

## Executive Summary

Warrington & Vale Royal College is a general further education college operating from two sites in Cheshire: Warrington and Winsford. The College was last inspected by Ofsted in November 2024. The College was recognised as 'Good' with some outstanding features and as making a strong contribution to meeting skills needs. Ofsted noted that:

*'Leaders and governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the college ... Governors are experienced in the further and higher education sectors and relevant industries such as health and construction. They use their experience and expertise to hold leaders to account for the quality of the provision.'*

The External Board Review of Warrington & Vale Royal College between October 2025 and February 2026 and was aligned with the *Association of Colleges' (AoC) Code of Good Governance for English Colleges* and the Department for Education guidance on external board reviews.

The primary objectives of the review were:

- To evaluate the effectiveness of the College's governing body, including its structure, roles, and responsibilities.
- To assess decision-making processes, transparency, and accountability mechanisms.
- To ensure alignment with best practices in further education governance and regulatory requirements.
- To identify strengths and areas for improvement in leadership and oversight.
- To assess the impact of the previous Board Review action plan and its implementation and to provide actionable recommendations to enhance governance effectiveness.

The Review was undertaken by Alison Robinson, an FE Consultant with more than 34 years' experience in the FE sector, including 12 years reporting to Boards and 8 years' operating as a Non-Executive Director / Governor / Trustee across a range of boards in the public, private and charity sectors.

Prior to commencing the Review, an initial scoping meeting was undertaken to identify the key elements of the review process and any additional lines of enquiry the Board wished the Review to include.

It was agreed that as part of the review there would be specific lines of enquiry that examine the following:

- Succession planning to support the College's aspiration to move from 'good to great'
- Board culture and behaviours
- Board papers

The review took the following steps:

1. Initial scoping meeting
2. Desk top review
3. Board and committee observation
4. Interviews
5. Ongoing feedback / keep in touch meetings
6. Draft report
7. Initial findings meeting to check factual accuracy of draft report
8. Final report completed
9. Presentation of findings to the Board

Throughout the review process a professional and supportive approach was taken to ensure that all Board members felt listened to and valued and were encouraged to be open and honest, allowing the Board to recognise its strengths and areas for development. Emerging findings were shared by the Reviewer with the Governance Professional and relevant members of the Board throughout the process to check clarity of understanding, and to triangulate evidence.

The full report sets out the main findings made in relation to the 3 key aspects of the review:

- ✓ Board structure and composition,
- ✓ Strategic oversight, accountability, and risk management,
- ✓ Board culture and dynamics

The following table summarises the key strengths and areas for development:

BOARD COMPOSITION	
STRENGTHS	AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT
1. The Board has completed a skills audit to assess the breadth and depth of the Board's skills and knowledge to inform further development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consider further Board process improvements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree Terms of Reference for Board Strategy Mornings</li> <li>• Add IT and Cyber Security to Finance and Resources agenda to ensure effective coverage</li> <li>• Continue to move towards the introduction of a Board portal to assist with the management of information and decision making</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
2. Strong balance of knowledge, skills, and experience on the Board and on the Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Strengthen the student voice / representation on the Board and at Standards and Curriculum Committee both in person and via papers</li> </ul>
3. Governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the College and the Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Consider whether Staff Governors are best placed on Standards and Curriculum only</li> </ul>
4. Clear and thorough set of governing documents	
5. Thorough Governor induction, training, and appraisal processes are in place and support succession planning	
6. Strong attendance at Board and Committee meetings by independent Governors	
STRATEGIC OVERSIGHT, ACCOUNTABILITY AND RISK MANAGEMENT	
STRENGTHS	AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT
1. Robust accountability measures and financial controls in place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Board process improvements – consider the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adding Student Representative Meetings to the Governor Engagement Calendar</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adding IT and Cyber Security to Finance and Resources agenda to ensure effective oversight (as previously noted above)</li> <li>Standardising the format of Link Governor job descriptions and offering a feedback template to report back to the Board</li> </ul>
2. Strong reporting to Board with thorough agenda setting, reports on time and with robust detail provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Board papers / presentations considerations for further development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Further training for all presenters / board paper writers</li> <li>Further revision of the template front cover sheet</li> <li>Consistent use of tabularised KPIs that are red, amber, green rated (RAG)</li> <li>Presenters assume papers have been read and focus on the vital few issues to allow for more strategic discussion</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
3. Effective risk management	
4. Full review of the Weston College recommendations to ensure the same could not happen at the College	
5. Thorough and effective Governor self-assessment process and action planning leading to improvements	
<b>BOARD CULTURE AND DYNAMICS</b>	
<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT</b>
1. Positive and open culture of support and challenge within the Board in line with the 7 principles of public life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Some Board members would benefit from further training / guidance on funding and curriculum costing / cross subsidy</li> </ul>
2. Tenure of office no more than 8 years.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Board process improvements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider expanding the Skills Matrix and Board appraisal process to include the expected behaviours</li> <li>The findings from the Skills Audit directly feed into the Board Development Plan</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
3. Appraisal process is very thorough, supportive and developmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Consider reviewing informal opportunities for Board members to meet to further enhance communication</li> </ul>
4. Board members are self-reflective, keen to learn and further develop	
5. Very effective induction, training, development, and succession planning in place for Board members	
6. Aspirational culture and focus on continuous improvement	

The overall conclusion on Board effectiveness is that:

The overriding culture and mindset of Warrington & Vale Royal College evidenced in their meetings and interviews is one of aspiration and a focus of continuous improvement. Board members are open minded, curious, committed to supporting their learners, and do the best for their local and regional community. All Board members are from the local area and speak with passion and enthusiasm. They are keen to use their skills to give something back to their local College and community.

The Board is highly effective in reviewing progress against its strategic ambitions, in holding senior leaders to account and ensuring effective oversight of the College's assets. The Board and Senior Leadership Team have together overseen a continuous improvement in the financial and educational performance of the College and are keen to work together to move the college from 'good to great.'

Good practice was particularly seen in their appraisal system for the Board and their review of the FE Commissioner Report on Weston College with a full investigation and action plan to ensure there were no gaps in accountability.

**There is a wide range of evidence that the Board is proficient and has a positive impact on college strategy, effectiveness, and outcomes.**

**The following recommendations have been made to the Board:**

1. Strengthen the student voice / representation on the Board and at Standards and Curriculum Committee both in person and via papers.
2. Continue to develop board papers with further refinements made to the newly introduced Board template reports to streamline documents, provide greater consistency and data transparency. Update training / coaching for presenters in line with refinements made to reporting.
3. Consider a range of suggested Board process improvements. For example, expand the Skills Matrix and the Board appraisal processes to include board behaviours, and continue to move towards the introduction of a Board portal to assist with the management of information and decision making
4. Review informal opportunities for Board members to meet to further enhance communication.
5. Review the role of Staff Governors.

Thanks, and appreciation are recorded to all those who have engaged in this Review. Particular thanks to the Governance Professional, Laura Churchill, who has worked hard to ensure that arrangements have been smooth and efficient.