

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Context for the Review

HSDC is the largest General Further Education College in Hampshire, with three campuses at Alton, Havant and South Downs. It was formed from two mergers - South Downs College and Havant College merged in 2017 to form Havant and South Downs College, with Alton College joining the group in 2019. At the time of this review, the student body included c. 5,000 16-18 year olds, 3,000 Adult and Higher Education enrolments and 400 Apprentices as well as 144 students in receipt of high needs funding.

The college was graded Good by Ofsted in May 2024 (ie during the period of this review), with Outstanding provision in Adult Learning Programmes and a judgement of Strong in relation to the College's contribution to meeting skills needs (this is the highest judgement they can make). Inspectors said that arrangements for governance were effective. The college's ESFA financial health grade is currently Requires Improvement (P6 Management Accounts, January 2024). The board has agreed a two year financial improvement plan and is forecasting to remain at this grade into 2025/26.

At the time of the governance review both the board and Senior Leadership Team were stable with governors and senior staff having been in their roles for over a year.

The board appointed Shirley Collier to carry out the governance review, across the Spring and Summer terms 2024. The board review framework includes Structures, Processes, People and Culture. It relies on the collation of evidence around an overarching question in each area to ascertain an understanding of board dynamics. The board was also interested to understand more about board engagement, board effectiveness and board behaviours.

Board Structures and Processes

The Review has confirmed that Board Structures, Processes and other arrangements are currently strong and this is the result of the board's active attendance to its processes. The board's model of governance is appropriate and committees' Terms of Reference well written. The timing of strategy events ensures that governors can shape the college's plans. Key documents, both constitutional and strategic, are clear and enable governors to monitor progress. SLT's documents are transparent and governors access considerable informal opportunities to ensure they can triangulate effectively. Evaluation and self assessment are very well thought through.

Governors could build their confidence regarding their understanding of external stakeholders' needs by increasing the number of their own touchpoints. Board members could also do more to own the governance self-assessment processes.

People and Attributes

The board is currently composed of a mixture of members who, supplemented by cooptees, possess both the knowledge and skills to add value to the college's business. They shape its strategies, have oversight of performance and progress and challenge SLT's thinking in key areas. Governors' soft skills are most evident in the strong relationships they have built with members of SLT.

In addition to specific knowledge gaps which will need to be filled through recruitment in the next 12 months, the board may also need to pay attention to the development and deployment of soft skills.

Board Culture and Governors' Interactions

There is considerable evidence that both governors and SLT perceive board culture positively and consistently. Levels of trust are high. Strategies which lead to strong team culture are in place and are managed well. The competencies of chairs are considerable, and ensure that cognitive diversity can flourish.

Board assurance from Champion Governors could be strengthened. Chairs should continue to balance the voices, drawing in quieter members first and ensuring a culture of respect.

Conclusion: Overall Outcomes, Impact and Effectiveness

There is strong evidence that the board of HSDC is highly proficient and consistently impacts positively on college strategy, effectiveness, and outcomes. This is a result of having appointed well qualified people, deployed them in roles where they can develop, and created an environment in which challenge is welcomed.

Governance provides senior management with one of its lines of defence; the current approach should give assurance to stakeholders that the college is managing its assets prudently and putting the student experience at the heart of its deliberations.