MONT ROSE COLLEGE OF MANAGEMENT & SCIENCES

GOVERNANCE REVIEW

AUGUST 2020

Mont Rose College Governance Review

Introduction: Mont Rose College has and continues to make a difference in the life opportunities of thousands of learners.

The College adopted the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) code of Governors issued in 2014 and revised in 2018. The terms of references for the Board of Governors were changed according to the CUC code.

The last evaluation of Governance and Management happened in 2017.

The CUC code recommends that Governing Bodies should undertake a "full and robust review of their effectiveness and that of their committees," and such reviews should be conducted at least every four years."

A working group was formed by the Board of Governors (BOG) and Academic/Quality Assurance Board (AQAB) to review the college Governance and Management.

The working group was comprised of:

Chair & External: Dr. David Baker

2 Members from AQAB: Desh Sharma and Pratika Teyssedou

1 Student: Adebisi Aduke Abdul Razzaq

The working group met online through Google Meet twice to go through the feedback forms received

MONT ROSE COLLEGE: GOVERNANCE REVIEW

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The College should ensure that the review forms are filled in completely and carefully and that the forms are signed off, as required, with notes made of follow-up actions.

2. It would be worth considering having a different form for the Board of Governors so that a greater degree of granularity can be achieved in the review process. Student feedback should always be elicited.

3. The current annual review process should be repeated and expanded to include a review of individual governors and members.

4. Both Boards should be increased in size in order that they become truly diverse and inclusive bodies.

5. A higher turnover of members is needed, in line with best practice elsewhere, and as a way of refreshing the two Boards.

6. A formal induction programme is strongly recommended, as are regular briefings on developments within the HE sector.

7. There should be a more formal management framework for the training and development of Board members.

8. A skills audit should be regularly carried out and the results discussed by the Boards and through the member appraisal process.

9. There should be a succession planning process for both Boards.

10. An annual log of attendance should be produced as part of the annual reporting process.

11. The frequency with which the Boards meet needs to be carefully considered.

12. The current positive environment within the two Boards should be maintained and fostered as the College's governance structures develop.

13. Further articulation of the respective roles of the BOG and the AQAB are recommended, along with further demarcation of the roles and responsibilities of those governors and members who are a part of other committees of the College.

14. Two performance criteria need to be further examined, and MRC be satisfied that these criteria are sufficiently met, as the completed survey forms did not refer sufficiently to these areas for a judgement to be made:

    a. The integrity of reported information is ensured

    b. College control systems and financial management are robust

MONT ROSE COLLEGE: GOVERNANCE REVIEW

A REPORT BY

PROFESSOR DAVID BAKER

AUGUST 2020

Introduction and Context

1. I was asked by the Dean of Studies to comment on the first annual review of the Board of Governors (BOG) and the Academic and Quality Assurance Board (AQAB) of Mont Rose College (MRC).

2. In consequence, I was sent the completed survey forms for BOG and AQAB members. These have been analysed, and the results of that analysis form the basis of my commentary, which is also informed by relevant documentation from the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) and notably the new Code and related documents.[1]

3. MRC's review of its main governing bodies comes at an appropriate time. As the CUC Code stats,' the dramatic and rapid changes in the Higher Education sector [have] firmly placed the spotlight on governing bodies who need to be alert to, and quickly assess, the myriad of risks and opportunities' facing their university in a competitive and volatile market.

4. The roles and responsibilities of the BOG and the AQAB will become ever more important as a result. In addition, as the College prepares to award its own degrees and heads towards university status, strengthening the two key organs of governance

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[1]CUC The Higher Education Code of Governance (draft)
https://www.universitychairs.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/HE-Code-of-Governance-DRAFT.pdf

Draft Governance Handbook (to support the Higher Education Code of Governance)
https://www.universitychairs.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Governance-Handbook-DRAFT.pdf

Consultation Submission Form (for Governors to provide their feedback by 13th March)
https://uwe.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5vFx8NrJog0SsYt

Advance HE
https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/new-cuc-draft-higher-education-code-governance

Wonkhe commentary on the new code, 23rd Jan 2020
https://wonkhe.com/blogs/does-university-governance-need-incremental-or-radical-change/

and management is both desirable and necessary and, as the review form states, 'adding value' in the process.

