



BOARD OF GOVERNORS BRIEFING

EAST SUSSEX COLLEGE GROUP



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Welcome to the East Sussex College Group (ESCG) Board Briefing.

The College's governing body is known as the East Sussex College Group Board. We have legal responsibility for the College, and our role is to give strategic oversight to the College. Governors do not involve themselves in the day-to-day management of the College. Those responsibilities are fulfilled by the CEO & Principal and her Executive Team. If you haven't already, you can read all about the Governors here [Meet the Governors](#).

The Board last met on 23 March 2021.

The Board were joined during the pre-Board briefing session by Steve Frampton, FE/HE Climate Commissioner and Chair of AoC Services Board. He talked about the essential role Colleges play in combatting climate change and creating a sustainable future. Follow the link to [learn more about the FE Roadmap](#).

Also during the pre-Board briefing session, the CEO provided Governors with a presentation that prompted reflection on progress since this time last year across a range of topics. These challenges included; leadership and governance change, inadequate financial health, high subcontracting levels, inadequate business systems, declining student recruitment, Covid-19 challenges, poor staff morale and wider reputational issues. The Board recognised that a significant amount of progress had been made across all of the identified areas. However, student recruitment, strengthening financial health and reputation building remain absolutely critical areas of focus. The Director of Governance similarly presented on progress against the (link to Governance Improvement Plan). Over the next two weeks, the Board will be undertaking a range of self-assessment activities (with external input from a National Leader

of Governance) to gauge the distance travelled. The pre-Board briefing session ended with a discussion about future-gazing and the government's ideas on reforming the further education system.

The Board meeting opened with a welcome to two new Governors, Alexandra Cheeseman and Zoey Bryant. Alex and Zoey join Leo Hunnisett as Student Governors on the Board. Kim Butler, Deputy Finance Director at Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, was approved as a new Co-opted Member of the Audit, Risk and Compliance Committee. The Board noted with sorrow the death of co-opted Member, Robert Mee, who had served the Board of Sussex Coast College, before the merger and later the East Sussex merged College Board, via his co-opted role on the HR Committee.

As always the first substantial item on the agenda was the Executive Team report, presented by the CEO. Governors asked how the [Skills for jobs: lifelong learning for opportunity and growth White Paper](#) had impacted on College thinking. They were advised of plans to increase collaborative partnership endeavours and plans to position the College better to meet local labour needs and narrow East Sussex's skills and attainment gaps.

The Board noted that on 22 March, the funding agency (ESFA) announced that Colleges that have delivered less than 90% of their 2020/21 Adult Education Budget allocation would have their unspent funds clawed back. The new threshold is lower than historic levels but higher than the 68% threshold set in 2019/20. This will present a challenge for the College, which is not forecast to meet the confirmed threshold. The Board was informed that the national Association of Colleges (AoC) and other representative bodies are arguing for a shift in this policy to recognise the Covid lockdown impact on adult recruitment.



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In terms of the College's finances, the Governors were told that income is £3,418k below budgeted levels and that the Covid-19 crisis has significantly impacted commercial income. The College continues to maintain good cash reserves, and it was confirmed that it would not require exceptional financial support. The financial health score remains as 'Requires Improvement'. The Board were updated on the progress of the disposal of surplus College assets, as approved at the last Board meeting.

The Board were delighted to hear that a new approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is being led by the CEO, and the new EDI Policy (link) was approved. A refreshed EDI Strategy will be brought to the next Board meeting.

In matters of the conduct of senior staff, Senior Post Holders at the College, the scrutiny of conduct is a power and duty reserved by the Board. If concerns arise, the Board can establish a Special Committee to oversee a disciplinary process. The Board approved revisions to the Special Committee Terms of Reference. The revisions clarified expectations around membership of the Committee. No Senior Post Holders at the College are currently subjects of the Special Committee, but the Board is required to have its procedures agreed should circumstances arise.

In December 2019, the Board received a recommendation from the Further Education Commissioner to reduce and rationalise its committee structure. Plans to further strengthen, streamline and focus the Board and reduce the number of Committees and meetings were discussed and approved, and the further changes will take effect after an ESCG Strategic Half Day on 28 June 2021. More details on the new structure will be published on the [ESCG Governance web-page](#).

The Board also approved a proposal to run a targeted recruitment campaign after the Easter break for co-opted

Members and two Independent Governors.
The Board next meets on 17 July 2021.

If you would like to discuss any aspects of this short briefing, please contact Mia Bryden, Director of Governance at mia.bryden@escg.ac.uk or on 07768335984.

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