**The Lanarkshire Board**

**Self – Evaluation Report 2022-23 and Board Development Plan 2023-25**

**“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 every three to five years.”**

*Extract from the Code of Good Governance for Scotland’s Colleges*

**Self-Evaluation Review**

Over a 3-month period in 2022-23 the Lanarkshire Board undertook a self-evaluation exercise on its effectiveness as the Regional Strategic Body for Lanarkshire as required by the Code of Good Governance for Scotland’s Colleges.

The assessment is based on the principles contained in the sector’s Code of Good Governance; the Board Effectiveness questionnaire (Appendix 3) reflects the various sections in the Code. The sections take on board the principles of the Code but are adapted to the position of The Lanarkshire Board as a multi college region.

**Background**

The Lanarkshire Board is the Regional Strategic Body (RSB) for Lanarkshire comprising New College Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire College. South Lanarkshire College undertakes a separate evaluation of its own Board and retains responsibility for staffing and estates (The Lanarkshire Order 2014).

The gathering of information from RSB members was an iterative process undertaken over a number of weeks.

The **1:1 sessions with the Chair** were initiated in March 2023 and 99% completed by the end of May 2023. The two missing sessions being because of the work commitments of the Board members concerned and are scheduled to take place as soon as their availability allows. [Update: one of the outlaying 1:1 sessions was completed in early July 2023.] The outline questionnaire for 1:1 discussions and Personal Development Plans, is attached for information at Appendix 2.

The survey of the **RSB Committees,** together with the relevant remits**,** was circulated in May 2023 separately to all committee members and the chairs of the respective committees. The questionnaire is attached at Appendix 3 and the feedback from the committees is summarised in section 3 of this report.

The **Board operational effectiveness** survey, was distributed later with members being asked to provide comment on specific aspects of Board operation as well as offering the opportunity for Board members to reflect on Board activity over the previous 12 months and identify their ambition for the Board in the coming 12 months. The questionnaire is at Appendix 4

The comments and suggestions gathered in the 1:1 sessions, the Committee survey and the Board Effectiveness questionnaire, together with feedback from college senior management, are collated into the **Board Development Plan** at Appendix 6.

The Senior Independent Board Member carried out an **appraisal of the Regional Chair** and contacted all members of the Board for their views. His report is at Appendix 5.

This report covers:

1. The Board self-evaluation process undertaken during 2022-23;

2. Feedback from the 1:1 discussions with the Regional Chair;

3. Feedback on the effectiveness of the 4 main RSB committees;

4. Analysis and findings of the Board Effectiveness survey, section by section, including general comment on the structure of the Committees;

5. Appraisal of the Regional Chair (Confidential);

6. The Board Development Plan for 2023-25;

7. Next steps;

8. List of appendices:

* Appendix 1 The Lanarkshire Board self-evaluation process 2022-23;
* Appendix 2 Outline questionnaire for 1:1 interviews and Personal Development

Plans;

* Appendix 3 The Committee operation and structure questionnaire;
* Appendix 4 The Board Operating effectiveness questionnaire;
* Appendix 5 Appraisal of the Regional Chair (Confidential)
* Appendix 6 Board Development Plan 2023-2025

1. **Self- evaluation process: Appendix 1**

The stages of the self- evaluation process are described in more detail in Appendix 1.

We have included the following broad areas which we believe meet the requirements of the Code of Good Governance for Scotland’s Colleges:

* Personal Development Plans for Board members following 1:1 discussions with the Regional Chair;
* A separate evaluation of the effectiveness and operation of the 4 main RSB Committees;
* A full Board operational effectiveness review including a general question on the Committee structure covering:
  + leadership;
  + quality of student experience;
  + accountability and staff governance;
  + overall effectiveness;
  + relationships and collaboration.
* An evaluation of the Board Chair carried out by the Senior Independent Member;
* Next steps to address the issues and ideas generated in the different sections of the evaluation.

