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REGIONAL BOARD REPORT

BORDERS COLLEGE REGIONAL BOARD

Subject: Board Developments and Documentation	**Purpose:** **For Approval** ☐ **For Discussion** ☒ **For Information** ☐
Prepared by: Ray McCowan	**Date: 13 June 2023**

Purpose: To provide Members with an update on agreed development activities and to propose additional areas for the new academic year.

Linked to Strategic Ambition: Take a leading role in enabling an inclusive, resilient and sustainable Scotland

Performance Measures: Recogise nationally as a progressive organisation

Linked to Strategic Risk Register: New Risk (outwith themes)

Linked to Strategic Risk Register: New Risk (outwith themes)

New Risk Commentary: **Governance**

Executive Summary:

This paper reports on progress made regarding feedback to the Chair during 2022-23 and also highlights where further work remains to be done. It also highlights in subsequent sections emerging changes that have happened in year that are or will enhance the effectiveness of the College Board. Finally, it outlines several issues it would like Board members to approve for future consideration and review in the 2023-24 academic year.

Recommendation: Board discuss the paper and agree the future items.

Previous Committee Approvals: None

For publication ☒	**For publication with redactions** ☐	**Not for publication** ☐

Chairs Paper on Board Development Plan Progress and Future Proposals for Consultation

Introduction

At the end of academic year 2021-22, Board members provided feedback to the Chair on suggested areas for improvement. In broad terms these recommendations or suggestions were described under two main headings: first to develop better external links across the Borders business community and second, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the business of the Board.

This paper aims to report on progress in both these areas and also highlight where further work remains to be done. It also highlights in subsequent sections emerging changes that have happened in year that are or will enhance the effectiveness of the College Board. Finally, it outlines several issues it would like Board members to approve for future consideration and review in the 2023-24 academic year.

Update on Previous Board Development Plan Actions from 2022

Development of External Links

As part of their feedback, Board members helpfully provided a number of contacts it would be beneficial for the Chair to engage with. When triangulating these with the work being done by the Principal, Directors and the DEBI Team, it quickly became apparent that were the Chair to approach these organisations unsolicited, it may confuse partners on why such an intervention was being made.

The Chair therefore agreed with the Principal and other Executive Directors to more opportunistically engage with partners in the region rather than make an overt approach. To that end some partners have been approached via CPP meetings and others via introductions at the Convention of the South of Scotland. The Principal and Chair have also been more actively involved in joint external activity with wider partners including SoSE, ERG, SRUC, SFC and wider college colleagues via Think the Unthinkable Events at Colleges Scotland.

Improve Effectiveness of Business of the Board

The Board Development Plan feedback from last year proposed several actions to be taken forward:

1. **Develop informal opportunities for the Board to meet with the Executive Team and each other**. This action was progressed via the recent Board dinner. We will look for further opportunities across the next academic year and aim for at least two events: one in the pre-Christmas period and one between Easter and summer.

2. **Rotate meetings across the College estate**. This has been largely delivered with colleagues having attended board sessions in both Galashiels and Hawick this year and the first Board meeting of the 2023-24 academic year being scheduled to take place at Newton St Boswells. Subject to Board members being content to rotate in this way we will aim to repeat this pattern of meetings.

3. **Look for ways to better capture the student voice**. In the past twelve months the Chair has met with and will continue to meet with the Student President and Student Vice Presidents between Board meetings. The aim of these meetings is to build confidence in and support the Student President and Vice President to share with the Chair issues they may not be comfortable doing so within a Board meeting or to help and empower them to raise these issues in the Board meeting. Early signs are that this process is working quite well with the Student President and Vice Presidents attending Board meetings/events and making effective contributions. This work will continue into the next academic year.

4. **Improve the visibility of Learning for Leading**. This will be raised as an end of year item for discussion at the June Board meeting when hopefully most if not all of the Learning for Leading Events will have been completed. [The aim of this discussion session at the Board meeting will be to assess lessons learned and how the Board and college can carry forward some of the findings and possible actions from these L for L visits.

5. **Review the Format of Board Reports**. This is part complete but remains a work in progress. There is now a far better balance between the executive summary, the main paper and the discussion/presentation to Board than previously. The section at the end of the summary paper on the assessment of risk and possible impacts of what is proposed still needs further work as there is some variability on the extent to which these sections are completed.

6. **What is not working so well**? Feedback last year suggested that the Board would welcome a greater awareness of, and involvement in, what is not going so well that the Board could provide an input to. This again is a work in progress. Our work at Board Development Days and in Board meetings around Think the Unthinkable, College risk appetite, funding challenges and strategic options to address these, are all examples of where the Principal and Executive colleagues are sharing the wider sector challenges and challenges for the ollege with the Board. This work will continue into the new academic year.

