considered membership of the CSAO committee includes student members.

Reports are presented to the Curriculum and Student Affairs Committee and the Board from both NCL and SLC student associations. As part of the transition to the new structure, and in recognition of the importance of the student input, consideration should be given to moving the Student Association Report up the Board and committee agendas to be the first item after the minutes and declarations of interest.

Resources have been invested in a range of activities to support students and enhance the student experience, as well as improving retention of students at risk of leaving, such as the Wellness Academies.

The Undergraduate Programme, in partnership with the University of the West of Scotland, is evidence of an innovative approach which allows students to study a range of industry focussed degree programmes designed to meet specific skills needs in the region.

## Board Accountability

The Curriculum, Student Affairs and Outcomes Committee monitors the delivery of the regional outcomes agreed with the SFC and reports back to the Board.

Board decision making is rigorous, properly informed, and timely. Board papers support effective decision making but can be lengthy, the volume of papers should be kept under review. All Board papers would benefit from a brief introduction highlighting the purpose of the paper and the Board action required, i.e. for decision, for discussion, for noting or other action.

Board and committee minutes should be more succinct, referencing the papers presented to the Board or committee, and recording the decisions made and agreed action points.

Finance committee and Board papers would benefit from greater structure, clarity, and narrative, especially for members who do not have a background in finance or accountancy.

The committee structure works well; all committees are effectively led by experienced and skilled Chairs and have an excellent range of skills and experience in the members. All committees have Terms of Reference which are updated and reviewed on a three yearly basis.

Committee Chairs provide feedback to the Board, highlighting any items that might require further discussion by the Board.

There is an appropriate level of trust in the committees to scrutinise and provide assurance to the Board.

There is an effective and mature relationship between the committee members and the senior staff that support the relative committees.

Co-ordination of the work of the committees is done through the Chairs Committee. To avoid any overlap or duplication the Chairs Committee should monitor which reports are submitted to each committee.

Consideration should be given to the ARC and Finance committee meeting, annually, to discuss issues that are common to the work of both committees.

Management of risk is robust, the Regional Strategic Risk Register is reviewed and updated on a regular basis by the Regional Strategic Risk Management Group and the Audit and Risk Committee. Any changes in the RAG status are highlighted for Board attention.

The Board has effective financial monitoring arrangements in place. However financial sustainability is an ongoing challenge and a concern for the Board and the college in the current financial climate.

New income streams such as the Undergraduate School have created additional income which have resulted in an improvement in the college’s projections for the underlying operating position for 2024/25.

## Board Effectiveness

The Board is effectively led by an experienced and skilled Chair who promotes an open and transparent culture and encourages effective contribution from all members. There is an appropriate balance of constructive challenge and support provided to the Principal and executive team.

There is an effective working relationship between the Chair, Principal, Governance Professional and the Advisor to the Chair.

The Board has appointed an experienced SIM who leads on the annual appraisal of the Chair.

The Board is well supported by an experienced Governance Professional who provides effective advice and support on the governance of the college.

New members receive induction training which includes meeting the Chair, Chairs of the committees and the opportunity for campus visits. Members are encouraged to participate in the CDN on-line Induction Module. A mentoring programme is also available and is valued by newer members.

All members have an annual appraisal meeting which provides an opportunity for members to consider their ongoing training and development needs.

The Board Development Plan is based on feedback from the annual self-evaluation and Board member appraisals. Members are encouraged to engage with training offered by CDN.

Understanding the external operating environment is important and members would benefit from the opportunity to hear directly from key stakeholders. Consideration should be given to introducing informal stakeholder engagement sessions before Board meetings.

The Code requires that the Board must keep its effectiveness under annual review and that there is a robust self-evaluation process in place. Members are asked to evaluate the performance of the Board and any committees they are members of. However, there does seem to be an element of ‘survey fatigue’ and concerns around the frequency that members are expected to complete questionnaires.