The full Board operational effectiveness questionnaire elicited responses from **12** members of The Lanarkshire Board and one from the senior management team. At the time of the survey there were 2 vacancies on the RSB, reducing the full complement of Board members to 20; 3 of the 5 Board members from SLC elected not to respond to the questionnaire. At the time of the evaluation a recruitment exercise was in process as the terms of 5 RSB Board members were due to finish over the summer period 2023. In addition, the dissolution of the Region, as recommended by SFC in its report

‘Coherence and Sustainability: A review of Scotland’s Colleges and Universities Phase One Report: Insights to Develop Further’, published in October 2020, had still not been advanced. The Region Transformation Group, chaired by the Scottish Government and run by SFC, has not met since before COVID. Both colleges continue to press for the group to be re-energised to enable NCL and SLC to progress independently while collaborating for the benefit of the learners in Lanarkshire.

1. **Feedback on the 1:1s and Personal Development Plans**

**Questionnaire/outline for discussion at Appendix 2**

Post COVID return to face to face meetings were welcomed, although the convenience of Zoom meetings was acknowledged. Remote meetings were considered particularly counterproductive for newer members of the Board for which this format did not provide the opportunity for informal discussion with longer serving members which would normally have taken place around face to face meetings. This had proved to be considerable drawback to their understanding of some of the more complex issues discussed by the Board and therefore their development as major contributors to meetings.

**Follow up actions to address the points raised in the discussion sessions**:

**Information sessions:**

There was particular Interest in information sessions on:

* finances in the college sector and how they are organised, specifically income streams;
* the organisation of the college sector in Scotland and the roles of partner agencies;
* sector jargon and acronyms;
* regional strategic planning;
* cyber security;
* risk appetite.

**Additional actions:**

* Reintroduction of the buddy/mentor scheme;
* In addition to sessions organised by the Board Secretary of the RSB, ensure members have the opportunity to attend development modules such as those offered by the College Development Network on governance, and relevant modules provided by the NCL Staff Development Academy;
* Investigate how to improve the presentation of papers for meetings and ensure that a context/summary is always provided;
* Follow up with the Principal and his senior team on the development of more regular strategy sessions with the Board;
* Develop closer links with the NCL senior team to gain better insight into potential strategic issues requiring Board decisions;
* Improve updating members on key issues between Board meetings, especially around decisions taken in the Chairs’ Committee where time constraints had not enabled full Board discussion prior to the event.

1. **Feedback on the Committee structure Questionnaire at Appendix 3**

There are 4 main RSB Committees which meet quarterly before regular Board meetings:

* Audit and Risk Committee (ARC)
* Curriculum, Student Affairs and Outcome Committee (CSAO)
* Finance Committee
* Resource and General Purposes Committee (RGP)

There are also 3 ad hoc committees which meet as necessary:

* Chairs’ Committee
* Nomination and Search Committee
* Remuneration Committee

**i) Audit and Risk Committee (ARC)**

Overall members are happy with the way this committee is chaired and how it operates, responses being mainly “1”s.

Comments include:

**What we have done well over the last 12 months:**

* The ARC has been very successful in supporting the review and corrective actions around the SLC governance challenges. Particularly, the engagement of the Chair of the ARC in supporting the Board and the Board Chair in resolving the complex issues;
* Provision of clear and straightforward navigation of the various challenges associated with the SLC position and the impact upon the RSB/NCL. Strong and sensible guidance on matters relevant to college risk;
* Partnership working with the assigned college, much of which has taken place out with the committee meetings. Very refreshing to see such collaborative working;
* Risk Management controls, understanding of Risks and actions;
* Excellent transparency;
* External auditor’s management and control of internal audits and follow-up;
* The Audit committee and the especially the Chair has held individuals, groups, responsible areas to account.

**Development I would like to see in the next year**:

* Perhaps an opportunity for joint meeting/working with the finance committee in order to ensure a more joined-approach to the development of a clear financial strategy for NCL;
* When a review of a college service has an overall conclusion of weak/unacceptable it might be useful to include the manager of the service when the report is discussed.

**ii). Curriculum, Student Affairs and Outcomes Committee (CSAO)**

Members’ responses are mainly “1”s. Where members recorded “2”s they were against the questions relating to the CSAO being forward looking and whether members have sufficient knowledge to contribute to discussion. These points will be addressed in the proposed next steps to work more closely with the Principal and senior team to identify strategic developments and provide the appropriate briefings.