Emerging Actions in Year: Update on Progress and Plans to Carry Forward

1 . **Balanced Scorecard/Infographic/College at a Glance**. During the business year some Board colleagues commented that the volume of papers and number of items at each meeting made it quite difficult to ascertain what overall performance in the College looked like. This was not a criticism of any of the individual papers or items but that it was sometimes difficult to determine what was working well and what might need improvement. To address this issue the Principal will present a balanced scorecard or similar infographic at the June Board meeting and get Board member feedback on whether this is fit for purpose to be taken forward at each future meeting.

2. **Balance of Board and Sub Committee Business and ToR Reviews**. The terms of Reference for all Sub Committees and the Board were agreed in September 2022. At the time of that review it was agreed that the Committees would manage under these ToRs for a full academic year and that they would then be reviewed. With the Sub Committee cycle complete or almost complete for 2022-23, the Sub Committee Chairs will meet with the Principal, Vice Chair and Chair to review the workings of the Sub Committees and how the ToRs may need to be changed to enhance both the Sub Committees and Boards effectiveness. This meeting will hopefully take place before the June Board meeting.

3. **Raise profile of Principals Report to be an item for Discussion not Information**. During the 2022-23 business year the Principals report has typically been an item for information. However, such is the volume of change and significance of change in both the College and the wider sector the Chair has agreed with the Principal that going forward from June 2023, the Principals Report will now be an item for discussion.

4. **College Communications to Board Members**. During the year there were occasions when the sequencing or timing of communications to Board members could have been better. The Principal and Chair have now agreed that where there are important or significant college issues being communicated across the senior team or to staff that Board members will as a matter of course receive these communications at exactly the same time.

Future Items for Consultation/Approval to Progress

At the time of writing Board members are being asked to complete the annual evaluation of the Boards effectiveness. Independently of any actions that may arise via that evaluation, the Chair is

proposing several actions that he would like the Board to comment on and approve as an action to be taken forward in the 2023-24 business year.

1. **Increased role for Chairs Committee as Board Sub Group**. As colleagues will know the Chairs Committee is an occasional Sub Committee of the Board convened to discuss one off issues of significance. This year for example the Chairs Committee was convened to discuss a staff settlement agreement and the approval to launch the VS scheme.

   Going forward the Chair would like to propose a more active role for the Chairs Committee. There is no intention to make it a standing committee that needs to meet several times a year. However, with the volume of emerging changes and reviews due to take place in the relatively short term the Chair is of the view that it would help both the Principal and Chair to consult more frequently with the Chairs Committee to provide a Board perspective or view on any significant emerging issues.

   The outcome of any of these meetings would of course be reported to the full Board. However, by convening a Chairs Committee in this way more frequently, it may obviate the need that may otherwise arise to convene extraordinary full board meetings.

2. **Further Simplification and Rationalisation of Board Agenda**. This builds on a point from the previous section about the volume of items presented at each Board meeting. Many of these are for information and are given only a cursory look at the Board meetings. They do however significantly increase the volume of papers and items for each meeting and in all cases have already been given detailed scrutiny in one of the Sub Committees.

   Going forward it is proposed to significantly rationalise the items for information section. Where items have been given detailed scrutiny in one of the Sub Committees [as per that Sub Committees ToR] they will not come forward to the Board for information unless by exception. This does not of course mean that Board members cannot access these items. All Board members have access to all Board Sub Committee papers so can read these at any time. It will hopefully mean that there will be less items and less papers to read specifically for the Board meeting itself.

3. **Policy Reviews.** During the year the Gary Lineker issue that dominated social media led to a recommendation that the College reviews its social media policy. During this review two things became clear. First that policy had not been reviewed for some time. Second, rather than waiting for opportunistic incidents such as this to be the catalyst for a review of policies, might it not be appropriate to undertake a proactive review of all policies that it is relevant for the Board to scrutinise or input to?

   As colleagues might imagine, the College has numerous policies and it is entirely appropriate that the vast majority of these are rightly implemented and reviewed by the Executive and Management Team with no involvement from the Board. The proposal is therefore as follows: -
   - The Principal, Chair and Board Secretary look at the current suite of policies and make a recommendation to the [revised] Chairs Committee about the policies that remain exclusively in the domain of the Management and Executive Teams and which ones should have scrutiny and input from the Board,
   - Once this is agreed, each policy is then reviewed to determine when it was last reviewed, whether it remains currently fit for purpose and whether any changes or updates might be appropriate. For those policies where Board input is deemed appropriate input will be sought from the Chairs Committee members on behalf of the full Board.

4. **Review of Standing Orders and Schemes of Delegation.** Similar to the point above, the standing orders and schemes of delegation for the Board do not appear to have been reviewed for some time. While it is unlikely that this will lead to significant change the Chair is recommending that these are reviewed as a matter of course so we can be assured they remain fit for purpose.

5. **Whistleblowing.** This is an issue that potentially cuts across the whole college and can potentially be raised by any member of staff, student or Board member. Rather than wait for a specific whistleblowing issue to arise and then have to react to and manage the risks at that time, the Chair is recommending a review of our current whistleblowing policies and procedures to proactively update our approach to whistleblowing, should such an issue arise.

The Chair is looking for the Boards approval and agreement to carry forward and implement the actions in points 1-5 above.