



# Report For Milton Keynes College Group Board Review 2024

## Executive Summary

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## 1. Executive Summary

### 1.1. General Background

Milton Keynes College Group (MKCG) initiated a review of governance in Spring 2024.

MKCG is a general further education, training and skills college, serving Milton Keynes and the surrounding areas. It provides a range of education from 14-16 through to higher education level programmes. MKCG is also a national provider of education services to prisons across the country. The College Group operates from two campus locations, namely Milton Keynes and Bletchley, and also from a new Institute of Technology at the Bletchley campus.

The development of a new Strategic Plan in 2021 was followed by a recent (February 2024) positive Ofsted inspection with the College Group being graded as good overall with outstanding being awarded to High Needs provision and Apprenticeships and the highest rating of 'strong' for business engagement. The College Group is also currently graded good for financial management by the funding agency.

The Chair has been in place from January 2024, and is supported by a Governance team comprised of an experienced Head of Governance (HoG) and a lesser experienced Governance Partner (GP). The Chief Executive Officer/Principal (CEO/Principal) has been leading the College Group since October 2022, and the Chief Operating Officer (COO) has been in post since February 2023.

### 1.2. Conclusions

#### 1.2.1. Board Composition - People and Attributes

MKCG governance is a hybrid Carver model based on operating through statutory committees and advisory groups, rather than being policy-driven.

The Board meets eight times a year and also holds an annual strategy day whilst the advisory groups meet at least three times a year and report directly to the Board.

The Strategic Plan 2021-26 (updated in 2023) provides a good strategic framework for the organisation and is well aligned to governance policy and practice. The Head Of Governance ensures that the cycle of business is clear and robust to satisfy the needs outlined in the Strategic Plan and designed to meet the needs of the student experience.

The Board, committees and working groups are provided with sufficient information and documentation and the productive, challenging relationships between governors and senior leaders mean that regular checks are performed to ensure continuous improvements in information and data to meet the changing needs and priorities.

The governors are well qualified and bring a diverse range of experience, skills and thinking to the Board with a significant number possessing expertise in finance, audit and risk. There are members who bring a wealth of expertise to cover most additional experience and skills requirements and the Board has an appetite to ensure that membership is as inclusive and diverse as possible.

There is an open culture and a trusting relationship amongst board members and the senior staff with a desired approach of 'no surprises' when presenting information and data.

There is an effective Link Governor Scheme in place, albeit under review, where members are assigned to a particular college function. Safeguarding has a designated link governor who provides feedback and reports from visits to the Board.

There are thorough records for the recruitment of the CEO/Principal and the COO, demonstrating good practice.

### 1.2.2. Board Structures and Processes

The Board has appropriate governance documents and an associated committee and working group structure in place, these being the structures and processes required for good governance. Members have access to a great deal of information, data and reports. The annual governance business plan emanates from the strategic aims, and the key priorities for the year are agreed at the July Board meeting.

The comprehensive Scheme of Delegation has been updated to include the changes in requirements for good governance outlined in the AoC FE Code of Good Governance.

The current board structure of regular board, committee (including Audit and Risk, Search and Governance and Remuneration) and advisory groups for Curriculum and Quality Finance and Capital Projects is working effectively.

The Board is provided with sufficient information and documentation to satisfy its needs in a timely fashion and meetings are accurately minuted. Papers presented to meetings have a helpful header sheet attached with a key information summary.

There is a clear policy framework with reporting mechanisms in place and this is regularly reviewed and updated as necessary. The Board's governance documents are updated regularly by the Head of Governance, who ensures robust compliance with the standards of good practice.

The Board takes collective responsibility for strategic oversight and plays an active part in defining the core values, aims and outcomes for students, and governance is well-planned and purposeful.

The Head of Governance ensures that the annual governance assessment takes place and that the governors' training and development needs are met.

### 1.2.3. Board Culture and Governor Interaction

The annual business plan begins at the governors' Awayday in May when the objectives and priorities are set for the year.

The level of interaction between individual members of the Board is high and there is a positive and effective relationship between the Board and the Executive founded on mutual trust and respect.

There is an understanding between the Board and the Executive team of the clear distinction between the roles of leadership and governance and leadership and management

The working relationship between the new Chair and the CEO/Principal is an embryonic but productive one with a clear desire to balance the right level of support and necessary challenge with a high degree of mutual respect for each other's perspectives. Regular meetings are held between the CEO/Principal, the Chair and the Head of Governance.

There is an open, transparent and supportive culture on the Board that encourages challenge and scrutiny in a productive balance between the need for change and the need to ensure consistent and embedded practice to bring sustainable high quality in the longer term.

There is a positive respect and understanding shown by the Principal and Executive and an awareness of the requirement to service the needs of the Board in a way that facilitates reporting, data and information to allow the Board to function effectively.

The governors are highly qualified and experienced with a good level of diverse business knowledge and understanding of governance to enable them to be effective in their role. There was evidence of productive questioning by members of the Board at all observed meetings.

Observations at meetings and interviews provided a clear picture of positive and proactive interactions, oversight and scrutiny.

There is a strong emphasis on focusing on the student experience at the heart of decision-making.

### 1.2.4. Board Impact and Effectiveness

Overall, the College Group governance is highly proficient and effective with the Board articulating the ambition to move from a rating of good to excellent.

The Board has consistently demonstrated a very positive impact on the College Group outcomes.

Policies and reporting are in place for key legal requirements including safeguarding, equity, diversity and inclusion, and health and safety.

The Board understands the importance of its strategic role and there is evidence that the operational activity is structured to meet the aims and objectives of the Strategic Plan. The Board has carefully chosen and

appointed members with key expertise, knowledge and skills to the roles of the Chairs of Committees and Task and Finish Groups.

There is clear evidence of some strong partnerships and collaborations in place with outside agencies such as businesses, employers, other FE and HE partners and collaborators and the College Group leads in some of these partnerships. There is also evidence demonstrated through questioning in the interviews and observations of committee and Board meetings of the Board's awareness of the need for effective policies and regular reporting mechanisms which were sampled in the desk top documentation review.

There is a sense of an open and transparent culture that was evident in the feedback from interviews, observations and both formal and informal interactions.

Members of the Board commented positively about the timely circulation of papers and documents for meetings, albeit some being considered a little too long.

The experienced, long-serving Head of Governance is well-respected and valued by all members and the Executive for her knowledge and understanding of Governance and the effective way in which she works with all concerned. The Head of Governance keeps up to date through training and development and there is a large amount of Governance policy information and materials on the College website, which is easy to access and up to date (at the time of review) demonstrating openness and transparency.

## **1.3. Recommendations**

### **1.3.1. Senior Post Holders' Appraisal Process**

Build on existing practice by formalising the appraisal process for all Senior Post Holders (SPHs) e.g. CEO/Principal, Chief Operating Officer, Head of Governance.

### **1.3.2. Longer Term Succession and Membership Strategy**

The Board to enhance the development of a longer term succession and membership strategy building on current good practice.

It would be an advantage to align this to the processes for the Governors' cycle of performance review and appraisal in order to:

### **1.3.3. Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and Surveys (SESaS)**

The Board to develop a strategy/plan for a Governance Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and Surveys.

This report also contains a number of considerations for development that may add value to/enhance current practice.