

South Lanarkshire College

Externally Facilitated Effectiveness Review

FINAL REPORT

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1 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 involved several stages aimed at building up an overview of the Board's effectiveness. The components of the review process were:

- Initial meeting with the Chair, Principal and Governance Professional to agree the scope of the review and the overall project plan, 12 June 2025.
- Observation of the 9 September Board meeting
- Desk review of core governance documentation on the Board Teams platform, including Board and Committee agendas reports and minutes.
- Interviews with all Board members
- Board survey to seek members' views of governing processes
- Final meeting with Chair, Principal and Governance Professional to review the draft External Effectiveness Review report

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This effectiveness review was undertaken during the period when the college transitioned from being an Assigned College to become a Regional College following the dissolution of the Lanarkshire Regional Strategic Body at the end of July 2025.

This was a major milestone for South Lanarkshire College and the Board. There is a high level of level of enthusiasm and commitment from members around the move to become a Regional College and the launch of the new ambitious Strategy 2030 which has been the result of a robust strategic planning process.

This is an effective Board which benefits from strong leadership from a skilled Chair who is ambitious for the college and the quality of the student experience. A clear commitment to the principles of good governance underpins Board operations, and a rigorous approach ensures continued good practice.

The Governance Professional has had a significant and positive impact on the governance of the college since joining in 2024, building on the work of the previous interim Governance Professional.

Board members are fully engaged and clearly understand their role and responsibilities. This is a strong supportive Board with members who are prepared to question and challenge constructively and with respect.

Board decisions are made in the spirit of collective responsibility, and the quality of the student experience is core to Board and committee discussions.

There is a rigorous approach to ensuring effective governance. A Rolling Governance Review provides assurance to the Board that the principles of good governance detailed in the Code are embedded in the governance arrangements and how the Board operates. This dynamic document also details the governance improvement plan.

There has been some turnover in membership and as a result this is a 'young' board in terms of tenure. Over half the Board have joined since 2024. It is important to keep building the Board team and create space for members to get to know one another, understand their respective skills and experience and to build effective professional relationships. It is also important to ensure that newer members understand the context for the new Strategy 2030 and the planning involved.

3 EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW AGAINST THE CODE FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE IN SCOTLAND'S COLLEGES

3.1 Leadership and Strategy

The Board has faced a series of exceptional challenges and significant change since the last External Effectiveness Review in 2021. The appointment of a new Principal in 2023 and a new Chair and Governance Professional in 2024 has brought stability, a more constructive culture, and a clear focus on the needs of learners and employers.

Having worked through this challenging period, and with the move to become a Regional College, there is clear evidence that the governance of the college is now in a place of strength. The Board has successfully led the college through a period of significant transformation and restructure.

The Board benefits from effective leadership from a skilled Chair who has established a culture of transparency, inclusiveness, and teamwork. This is underpinned by a commitment continuous improvement.

The South Lanarkshire College Strategy 2025-30 was launched in August 2025, and there is a high level of enthusiasm and commitment around the new strategy. The Strategy 2030 clearly sets out the mission, vision and values of the college and a set of strategic goals.

The Board has been fully engaged in the strategic planning process through a series of Board Development Days. This has been a robust process, which has been informed by labour market intelligence and key stakeholder engagement. In order to inform their discussions and decision-making members also received briefings on key national priorities and reforms currently impacting on the college and the wider tertiary sector. A series of thematic Board workshops have focussed on topics such as key performance indicators and setting the risk appetite for the college.

There has been a clear focus on evaluating the performance measures which will underpin the strategic goals. A set of high-level Board metrics have been developed to enable members to evaluate progress against each of the strategic goals. Following discussion at the September Board meeting it was agreed to hold a further Board workshop to review and test out in more detail these metrics and the strategic target setting. This will include the introduction of a strategic dashboard which will allow members to have visibility of key data and progress.

3.2 Quality of the Student Experience

The quality of the student experience is clearly at the core of Board discussions and decision making. This is embedded in the culture of the Board.

Strategy 2030 reflects the commitment to ensuring and enhancing the quality of the student experience. The alignment of the curriculum to the needs of employers and regional economic development is also embedded in the strategy. There is a clear focus on ensuring that learning leads to meaningful destinations.

The Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee has effective oversight of the quality of the student experience, and monitors performance through student surveys and regular updates on KPIs. Quality is a standing agenda item, and the committee regularly conducts deep dives into key areas.

The other committees also consider the impact on the student experience of their decisions.

Student members have regular dialogue with the Chair and the Principal on Board related business.

The Student Association report sits high on the LTSE Committee and the Board agendas which reflects its importance. These reports are informative and high quality.

The Student Association works closely with the Head of Quality and Learning & Teaching Innovation and the college wide quality enhancement process. This ensures that the student voice is effectively captured and reported to the LTSE Committee and to the Board.

3.3 Board Accountability

There is a clear understanding of collective responsibility and the responsibility to ensure the quality of the education provided and provide best value for the funding provided.