5. My findings are discussed below. Text in **bold** represents a recommendation for change and improvement.

Survey Form, Survey Responses, Shape, and Nature of the Review

6. The survey form was the same for both the BOG and the AQAB. There was a high degree of consensus and agreement about the strengths and weaknesses of the present arrangements, with good ideas and suggestions (discussed below) as to how things can be improved in the future, though not all respondents completed all parts of the form. Spelling and grammar left something to be desired in a small number of cases. **MRC should ensure that the forms are filled in completely and carefully.**

7. Given the different (though complementary) roles of the BOG and the AQAB, **it would be worth considering having a different form for the two bodies, so that a greater degree of granularity can be achieved in the review process.**

8. The survey forms for the BOG members were commented on and signed by the Chair, who was also interviewed by one of the other BOG members. This was not the case with the AQAB forms or the Chair (though he was interviewed as part of the BOG review process). **It is important to ensure that all the forms are completed and signed off, as required, with notes made of follow-up actions.**

9. It was good to see the student member of the BOG respond – and respond so positively about their work on the Board and its Chair. It was a pity that there was no equivalent form for a student representative on the AQAB. **MRC should ensure that student member feedback is always elicited.**

10. **It needs to be made clear what the roles of the Chairs of BOG and AQAB are in the review process in the future**, and the extent to which this is an appraisal of members as opposed to a simple review and feedback process. This was suggested by a member of the BOG and is discussed below.

11. The current process seems to have been welcomed and is likely to be a useful developmental tool for MRC. **It is strongly recommended that the current annual review process is repeated and expanded to include a review of individual governors and members.**

Membership and Turnover

12. Both the BOG and the AQAB are small in numbers. This is not a bad thing in an institution the size of MRC, though the BOG, in particular, recognizes that it will have to grow, not only as the institution becomes larger, but also in order to ensure a greater level of inclusion and diversity. **It is recommended that both Boards are increased in size in order that they become truly diverse and inclusive bodies.** It is good that there are student representatives on the BOG and the AQAB.

13. There was a suggestion from one respondent that departmental representation on both Boards should be increased. This is not recommended; rather, representation of this kind should be focussed on other College bodies, and notably the Senior Staff Committee. Otherwise, discussion at the BOG and the AQAB may become inappropriately detailed and specific.

14. Turnover on both the BOG and the AQAB is low. Respondents rightly prided themselves on their length of service and the value that they could, therefore, bring through membership. While this is to be welcomed, **it is suggested that a higher turnover of members is needed, in line with best practice elsewhere, and as a way of refreshing the two Boards**. It will be easier to engender this with a larger membership. The College will need to ensure that there is a robust nomination and appointment process in the future.

Induction, Training, and Development

15. Members of both the BOG and the AQAB commented on not being initially well prepared for their roles, and **a formal induction programme is strongly recommended. Regular briefings on developments within the HE sector (e.g., Office for Students' decisions and regulatory frameworks) are also recommended**, based on comments made by members in their responses.

16. Many respondents commented on the training that they receive, whether as individuals (e.g., management development) or collectively (PREVENT). The fact that some AQAB members and staff members of the BOG had attended the High Impact Leadership Programme is to be commended.

17. More training in financial management matters and in various aspects of governance would be welcomed by members. It was not clear the extent to which these activities are logged or discussed in member appraisals. **A more formal management framework for the training and development of Board members is recommended.**

Skills Base and Succession Planning

18. Reference was made to the need to plug the identified skills gaps on the Boards – and especially the BOG. **A skills audit should be regularly carried out and the results discussed by the Boards and through the member appraisal process.**

19. There was widespread agreement that there was currently no succession planning for either Board. This is an important requirement, not least in conjunction with the need for a skills audit. **There should be a succession planning process for both the BOG and the AQAB.**

