

# Pillar 1 - Paper 1 - College Chairs

## Summary

College board chairs play a crucial role in making sure boards work well for their colleges, their communities and the wider public good.

Chairs are appointed through the Scottish Government's public appointments process and are personally accountable for ensuring their boards meet legal duties and reflect ministerial priorities.

Their responsibilities include:

- Leading the board in setting the college's strategic direction
- Scrutinising performance and ensuring public money is used properly
- Overseeing governance, risk and internal controls
- Supporting board development and carrying out member appraisals
- Appointing and managing the performance of the principal

The paper explains how boards themselves fit into the wider college system, including their statutory duties and other legal obligations.

The Code of Good Governance reinforces expectations of chairs — promoting high standards of conduct, transparent decision-making, strong strategic leadership and ongoing board development.

It also outlines:

- How chairs are appraised
- What remuneration looks like
- Requirements for board composition
- Current engagement structures, such as the College Chairs' Group and the Chairs and Principals Forum

An appendix includes extracts from the standard appointment letter issued to new chairs.

## College chairs

### Context

Ministerially appointed college chairs are subject to overarching Scottish Government public appointments guidance, which emphasises strategic leadership, robust governance, financial stewardship, and accountability to Ministers. These expectations are reinforced through the 2014 sector-specific guidance for college boards, which places personal accountability on chairs to ensure their boards meet statutory duties, operate effectively, and deliver in line with national priorities.

In practice, college chairs are responsible for leading their boards in setting strategic direction, overseeing institutional performance, ensuring effective use of public funds, and maintaining strong systems of governance, risk management and internal control. Chairs also play a key role in holding the executive, led by the Principal, to account, while maintaining a clear separation between governance and operational management. Their leadership extends to board development, performance appraisal, and fostering collaborative relationships across the sector and with external stakeholders.

Alongside this, the Code of Good Governance for Scotland's Colleges provides a complementary framework, setting clear expectations for both chairs and principals. While chairs lead governance and strategic oversight, principals appointed by college boards, hold responsibility for the day-to-day academic, operational and financial management of their institutions.

Current engagement arrangements support sector-wide collaboration, with chairs participating in forums to share best practice and contribute to strategic discussions across the college system.

Overall, the framework establishes a clear model of governance in which College Boards, under the leadership of ministerially appointed chairs, provide strategic leadership and assurance, while principals deliver operational management, together supporting institutional performance and alignment with national and regional priorities.

There are 15 regional colleges in which Ministers are responsible for appointing a chair, these are listed below. The remaining nine colleges do not have a chair appointed by Ministers; appointments are made a Regional Strategic Body or by the college board:

- Ayrshire College
- Borders College
- Dumfries & Galloway College
- Edinburgh College
- Fife College

- Forth Valley College
- City of Glasgow College
- Glasgow Clyde College
- Glasgow Kelvin College
- North East Scotland College
- New College Lanarkshire
- South Lanarkshire College
- Dundee and Angus College
- West College Scotland
- West Lothian College

### Overarching guidance around public appointments

The Scottish Government's overarching [public appointments guidance](#) sets out the core expectations for all ministerial appointees, emphasising strategic leadership, effective oversight of performance, risk and prudent stewardship of public funds. The [2014 ministerial guidance for college sector board appointments](#) reflects these same principles while tailoring them to the specific statutory and governance context of colleges. It reinforces that college chairs, as ministerial appointees, are personally accountable for ensuring their boards meet legislative duties, uphold high standards of governance, and operate in line with Ministers' expectations.

The Scottish Government's public appointments guidance sets the baseline for all ministerial appointees: boards (under the leadership of the Chair) provide strategic leadership, ensure delivery aligned to Ministers' priorities, secure financial stewardship/best value, hold the executive to account, manage risk/governance, and ensure early notification to Government of emerging issues. This references the governance of the board to which chairs are appointed, however terms of appointments can be issued to emphasise sector wide collaboration.