Decision-making processes are transparent, properly informed, rigorous, and timely. Board papers have improved significantly and are now high quality with effective cover papers clearly stating the purpose, recommendations, risks, and a summary of the key issues to be considered. Although the volume of papers has reduced there is a recognition that there is still scope for improvement by providing more concise papers, this is under review by the Principal and the executive team.

Members have noted the improvement in financial reporting, and the concise narrative that is provided.

At the end of each Board meeting decisions and actions are summarised by the Governance Professional ensuring all members fully understand the outcomes of the meeting

Committees are well run and benefit from skilled Chairs who have established effective working relationships with their executive team members. Each committee has a clear Terms of Reference setting out the purpose of the committee and the alignment with strategic priorities.

Agenda planning meetings allows the committee Chairs and executive staff to discuss and agree agendas. Each committee has a workplan for the academic session. There is an appropriate balance of constructive scrutiny and support provided by members at committee level.

The committee Chairs reports to the Board are informative and highlight key issues for Board consideration

There is an appropriate level of trust in committees to be rigorous in their scrutiny and provide assurance to the Board.

As part of the strategic planning process members have been engaged in setting the risk appetite for the college, balancing risk and opportunity. Following the September Board meeting a further session is planned to consider further the management of risk and how risks are scored.

The annual report from the Audit and Risk Committee was submitted to the Board meeting in September 2025. This provides an oversight of all audit related activity and provides assurance to the Board on the effectiveness of the college control environment.

The Audit and Risk Committee meet annually with auditors without staff present.

The Audit and Risk and the Finance Committees also meet together annually.

Financial sustainability is core to Board discussions, and the Board strategy is to diversify income streams and reduce reliance on core SFC funding. The newly branded Business Innovation Team will focus on contract management and commercial activity to generate alternative sources of income.

3.4 Board Effectiveness

Effective governance structures and systems are evident and there is a strong working relationship between the Chair, Principal and Governance Professional based on a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.

The Chair has established a culture of openness and transparency, encouraging effective contributions from all members, and promoting teamwork. The Board provide effective challenge and support to the Principal and executive team.

The relationship between the executive team and the Board is well balanced and based on genuine teamwork. There is an appropriate level of trust, and confidence, in the Principal and the executive team.

Members value the positive impact that the Governance Professional has made since taking up post. The new Board Teams site provides access to governance documents and Board and committee papers as well as sector briefing and other updates.

There has been some turnover in Board membership, and as a result this is a relatively 'young' Board' in terms of tenure. Of the current membership over half have joined since 2024.

It is important to keep building the board team and create space for members to get to know one another, understand their respective skills and experience and to build effective professional relationships. The range of skills and experience that members bring to the Board is excellent.

One new member has recently been recruited and there are further vacancies to be filled. The Board skills matrix is used to inform the skills requirements of the Board.

Four new co-opted members have been recruited to fill skills gaps on the board committees.

Newer members have benefited from the new comprehensive induction training and have commented positively on the support provided. It is important to build confidence in newer members, and their ability contribute to Board discussions and to question effectively.

The Governance Professional provides information on training and development opportunities for members.

The Rolling Governance Review document, maintained by the Governance Professional, includes status and progress updates on actions that have been identified to further improve the governance of the college. This is a dynamic document which provides assurance to members that good governance and compliance with the Code is clearly demonstrated, along with a development plan for continuous improvement.

There is an annual workplan for Board and committee business which details the annual cycle of key business coming to the Board and Committees for discussion or decision.

3.5 Relationships and Collaboration

Partnership working is regularly discussed at board meeting and has formed an important part of the strategic planning process. Key stakeholders were engaged in discussions around strategic themes to ensure that the new strategy was relevant, responsive, and appropriately ambitious.

The newly branded Business Innovation Team will seek to build collaborative partnerships, seek alternative sources of funding, and contribute to the financial sustainability of the college

During the new academic session local and national key stakeholders have been invited to present to the Board. This and the regular briefing shared with members will enhance members understanding of the external operating environment and the importance of these key relationships.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Building the Board Team <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Given that over half of the members have joined in the last 18 months it is important to keep building the Board team and create space for members to get to know one another, understand their respective skills and experience and to build effective professional relationships. In order to ensure engagement with strategic plan, for new members, and co-opted members, include a briefing on the background to the strategic planning process as part of the induction.
2	Board and Committee Papers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although the volume of papers has reduced there is a recognition that there is still scope for improvement by providing more concise papers. This is under review by the Principal and the executive team.

5 ANNEX 1

5.1 Document Review

1. Board and committee terms of reference
2. Standing Orders, Scheme of Delegation
3. Financial statements
4. Annual Audit Report 2023.24
5. Board agenda and papers - June and September 2025
6. Strategic planning documents
7. Audit and Risk Committee annual report to the Board
8. Internal Audit Report on Corporate Governance August 2025
9. Risk Register
10. Board member profiles
11. External Effectiveness Review 2021
12. Board Development Plan
13. Rolling Governance Review document
14. Strategy 2030

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.