

8 June 2022

Richard Leonard MSP
Convener
Public Audit Committee
Scottish Parliament

By email

Dear Convener

The 2020/21 audit of South Lanarkshire College

I welcomed the opportunity to give evidence to the committee on 12 May 2022 on my report on the 2020/21 audit of South Lanarkshire College.

After reviewing the draft official report of the meeting, I thought it would be helpful to write to you to clarify some of the matters covered in the discussion.

- I talked about the nature of appointments for Scotland's colleges, noting that the chair is appointed by the Scottish Government. Although this is the case for single regional colleges, I should have clarified that responsibility for appointing the chair and other board members in South Lanarkshire College sits with the Lanarkshire Board (as the regional strategic body).
- In my evidence, I noted that the SFC review was conducted by an experienced college professional from elsewhere in the UK. Although the person who led the review has a wealth of experience in governance issues, this has largely been in the higher education and university sector, rather than the college sector.

Paragraph 14 of my report on the 2020/21 audit of South Lanarkshire College notes that the decision to hold an extraordinary board meeting on 30 November 2021 was, in part, prompted by the SFC-commissioned review of governance. For the avoidance of doubt, the board's decision to suspend the principal and interim clerk to the board and to accept the chair's decision to voluntarily step aside from his role were not a result of the findings or any recommendations in the SFC review of governance.

I would also like to take the opportunity to distinguish between the Azets investigation, that was mentioned by Graham Simpson during his questions, and the investigations that are currently ongoing into complaints and grievances against the chair, principal and interim clerk to the board. The Azets investigation was not within the scope of my report on the 2020/21 audit of South Lanarkshire College, as it is not directly relevant to the issues of non-compliance with the Code of Good Governance or the decision by the board to suspend the chair, principal and interim clerk to the board.

The independent auditor reported on the Azets investigation and the findings in their [2020/21 annual audit report](#) (page 30). The investigation was concluded in June 2021 and the findings were considered by the audit and risk committee (at a single-item extraordinary committee meeting) on 1 July 2021. The report highlighted a number of recommendations for improvements in processes and controls but did not identify significant weaknesses in controls nor did it confirm fraud or theft. Progress against the recommendations in the report is being monitored by the college's audit and risk committee.

As I noted in my evidence to the committee, the independent auditor will continue to review governance arrangements in the college and monitor implementation of the governance improvement plan as part of the 2021/22 annual audit. I will maintain oversight of progress made by the college in this area, with a view to further public reporting in the future.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Boyle
Auditor General for Scotland