YORK COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY CENTRE

External Review of Governance 2026

Summary of Outcomes and Governance Improvement Priorities

INTRODUCTION

All further education colleges are required to undertake an external review of governance periodically in line with Department for Education requirements.

York College and University Centre commissioned Rockborn to undertake an External Review of Governance between February and May 2026. The review included observation of Corporation and committee meetings, review of governance documentation, survey feedback, and discussions with governors, senior leaders and the Director of Governance.

The purpose of the review was to provide independent assurance regarding the effectiveness of governance arrangements and to identify opportunities to support continuous improvement.

This summary provides an overview of the key findings from the external review together with the Governing Body's priorities for further development. The full report was considered by the Corporation in July 2026.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FROM THE EXTERNAL REVIEW

Rockborn concluded that governance at York College is strong and has significant impact on the College. The review found clear evidence that governors provide effective strategic leadership, robust scrutiny and positive support and challenge to senior leaders. The reviewers also confirmed that there were no areas of non-compliance or procedural weaknesses identified within the College's governance arrangements.

The review highlighted the positive culture that exists within the governing body, describing governance as being characterised by openness, trust, constructive challenge and a strong commitment to learners. Governors were found to work effectively with senior leaders while maintaining appropriate independence and accountability.

The review recognised the significant contribution made by the Chair, Principal and Chief Executive, and Director of Governance in developing strong governance processes, effective relationships and a culture of continuous improvement.

SUMMARY OF KEY STRENGTHS

The review identified a number of significant strengths within governance at York College:

Learner-centred governance

A strong learner-first ethos was evident throughout governance arrangements, with governors demonstrating a clear commitment to student success, wellbeing and achievement. Student voice is increasingly embedded within governance discussions and decision-making.

Strong governance culture

Governance was recognised as operating within a positive and inclusive culture characterised by openness, honesty, mutual respect and constructive challenge. Relationships between governors and senior leaders were identified as a particular strength.

Skilled and experienced governors

The Corporation benefits from governors who bring significant professional expertise from education, finance, business, legal and public sector backgrounds. Recruitment and succession planning arrangements were found to be robust and informed by a comprehensive skills-based approach.

Effective strategic oversight

Governors were commended for their involvement in shaping and monitoring the College's Strategic Plan and maintaining oversight of key strategic priorities, risks and performance indicators.

Strong financial and risk oversight

The review found that financial stewardship, audit arrangements and risk management are well established and effective. The work of the Audit Committee and the Corporation's approach to strategic risk oversight were highlighted as areas of particular strength.

Effective oversight of key compliance areas

Governors were found to maintain strong oversight of safeguarding, Prevent, equality, diversity and inclusion, staffing and wellbeing, ensuring that appropriate assurance is received in these important areas.

Robust governance processes

Governance policies, procedures and committee structures were found to be comprehensive, compliant and effective. The review also highlighted innovative governance practice, including the use of technology and new approaches to governor engagement and information sharing.

AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Whilst concluding that governance is strong and effective, the review identified several opportunities to support the Corporation's commitment to continuous improvement.

These include:

- Continuing to strengthen engagement between governors and staff across the College.
- Providing additional opportunities for strategic discussion and Corporation development.
- Further enhancing the presentation of information to support governor scrutiny and decision-making.
- Continuing to develop governance arrangements in response to Corporation succession and recruitment activity.
- Reviewing governance processes to maximise meeting effectiveness and efficiency.

The review notes that these recommendations are intended to support the Corporation in moving from strong governance towards sector-leading practice.

GOVERNING BODY RESPONSE

The Corporation welcomed the findings of the review and is pleased that Rockborn concluded that governance at York College is strong, effective and making a significant contribution to the success of the College.

The Corporation recognises the value of independent external review and has incorporated the recommendations into its Governance Improvement Plan for 2026-2029.

Key priorities arising from the review include:

- Supporting the induction and development of new governors.
- Enhancing engagement between governors, students and staff.
- Creating additional opportunities for strategic discussion and Corporation development.
- Continuing to strengthen oversight of strategic priorities, including sustainability and equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Further refining governance reporting and meeting processes to maximise effectiveness and impact.

Progress against these priorities will be monitored through the People and Governance Committee and reported regularly to the Corporation as part of the College's ongoing commitment to excellent governance.