### Role of chair and sector specific ministerial guidance ([2014 ministerial guidance for college sector board appointments](#))

Under the leadership of the Chair, each individual college board has responsibility for advancing its strategic aims and for identifying and responding to developments that may affect the body's ability to meet its objectives. Boards are expected to ensure efficient, economic and effective use of resources in line with Best Value principles, including, where appropriate, participation in shared or collaborative service arrangements. Boards must also maintain robust systems for risk management, governance and internal control, and take account of relevant Ministerial guidance in their decision-making.

The Chair is responsible for fostering efficient and effective use of resources, ensuring appropriate and timely escalation of emerging issues to the Scottish Funding Council in line with the requirements of the Financial Memorandum, and, where necessary, to the Scottish Government. The Chair also oversees the appointment and performance management of the Chief Executive. Ministers set the functions of college chairs within the terms of appointment letters issued to each chair, and Annex A provides a list of these functions.

The Chair ensures the Board operates collectively, transparently and in the public interest. Public appointees do not become involved in the day-to-day running of the public body. This is the role of the Chief Executive (Principal) and their management team.

The [2014 ministerial guidance for college sector board appointments](#) sets out that college chairs, appointed by Scottish Ministers, are personally accountable for ensuring the board functions effectively and meets its statutory responsibilities. Chairs are expected to provide clear strategic leadership and ensure the board maintains an appropriate balance of skills, experience and knowledge to discharge its governance duties. This clearly links to the more overarching guidance around public appointments.

Chairs must ensure the board fulfils its statutory and other legal obligations, including setting strategic direction, overseeing performance, and safeguarding the proper use of public funds. They are responsible for ensuring their board operates in line with ministerial expectations and sector specific governance requirements, upholding high standards- of accountability and good governance practice. Chairs oversee evaluation and performance processes, including annual board member appraisal and full board effectiveness reviews. This also clearly intertwines with the points raised in the overarching public appointment guidance.

### **College chair appraisals**

College chairs are appraised annually against the requirements of their terms and conditions. The appraisal framework is structured around four overarching objectives: providing effective leadership; ensuring effective governance and financial management; delivering effective results and driving continuous performance improvement; and supporting and developing the board and its members effectively. The appraisal process is normally led at Scottish Government Deputy Director level.

Feedback on chair performance is sought ahead of the appraisal through correspondence with the college principal, board of management, the Scottish Funding Council and a chair self-evaluation form.

### **Chair remuneration, time commitment and board composition**

College regionalisation was introduced by the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013. At the time of regionalisation, remuneration for college board chairs was agreed on three daily rates (£200; £265 and £300) based on college staffing and income levels. The daily remuneration rate for these appointments is determined by Scottish Ministers and the college board to which they are appointed is responsible for paying chair fees and reasonable expenses. College chairs

devote up to 2 days per week to performing their functions. Below are the categories that each ministerially appointed chair falls within:

<b>£211</b>	<b>£265</b>	<b>£330</b>
Borders College	Ayrshire College	City of Glasgow College
Dumfries and Galloway College	Dundee and Angus College	Edinburgh College
Forth Valley College	Fife College	
Glasgow Kelvin College	Glasgow Clyde College	
South Lanarkshire College	New College Lanarkshire	
West Lothian College	North East Scotland College	
	West College Scotland	

A regional college board must comprise a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 20 members. This can include a Chair and principal, one elected teaching staff member, one elected support staff member, two student members, one teaching staff trade union nominee, one support staff trade union nominee, and between 9 and 12 independent members.

### Code of Good Governance

[The Code of Good Governance for Scotland's Colleges](#) was originally published in December 2014. The Code is reviewed and updated annually by the Good Governance Steering Group, the college sector's advisory body on all matters relating to college governance. This code outlines clear expectations of college chairs, requiring them to provide effective leadership to the Board by upholding high standards of conduct and ensuring compliance with the Code; leading strategic discussions to shape the college's vision, strategy and priorities; ensuring transparent and well-structured decision making supported by informed scrutiny; overseeing financial oversight, performance monitoring and risk management; and supporting continuous Board development through induction, training and regular effectiveness evaluations, including of the Chair themselves.