Comments include:

**What we have done well in the last 12 months:**

* Engagement with student representatives, but perhaps we should encourage them to not only update CSAO on their activities, but also what students want from us;
* Excellent engagement of Student representatives from SLC and NCL;
* The CSAO Committee was actively involved in the development of the enhanced curriculum through the partnership with UWS. There should be more partnership working for the benefit of the learners in Lanarkshire;
* I think that the Committee has provided good focus upon examining, challenging and enhancing the performance characteristics of the College. I think, too, it has provided an excellent mechanism by which the student voice can be expressed;
* Despite the extraordinary difficulties over the last 12 months with funding cuts, COVID recovery, cost of living crisis to name a few, our committee members have remained professional, focused, and dedicated to doing the best we can for our students and college. It has been an absolute pleasure to serve on the board and committees;
* Sharing student initiatives across the region;
* The CSAO has successfully been inclusive and welcoming to South Lanarkshire College colleagues. The group has worked well discussing challenges faced by the college sector and has highlighted good practice achieved by both colleges;
* The committee has been proactive in addressing the current SFC funding deficit and the funding issue going forward.

**Development I would like to see in the next year:**

* More regular updates on funds such as bursaries, and how hardship funds and access funds are used;
* Enhanced scrutiny of targets linked to with an overview of budget implications regularly considered;
* I think it may be worthwhile looking at the performance successes of SLC in relation to their Education Scotland performance – with a view to determining benefits to be gained for NCL;
* To develop a Board and committee space on Teams to negate the distribution of papers by email.

**iii). Finance Committee**

Committee members’ responses were very broadly in the “1”s category ‘strongly agree’, however there were some “2”s mainly in relation to ‘is the committee forward looking’, and ‘do members have sufficient knowledge to contribute’. The comments on this were helpful. As for the CSAO Committee above these points will be picked up with the Principal and Senior Team. A particular concern was raised about the lack of development of a regional approach to planning and monitoring of financial matters. This has become entangled with the SFC decision to dissolve the Regional Strategic Body (see section 1 of this report) and the lack of progress being made by the suspension of the activities of the Region Transition Group

Comments include:

**What we have done well in the last 12 months:**

* Chair of committee brings useful challenge and reflect to those attending the committee

**Development I would like to see in the next year:**

* Further financial challenge of senior executive to ensure we provide clear and sufficient information to the committee to enable wider participation in the discussions and decisions;
* Longer term planning/visioning which reflects the financial situation within the sector.

**iv). Resources and General Purposes Committee (RGP)**

Responses were mainly “1”s and “2”s though there were a couple of “3”s in relation to being forward looking and around engagement with strategic partners. These points were also reflected in the responses of one of the senior team who has recently started attending the RGP.

**What have we done well in the last 12 months**

* Overall estates review
* Developed and utilised not only an ongoing and improved understanding of the College’s and Region’s business, but also a greater awareness of the environments they operate in – the relationships and partnerships that affect and impact upon engagement and delivery overall;
* Being as informed as is possible, but also demonstrating a willingness to listen, to be pragmatic and to be as adaptable as possible whenever a situation demands it.
* Level of detail on what can be complex issues is always good. We have done well with what we can control.

**Development I would like to see in the next year:**

* Issues relating to cladding often take a lot of time, perhaps given the very specialist aspect a separate meeting should be held and only an update at RGP;
* The FE Sector is facing numerous challenges with its colleges bearing the brunt of these. The impact upon learners, staff and management is likely to be significant. From a Lanarkshire perspective, it will be crucial for the improved operating arrangements with South Lanarkshire College to continue and, as a result, for the Region to be in a much better position to respond far more effectively and efficiently than would otherwise have been the case.
* Additionally, I would like to see a continuing return to more “face to face” environment where, to my mind, the benefits over online meetings are fundamental and offer:-
  + An improved ability to gauge others’ reactions during discussions and to work in a more positive way to address concerns;
  + An increased opportunity to judge and spark new thoughts and ideas; and
  + More generally, an opportunity to create improved prospects of a more engaging Board and Committee structure where individual characteristics and personalities are better known and can be better utilised.