Attendance and Frequency of Meetings

20. MRC should be congratulated on the high attendance at both the BOG and the AQAB. It would be good to have these attendance figures also expressed in terms of actual versus potential meetings attended, including for the sub-committees. **An annual log of attendance should be produced as part of the Boards' annual reporting process.**

21. There was a suggestion that the BOG (if not the AQAB) should meet more frequently, especially as the responsibilities of the Board increase. **The frequency with which the Boards meet needs to be carefully considered**: on the one hand, more meetings could be conducive to good and necessary governance of the institution; on the other, the College and its board members must not be overburdened inappropriately. The emphasis, as stressed in the foreword to the survey form, should be on making *timely* decisions.

Relationships

22. In the new CUC Code, 'there is a changing focus from the processes associated with good governance to the behaviour and relationships required to ensure their effectiveness in practice…Good governance requires more than the development of processes since it is built on … honest dialogue and mutual respect'.'.

23. Judging by the many comments made informs about the openness of communication and the supportive relationships across both the BOG and the AQAB, MRC is already well placed in this regard, not least because of the care taken by the Chairs of the two Boards to ensure effective and collegial functioning. **The current positive environment within the two Boards should be maintained and fostered as the College's governance structures develop.**

24. Reference was made by non-executive BOG members to their wish to have more knowledge of MRC, to be gained by visits to parts of the College.

Accountability, Responsibility and Risk Management

25. It is evident from the completed forms that Board members are aware of their responsibilities. What was not fully evident from the documentation submitted was a complete awareness of the relationship between the BOG and the AQAB and, as one respondent put it, 'the proper delegation of authority.'

26. It will be important to clarify the relationship between the two bodies, given that it is now the BOG that must provide the assurance on academic standards and the integrity of academic qualifications, though the present relationship between the BOG and the AQAB seems to work well in terms of academic matters and overall transparency. **Further articulation of the respective roles of the BOG and the AQAB are recommended, along with further demarcation of the roles and responsibilities of those governors and members who are a part of other committees of the College.**

27. There was much evidence of the College's ability to recognize and manage risk, as evinced by the examples cited in the survey forms. Particular attention was drawn to the way in which MRC had responded so well to the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath.

Chairing and Meetings Management

28. Members of both the BOG and the AQAB felt that meetings were chaired effectively and efficiently, with papers given out in advance. Discussions were handled in a transparent and collegiate way. 'A decision is never imposed', as one respondent put it.

29. Setting and monitoring of key performance indicators appear to be good. There was general agreement that follow-up on agreed actions needs to be tightened up, especially within the BOG. There was a stronger sense of follow up and follow through in the AQAB.

30. The Chairs of both the BOG and the AQAB were described as 'outward facing', engaging not only other members but also the College and key stakeholders more generally.

Effectiveness of the two Boards

31. There is much evidence that the BOG and the AQAB are working effectively. Individual members gave many examples not only of good practice but how, as members of the two Boards, they had 'made a difference.' There is a strong sense of ongoing self-critical review and continuous improvement and quality enhancement.

32. Most of the criteria listed in the survey form were well met, as judged by the evidence submitted. **Two criteria need to be further examined, as the complete survey forms did not refer sufficiently to these areas for a judgment to be made:**

    a. **The integrity of reported information is ensured**

    b. **College control systems and financial management are robust**

33. **MRC needs to ensure that the BOG and the AQAB can be satisfied that these criteria are consistently being met**, though it should be noted that there is evidence of effective resource allocation regarding specific initiatives (as for example remote teaching developments).

34. In all other respects, the Boards monitor and hold senior management to account for the achievement of the College's objectives and that stakeholders have an opportunity to hold the Boards to account through agreed processes and routes, with appropriate consultation being held about significant changes to MRC's strategies, policies, and plans. Examples of this happening in practice include campus expansion, new programmes, and modes of delivery, new services (such as library expansion), returning to work and study after COVID.

35. It is evident also that MRC is thriving as a result of good governance, as shown by its academic and reputational success in recent years, and its ability to respond effectively, quickly and flexibility to significant changes in the environment in general and the higher education sector and its markets in particular.