



Welcome note from the Chair of East Sussex College Group

Dear Colleague

Thank you for your interest in the role of Chair of East Sussex College Group (ESCG). The Board of Governors and I hope that you may feel able to apply for this role and that some contextual information might persuade you that this role offers the opportunity to lead the governance process for the College through its next phase, as envisaged in the ESCG Strategic Plan 2021-2024, and potentially beyond.

The College Group was formed in March 2018 from the merger of two prior East Sussex general further education colleges, which were themselves the products of merger and re-organisation in the preceding decades. The merger ambitions, which were supported by Government restructuring funds in the form of grant and loan, were to enable a coherent and effective East Sussex county wide networking of FE, HE, skills and apprenticeship provision, able to make significant investment to ensure high quality learning and skills for young people, employees and communities across this wonderful county.

The support for the merger and its ambitions recognised an ESCG commitment to operate in partnership with key county stakeholders, East Sussex County Council, borough and district councils, the specialist Sixth Form College (Bexhill), land based College (Plumpton) and the universities, schools, LEPs and employer and community representative organisations with vital roles to play in East Sussex.

Beyond East Sussex, the College has also been instrumental in developing a partnership approach with all Sussex colleges to skills improvement across the whole 'Sussex' patch and is a vital member of the developing Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) 'trailblazer'. The partnership has government strategic development funding to forge coherent plans to enable post Covid training and re-training in vital skills sectors, including 'green technology'.

You will see, from the ESCG Strategic Plan, that the Board and the Executive leadership team have committed to ambitious plans for the college's 'people' (learners and staff), for the 'estate' and 'infrastructure' across the county, for communications and engagement, financial resilience and for governance. This planning has been a vital activity after a period of two years after the 2018 merger when the college's financial position was not healthy and there was significant 'churn' in its leadership team. Several long serving governors also left during that period and the current board has a significantly different gender, age and background 'mix' to the one formed at the point of merger.

My tenure in the role of Chair began in March 2020 and during the subsequent period we have been able to appoint a capable and effective CEO/Principal and a Deputy Principal and Chief Finance Officer and we have refreshed the membership of the Board, developed the 2021-24 Strategic Plan and stabilised the financial health of the college. At time of writing, we anticipate an imminent Ofsted inspection and have self assessed the provision as 'good'. We are in the process of recruiting to the role of Director of Governance, with excellent, experienced interim governance advisors in place to see us through that process. We have received significant support and guidance from the FE Commissioner team and the Education and Skills Funding Agency and we have strong and resilient relationships with East Sussex County Council and Hastings and Eastbourne Borough Councils and Lewes District Council, which have been especially valuable during the Covid affected periods of great community strain.

We now seek a committed, calm and values-driven Chair to lead the Board of Governors, the 'stewards of the assets' on behalf of the communities we serve, through the years of the Strategic Plan and beyond. There will inevitably be challenges, not least in the delivery of comprehensive estates and digital infrastructure strategies and in attracting, developing and retaining highly effective and resilient people, whilst managing finances in a part of the education sector that has had historic funding challenges and has found Covid related threats to previously reliable income streams. ESCG has a talented and energetic executive leadership team and serves a county with a rich cultural offer, beautiful coastal and rural areas and ambitious regeneration plans for key towns.

We hope that you decide to apply to take on the role of ESCG Chair from the end of March 2022, with the possibility of joining the board as 'Chair Designate' before that time.

Best wishes

David Smith

Chair, East Sussex College Group