1. **The findings of the Board operational effectiveness survey**

A copy of the questionnaire is attached at **Appendix 4**

**Summary**: The overall feedback on the Board’s operational effectiveness was positive; by far the responses were “1”s and “2”s (strongly agree/agree) with a smattering of “3”s and one “5” (strongly disagree). Alongside the “3”s, the comments made by some Board members indicate the areas we need to focus on in order to improve Board performance and at the same time encourage informed participation in discussion by a wide range of Board members. The one “5” in the survey is in connection with Staff Governance and clearly this response cannot be overlooked.

**SECTION 1 of the questionnaire: THE BOARD’S LEADERSHIIP AND STRATEGY ROLE**

This section was subdivided into:

* ethical leadership
* strategic leadership and
* corporate social responsibility

The majority of Board members scored “1” or “2” (strongly agree/agree); two scored “3” in the 3 subdivisions in this section but there were no scores “4” or “5”. In addition to being asked to rate Board performance, Board members were invited to give their comments on “what we did well in the last 12 months” and “developments I would like to see in the next 12 months”.

Among the comments on the leadership section of the survey some examples are:

**What we have done well over the last 12 months**:

* Working with College senior management to help provide strong focus and direction on the tasks in hand; this during an ongoing period of stress & strain on different fronts. The social elements were not forgotten either, with the continuing provision of meals to learners and, subsequently, the launch of the [NCL Education] Foundation;
* Board being aware timeously of issues;
* We have focused on the student experience;
* The Board is always thoughtful regarding the impact of any decision on students, staff and the wider community;
* Having witnessed some issues that have occurred in other FE colleges, I believe that our board operates collegiately but with the correct amount of challenge when required.

**Developments I would like to see in the next 12 months:**

* Strategy to address the financial challenges ahead;
* Increased opportunities to focus on forward looking strategic considerations;
* The key issue is effective use of resource. As resource is a challenge that may impact the leadership we can provide. Lack of resource also means time being allocated to mitigate that as opposed to providing leadership;
* Constant financial monitoring will be required;
* To continue developing initiatives that improve outcomes for the students, the staff and the local community.

**SECTION 2 of the questionnaire: QUALITY OF THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

The subsections covered here are:

* student engagement
* relevant and high-quality learning
* quality monitoring and oversight.

At each of its meetings the Board is updated on student projects and activities by the Students’ Association Presidents from both colleges; the Board has maintained its strong relationship with both Students’ Associations. The Chair has an open access policy to all Board members, especially the Student Presidents, should they wish to raise any issues with him outwith regular Board and Board Committee meetings.

Feedback in the questionnaire from Board members was very positive in relation to the Student Associations’ contributions with some constructive ideas for further development. All questionnaire respondees marked this section with “1” and “2” (“1” = strongly agree/agree) with one “3” in the section on ‘student engagement’.

Comments in relation to the quality of the student experience section include:

**What we have done well over the last 12 months:**

* The continuing development of Student Association/Board interactions has been very positive and, in my opinion, is now light years ahead of where we were previously. I believe that this view is shared by the SA Presidents. With changes to the Board and SA positions imminent, it is my fervent hope that these improvements continue offering a better learning environment for all concerned;
* I think there are challenges in terms of working with external agencies who are also suffering from the current economic position;
* There is a focus on the student learner;
* In terms of student voice, I believe students have a strong voice at the table through the student reps;
* SA reports have developed and become very informative.

**Developments I would like to see in the next 12 months:**

* Board should interact more with staff – in the past the Board were assigned to different departments;
* While we have mechanisms in place, what are the outcomes? Can we evaluate the impact of cuts on the college student experience?
* We need to be even more closely linked in with the Lanarkshire region to ensure that the college is providing the right courses;
* It is increasingly difficult to improve, or indeed maintain, the student experience with an ever-decreasing budget.