The self-evaluation process could be simplified by reducing the number of questionnaires and introducing a workshop-based approach to self-evaluation. These could be independently facilitated and would be aimed at producing more meaningful results based on discussion between members.

Rather than repeating the same exercise each year, annual self-evaluation could be achieved within the context of a three-year cycle of

* self-evaluation
* action planning and the production of the Board Development Plan,
* workshops to review progress review against the Board Development Plan and the identification of further areas for development to be included for the coming year.

This would provide a more dynamic and effective approach to annual self-evaluation, reduce ‘survey fatigue’ and present further opportunity board member engagement and team building.

## Relationships and Collaboration

Stakeholder engagement has formed an important part of the strategic planning process and the development of the NCL Strategy 2030.

As noted above, members would benefit from the opportunity to hear directly from key stakeholders. Consideration should be given to introducing informal stakeholder engagement sessions before Board meetings.

The college has been innovative in its approach to partnership working as demonstrated by the development of the Undergraduate Programme in partnership with UWS.

# **Recommendations**

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| 1 | **Strategic KPIs**   * The Board should agree on a set of strategic KPIs to underpin the strategy. * Members should receive regular reports on progress against the agreed KPIs with a supporting narrative highlighting any variances and executive team interventions. |
| 2 | **Build the new Board team**   * The transition to a smaller regional board and the development of the new strategy presents an opportunity to harness the enthusiasm and commitment of NCL board members around the strategic plan and build the ‘new’ board team. * Succession planning is important to ensure the Board, and the committees have the skills and experience required by the ‘new’ Board. |
| 3 | **Student Association Reports to the Board**   * As part of the transition to the new structure consideration should be given to moving the Student Report up the Board and committee agendas to be the first item after the minutes and declarations of interest. |
| 4 | **Board and Committee Papers**   * Board papers can be lengthy; the volume of papers should be kept under review. Board papers would benefit from a brief introduction highlighting the purpose of the paper and the Board action required, for discussion, for noting or for decision. * Board and committee minutes should be more succinct, referencing the papers presented to the Board or committee, and recording the decisions made and action points. * Finance committee and Board papers would benefit from greater structure, clarity, and narrative, especially for members who do not have a background in finance or accountancy. |

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| 5 | **Committees**   * Consideration should be given to the ARC and Finance committees meeting, annually, to discuss issues that are common to the work of both committees. * To avoid any overlap or duplication the Chairs Committee should monitor which reports are submitted to each committee. |
| 6 | **Board Member Development**   * Members would benefit from the opportunity to hear directly from key stakeholders. Consideration should be given to introducing informal stakeholder engagement sessions before Board meetings. * A key stakeholder mapping exercise would enable members to better understand the wider operating environment and support effective decision making. |
| 7 | **Annual Board Self Evaluation**   * A more dynamic approach could be considered based on a three-year cycle of evaluation, as detailed above. |
| 8 | **Website**   * Post dissolution, review the Board section of the college website to add biographies for all members and to ensure that all the governance documentation is up to date. |

# **Annex 1**

## Document Review

1. New College Lanarkshire Code of Conduct
2. Scheme of Delegation and Standing Orders
3. Committee Terms of Reference, Structure and Membership
4. Review of Compliance with the Code: New College Lanarkshire/ The Lanarkshire Board
5. New College Lanarkshire 2023/24 Annual Audit Report
6. Lanarkshire Board Regional Financial Statements to July 2024
7. Board agenda and papers for December 2024 and March 2025 meetings
8. New College Lanarkshire Internal Audit 2021-22 - Corporate Governance & Risk Management April 2022
9. Lanarkshire Board Development Plan
10. Meet the Board
11. Regional Strategic Risk Report February 2025
12. Lanarkshire Board response to the consultation on the RSB dissolution.

**Footnote**

The reviewer would like to thank the Board Chair, Principal, members, and the Governance Professional for their assistance and insight with this external effectiveness review.