The Code sets out clear expectations of the principal's role, noting that the principal is appointed by the board as the college's chief executive through a transparent process involving students and staff. The board must delegate to the principal authority for the academic, corporate, financial, estate and human resource management of the college, ensuring these functions are carried out under the principal's direction. The Code also requires the board to agree defined performance measures for the principal, seeking input from students and staff, and to monitor and record performance on an annual basis. In addition to operational

leadership, the principal supports effective governance by facilitating communication between the board and the wider college community, while remaining accountable to the board, which is responsible for constructively challenging and holding the principal to account.

### **College Principals**

The Board of Management of each incorporated Scottish college is responsible for key governance functions under the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992. The Board holds the legal authority to appoint senior staff, including the principal, as part of its statutory functions and Ministers have no role in this process.

### **Current Arrangements for College Chair Engagement**

College chairs currently meet at least four times a year through the Colleges Scotland College Chairs' Group (CCG) to support strategic direction, advocacy, governance, and the sharing of best practice. They also meet twice a year with college principals through the Chairs and Principals Forum to discuss and agree strategic issues and priorities for the sector.

## Annex A

### Appointment letter extract

#### Board and Committee Engagement

- prepare for, attend and positively contribute towards meetings of the Board and its committees;
- attend other meetings and seminars on behalf of the Board (as required);

#### Strategic Leadership and Governance

- develop the strategy of the Board, including assisting with the development, approval and monitoring of the College's corporate plans;
- lead the Board in making decisions and develop its capacity to do so;
- ensure open and transparent procedures are in place for appointments to the Board which are not made by the Scottish Ministers, having regard to Ministerial guidance, and adopt a self-evaluation policy and process;
- ensure probity and propriety in the workings of the College;
- ensure that you are sufficiently informed in order to hold the executive team of the College to account for the implementation of Board decisions;

#### Performance, Assurance and Financial Oversight

- maintain a strong collective sense of delivery, accountability and challenge in investment of considerable public funds, between the Board members and the executive team;
- oversee the delivery of effective performance of the College's activities and ensuring achievement of its aims including monitoring the financial position against budget allocations and key financial targets and ensuring corrective action is taken where required;
- work with the Board and the senior team to ensure the college demonstrates assurance and accountability of the funding it receives as set out in the Scottish Funding Councils (SFC) Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model, ensuring provision meets the needs of the region;
- makes best use of available funding, consistent with the SFC's national strategy; and that it is delivered;

- ensure that the College's resources (staff, finance and premises) are used effectively and responsibly to support local priorities and strategic objectives;
- approve, where appropriate, a statement of accounts for the Board each financial year on the basis determined by the Scottish Ministers;

### Representation and External Relationships

- act as an ambassador for the College, building close relationships and networking with others in the region e.g., local authority and employers;
- establish good partnership working with other organisations and participate in reference groups, discussion forums and open meetings (as required);
- foster appropriate regional and cross-regional collaborative relationships to ensure the college meets economic, social and educational needs;
- be the principal spokesperson and public face of the Board, representing it at meetings with other bodies, the Scottish Ministers and other Members of the Scottish Parliament, and at conferences and in the media;

### Board Leadership and Member Development

- provide effective leadership to the Board, including chairing meetings and fostering sound decision-making and full participation by other Board members in the exercise of their functions and in the work of the Board;
- appraise the performance of other Board members (including the deputy chair) against the individual objectives applying to those appointments and also the extent to which these appointees contribute to ensuring that the Board as a whole delivers its functions effectively and efficiently, and in accordance with Ministerial aims, policies and priorities;
- arrange an annual appraisal interview to discuss and review the performance of members of the Board, prepare a short annual written appraisal of each member, refer reports of unsatisfactory performance to the Scottish Government's sponsor directorate for the Board, and refer other reports on its request;

### Other Duties

- carry out other tasks that may reasonably be required.