**SECTION 3 of the questionnaire: ACCOUNTABILITY**

This section has subsections:

* Accountability and Delegation arrangements
* Risk Management
* Committee Structure

Predominant responses in the 3 subsections are “1”s and “2”s, (strongly agree/agree) however there are several “3”s in the first two subsections given by 2 individual Board members. These could be interpreted be as ‘don’t knows’ as they came from newer or less experienced members of the Board, or that the Board’s performance in these areas is perceived as average and needs to be tightened up. Further information is required before appropriate action can be decided.

One member felt that the ‘scoping and monitoring sources of evidence (internal and external to the region) to ensure that risks and potential new risks, are understood and controlled’ should be strengthened while another commented that some of the decision making could be more transparent. Neither of these concerns were reflected more widely but they remain points to be followed up.

The **Committee structure** was supported by all respondees. Please see section 3 of this report for the detailed feedback on the 4 main RSB committees.

Comments in relation to Accountability include:

**What we have done well over the last 12 months:**

* Continued to deliver professionally and appropriately despite the difficulties and barriers eg credit delivery, finances and the governance situation at South Lanarkshire College that persisted for much of the year;
* We have maintained focus on the financial performance of the College;
* Committees from NCL and SLC have formed stronger working relationships;
* Majority of papers issued with adequate time for Board members to have meaningful discussions/debates.

**Developments I would like to see over the next 12 months**:

* Increased opportunities to better include all Board Members into College life. The benefits of doing so should enable improved awareness and understanding of the “working” college, thus allowing more knowledgeable and informed contributions across a wider range of matters for the benefit of the Lanarkshire Colleges;
* Less “regular” use of the Chairs’ Committee;
* Resourcing committees (increasing committee member numbers perhaps) so that they remain quorate for all sessions;
* Now COVID is away is there a requirement for a Chairs’ Committee?

**Staff Governance**

All responses in this section were either “1” or “2” with one exception which was a “5”.

Comments include:

**What we have done well over the last 12 months**

* Albeit with well identified and conveyed concerns about the process, handled the governance situation at South Lanarkshire College in as good and appropriate manner as was possible;
* I feel like the board treats and listens to everyone equally.

**Developments I would like to see over the next 12 months:**

* The effective and positive conclusion of the dissolution of the current Regional College/Assigned College structure in Lanarkshire;
* We are able to work within the parameters that we can in terms of management of staff;
* Unions having access to the Board to assist in resolving the poor unions/management relationship**.**

**SECTION 4 of the questionnaire: EFFECTIVENESS**

Sections in this part of the survey were:

* The Regional Chair
* Board members
* Board Secretary
* Board member recruitment, induction and development
* Board evaluation and Development Plan

Feedback on the role of the Regional Chair was overwhelmingly positive with “1”s and “2”s, as were the comments on the knowledge and skills of Board members and the role and effectiveness of the Board Secretary. Three Board members gave “3”s in their responses on the induction process and the ‘regular review and updating of the Board Development Plan’ and on ‘Board members keeping their own development requirements under review’.

From the responses and the comments to this section it is important to ensure that these issues are taken forward with the Chair and Board Secretary and to put improved arrangements in place to address the concerns raised. Board members need to be confident that they are well briefed and can confidently contribute to Board discussion and its overall effectiveness. It was also suggested that a more manageable self-evaluation process both for the annual Board performance review and for the appraisal of the Chair should be found.

Comments include:

**What we have done well over the last 12 months**

* Clerk to the Board’s knowledge is invaluable, Chair makes himself available to all Board members, the Independent member is very caring;
* The Chair and secretary have shown great leadership;
* Worked together! (Although would like to see a return to face to face meetings as opposed to the Zoom/Hybrid models used – of necessity – over the last period);
* I think the board operates relatively efficiently and effectively. I know who to contact for any issue or for developmental support, and the chair is very responsive and can be called on at any time.

**Developments I would like to see over the next 12 months**

* For the benefit of the two colleges and the region as a whole, it will be imperative for the dissolution of the current operating arrangements – the regional and assigned college structure – is dealt with as sensitively, but as timely as is possible. We are now some considerable time from when it was decided these arrangements would be curtailed and, even considering the impact COVID had on the process, real progress is required.
* Also, in keeping with comments elsewhere and especially considering the number of new Board Members that will be recruited in the new term, renewed attention to such as supporting and developing the Board – individuals and as a whole – be given and applied.
* I think there should be a more structured training program for board members. The initial training is helpful but I think there should be training given that is tailored to specific committees and also on specific topics.
* I would like to receive board papers as one PDF to make it easier to digest as a recipient.

