



PRESS RELEASE

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New research reveals impact of virtual college governance

A new report has provided valuable insight into how colleges were governed during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The report, commissioned by College Development Network (CDN) and the Association of Colleges (AoC), looks at the experiences of colleges, chairs and governing body members and how they adapted to the virtual world.

Using more than 300 responses to a questionnaire distributed to college governors, governance professionals and principals in July 2020 across England and Scotland, the report also draws upon the shared experience of wider examples of online governing activities.

It looks at what governing colleges looked like before Covid-19 and the impact of the move to virtual practices during the lockdown from March 2020. The report recognises that the shift to virtual meetings has been a constructive and positive development to support governance in colleges. However, the report makes clear that virtual meetings should not be seen as a substitute for face-to-face meetings.

It also found there was a good case for using a mix of meeting formats going forward and provides advice for future use of virtual governing meetings.

The report makes a series of recommendations to maximise the success of board meetings. Including appreciating the potential of the selected technology, making sure all meeting participants can use the technology, and shaping the governing event to get the best from the virtual meeting arrangements.

Chief Executive of CDN, Jim Metcalfe, said:

“I am delighted that CDN and the AoC have further developed their partnership to produce this timely and important UK-wide report. The recommendations in the report provide a key checklist for boards, particularly as Covid restrictions are likely to be with us for some time to come.

“The report reveals how Boards have adapted during 2020, and it finds that the changes they have made during the pandemic will provide lasting impact and benefits for the ways in which Board meetings can be conducted.”

Deputy Chief Executive of AoC, Kirsti Lord said:

“Today’s report is a useful contribution for governing bodies needing to find new and effective ways of meeting and organising in a climate that has shifted drastically in less than a year. Board members responded extremely well making new arrangements work and building confidence with online systems many had never used before.

“It is clear that many of the online experiences will carry over as the world opens up again. However, as the report sets out, there is a call to return to face-to-face meetings when safe to do so and a blend of online and physical would work best for the future. I hope many governing bodies will find the report useful and insightful as we prepare for a system that works for everyone in a post-Covid environment.”

ENDS

Notes to editors

College Development network (CDN) is the national agency in Scotland that supports skills and sector development across colleges and vocational learning.

CDN recently launched its new three-year Strategic Framework 2020-23, which sets out five key Outcomes, through which we will realise our mission to support the college and skills system in driving success for students, their wider communities and regional economies.

We will phase our strategic planning over the coming three years to ensure our Outcomes are achieved. As we support staff and students to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, and work with colleges to play their part in Scotland's economic revival by providing people with the skills employers need, there are some objectives we will particularly focus on in the coming 2020-21 academic session, including:

1. Supporting the learning workforce to develop excellent digital skills
2. Promoting systems leadership development opportunities across the sector
3. Developing collaborative research and enquiry programmes focused on recovery and practical innovation in education and skills
4. Ensuring that tackling the climate emergency and building a sustainable economy is at the heart of the post-Covid strategy

Each year we engage with thousands of members of staff working in colleges across Scotland through our training and network events. We also work with learners through our thematic projects like our governance and leadership summit, College Expo event, and national awards programme.

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