

EXTERNAL GOVERNANCE REVIEW FOR RNN GROUP: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In October 2023 the Board of the RNN Group appointed Ian Ashman to undertake an External Governance Review (EGR). The Department for Education (DfE) now recommend these are undertaken every three years. The scope of the Review was to identify strengths and areas for development, in order to improve Board ability and effectiveness, and to help achieve the Board's aim of providing excellent governance in an outstanding Group.

2. Description of the Review Process

- 2.1 The assessment framework for this Review is an extensive set of criteria, which the Reviewer has devised from external guidance. Sources include DfE and EFSA requirements, the Ofsted Grade descriptors for Good and Outstanding governance, the latest Association of Colleges Code of Governance and the Institute of Chartered Secretaries Code. These criteria are organised to follow the 2023 AoC governance framework.
- 2.2 In undertaking the EGR, the External Reviewer, has looked in depth at 30 high priority criteria, with the remaining criteria being subject to a document-based assurance process, working in partnership with the Director of Governance. The findings, recommendations and suggested enhancements have been developed using evidence drawn from extensive interviews with governors, executive team, observations of Board and Committee meetings, a survey of governors and document review.
- 2.3 The Reviewer has encountered positive, open and self-critical engagement from all concerned and appreciates the time and thought which has been given to the contributions.

3. Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations and Suggested Enhancements

- 3.1 The Reviewer has documented strengths, areas for development, key recommendations and suggested enhancements to current practice. In summary, the Reviewer's conclusion is that effectiveness of Governance at the Group is good, with a proven track record of success and with the ability to improve further towards excellence.
- 3.2 There are many strengths identified, including that:
- Governors have a good working partnership with the Executive and offer good support and challenge, holding leaders to account, which has helped drive improvement
 - The Board has given strong direction for RNN Group, with a clear mission, values and strategic plan
 - There is a clear Committee structure, with effective reporting through to the Board, including strong KPI monitoring
 - Governors bring a good range of skills to support decision making, with skills gaps identified and addressed, with plans to extend the skills set further
 - Governors have a clear understanding of the areas for further enhancement and implement swift actions e.g. in the areas of employer links, HR, and risk assurance.
- 3.3 The Reviewer has identified ten recommendations to address the areas for development, to help the Board achieve its aim of moving from good to excellent governance, providing strong accountability for an outstanding Group. These recommendations are underpinned by suggested enhancements which could help the Group implement the recommendations in

practice. The recommendations and suggested enhancements can be grouped under four headings, as described below.

Determination of Mission, Values and Strategy

- Enhance the clarity of the Group’s Educational Character and Public Benefit, amplify the alignment between the curriculum, financial, equality, sustainability and the new people elements within the next strategic plan, and to be even more explicit in the plan and in practice about implementing a culture of high expectations for students, staff and managers

Oversight and Accountability for Implementation of Plans and Quality of Delivery

- Further enhance the focus given within Board meetings to curriculum and quality performance, including hearing the student voice and further supporting progress in addressing actions in the SAR and QIP, including augmenting employer responsiveness; and to enhance the effectiveness of the Governor Link Scheme, as a driver and source of evidence for towards excellence

Governors Leadership and Integrity, and Stakeholder Engagement

- Retain the strength and further develop the representation on the Board, including in employer and student engagement; to complement the focus on staff engagement, and to take steps towards improving the diversity of Governors, in order to better reflect and articulate different voices in the communities, which the Group serves

Board Effectiveness and Systems

- Complete the review of Board meetings, which has already begun, to create fewer, more effective meetings, with less duplication of items and papers. Review and further develop the format of reports and data dashboards for the Board, building on recent progress, in order to enhance the effectiveness of information and decision making and support further improvement in the Group.

3.4 The Board at RNN Group has a proven track record in helping drive improvements in performance in recent years, having achieved a more sustainable financial position, secured a ‘Good’ grade in inspection, and successfully exited the FE Commissioner’s Post Intervention Monitoring System. The Board is determined to achieve further improvement towards excellence and is ready to apply the same focus and rigour and effective partnership with the Executive Team, which has proved so effective to date.

3.5 It is hoped that the observations and recommendations in this report will assist the Board in securing the further development of the Group towards its goal of achieving excellence.

Ian Ashman

External Governance Reviewer

1st May 2024