**SECTION 5 of the questionnaire: RELATIONSHIPS AND COLLABORATION**

This responses to this section were very positive, all “1”s and “2”s.

Comments include:

**What we have done well over the last 12 months**

* We have continued to build on the internal and external relationships required to help deliver an effective education platform for staff and learners alike;
* We have strengthened relationships with SLC and associated committee structures. That said the assigned college has consumed a lot of time and attention;
* Staff rep invited to meeting with SFC for transparency and allowed to feed into process;
* SLC reports made available and presented well.

**Developments I would like to see over the next 12 months**

* Whatever the eventual dissolution agreement looks like, the impact upon the colleges, the region, staff and learners should not be a negative one;
* Whilst outside of our immediate control, it would be good to reach a resolution with the assigned college. Whilst SLC have their own board, we are the board of NCL AND the assigned college and NCL deserve more of our focus and attention.

1. **Chair’s review: Appendix 5**

This was undertaken by the Senior Independent Member. His full report is at Appendix 5.

**Summary**

There is no question that the last year has been a particularly challenging one and that there remain a number of difficulties which will continue for some time yet – financial concerns, regional needs and the dissolution of The Lanarkshire Order etc. However, it is clear also that the Regional Chair is regarded as being an effective leader of the Board, that he communicates confidence in his leadership and in his guidance around/navigation of issues. While work remains to be done, he has advanced the environment in which Board Members contribute - noteworthy in itself because of COVID and the Assigned College challenges - as well as, in robust conjunction with the College’s Senior Management Team, strengthened the relationship it enjoys with Board Members, the benefits of which are then evident at all levels within the College.

1. **Board Development Plan**

Arising from the questionnaires (Appendices 2, 3 and 4) a number of constructive suggestions were put forward by Board members:

* + To strengthen the Induction programme for new Board members;
  + To revise and reintroduce the mentoring/buddying programme;
  + To have Information sessions on:
    - Partner agencies, their structure and how they interact with colleges;
    - Sector jargon and acronyms;
    - Sector finances and how they are constructed;
    - Cyber security;
    - Risk appetite;
  + To work with the senior team at NCL to ensure members have sufficient and appropriate information to enable them to participate in discussions at the Board and in committees;
  + To consider better interaction between the Board Committees on key issues especially in relation to finance and risk where crossover meetings between the Finance and Audit and Risk Committees could be beneficial;
  + How to involve more Board members in important matters;
  + Having strategy sessions outwith the regular Board meetings which of necessity are heavily laden with process issues leaving little time for discussion and the generation of new ideas;
  + Closer collaboration between the Lanarkshire colleges and the region’s agencies;
  + Setting a defined annual meeting date for the Remuneration Committee;
  + To review how papers are presented to the Board and to ensure there is a cover sheet setting out the context with clear direction for the Board on the action needed.

1. **Next steps following approval by the RSB and submission to SFC:**
2. To put in place regular information sessions as noted in the section above, and to advise members of forthcoming events run by third parties;
3. To research and implement additional methods of induction for new Board and Committee members;
4. To work with the Principal and his senior team on future strategy events with Board members;
5. To investigate ways to improve the presentation of papers at Board and Committee meetings;
6. To consider how to we engage the wider board members in a more active and participative manner;
7. To continue to engage closely with, and give support to, the students through the Students Association;
8. To find more timely ways to keep Board members informed of developments, especially when decisions have been taken in the Chairs’ Committee because of the need for speedy action.
9. **Appendices:**

Appendix 1 The Lanarkshire Board self-evaluation process 2022-23

Appendix 2 Outline questionnaire for 1:1 interviews and Personal Development Plans

Appendix 3 The Committee operation and structure questionnaire

Appendix 4 The Board Operating effectiveness questionnaire

Appendix 5 Chair’s appraisal undertaken by the Senior Independent Board Member

Appendix 6 Board Development Plan 2023-25