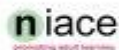


Excellence in FE Governance Pipeline Research Project

FINAL REPORT

3. Project A: Board Impact

April 2014



Project A: Board Impact

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Executive Summary

This project reviewed the impact of good further education (FE) governance on the learner experience, on the provider, on the employer community and on the wider community. Key personnel in 24 providers – FE colleges, independent training providers (ITPs) and adult and community learning (ACL) providers – were interviewed. All the providers involved were good or outstanding, and many shared the same value set.

The project found that the providers' boards had a great impact on their organisation and, whatever their legal status, a set of good governance principles, characteristics and behaviours underpinned their work. These should be adopted by all boards.

Principles

- A commitment to ensuring high quality teaching and learning, and protecting the student interest through good governance.
- A recognition that accountability for funding derived directly from a range of stakeholders, and the need to demonstrate accountability to those individuals and organisations.
- A commitment to full and transparent accountability for public funding including clear published policy on how complaints were handled.
- A commitment to the publication of accurate and transparent information.
- A commitment to the achievement of equality of opportunity and diversity throughout the organisation.

Characteristics

- Seeing themselves as guardians of the organisation's mission, as well as of its financial success.
- Organised and clear governance structures, with well-understood delegations and authorities.
- Priority given to financial health, including adopting effective systems of control and risk management that promoted value for money, met mandatory audit requirements, and produced accurate and quality-assured provider data.
- A strong focus on board members having good business-related skills and acumen.
- Chair and senior leadership team (SLT) creating an atmosphere for constructive challenge, and acting on the outcome.
- Clerks/company secretaries having the status within the organisation to chase progress and commission reports
- Recognition of individual contributions.

Behaviours

- Ensuring the organisation's sustainability by setting the strategy, ensuring robust planning and monitoring successful delivery.
- Selecting and recruiting the right senior team and implementing rigorous performance systems that would lead to dismissal if targets and outcomes were not met.
- A range of strategies for engaging with employers.
- Strategies for ensuring students could progress to relevant jobs and/or further study.
- Chair, Principal/Chief Executive and clerk/company secretary striving to ensure boards received the right level of information to make decisions.
- Keeping under review composition and membership, assessing skills were fit for purpose and undertaking succession planning.
- The board reviewing regularly its effectiveness and that of any committees in its structure and involving external experts in that review.

Other recommendations emerging from the findings

- Boards should make explicit reference to their role during their discussions, and regularly analyse how successfully they are fulfilling it.
- The provider's mission should inform all board discussions and should be reviewed regularly to ensure community accountability operates in practice.
- Active engagement with wider community activities – such as regeneration – will ensure the provider is contributing fully to local economic and social development.
- Boards should put considerable time and effort into recruiting, inducting and training members to ensure a good understanding of their role and the right skills to fulfil it.
- To be fully effective, boards need to ensure that every member comes with the skills needed to think strategically and challenge constructively, while also ensuring social and cultural diversity.
- Boards should ensure they have several sources of data – internal and external - as well as a good personal understanding of how things work on the ground.
- Boards should regularly review the way they operate and be prepared to be innovative in order to ensure they are using members' time effectively and are able to accommodate the needs of a diverse membership.

- Boards need to make sure that risk is part of every discussion, and that processes are designed to properly embed risk management rather than pay it ‘lip service’.
- Where it is decided that board members should use their networks and contacts to the advantage of the college, there need to be proper rules in place to ensure it is done appropriately.

1. Introduction

The Education & Training Foundation (‘the Foundation’) was established in August 2013 with the remit to improve professionalism and standards in the education and training sector. Its central responsibility is to ensure learners benefit from a well-qualified, effective and up-to-date workforce, supported by one of its key priority areas - good leadership, management and governance.

The Foundation tendered this project as part of the development of its strategic plan for 2014-17. Building on the review of college governance undertaken by the AoC in 2013¹, it was seeking to determine a coordinated programme of research that would help to bring about a positive shift in further education system (FE) governance in England. The project’s goal was to review existing research for omissions and prioritise future research questions. The work covered all FE providers, including colleges, those that are charities and private companies, and those run by local government.

The work was undertaken between January and March 2014 by a consortium² led by the Association of Colleges (AoC). The Project Director was Dr Susan Pember, author of the AoC’s review of college governance.

The project was divided into two stages. In Stage One we identified four themes that required further investigation:

Theme 1. Good governance and accountability: is there a causal link between good governance and employer involvement/accountability, community accountability and engagement and good Ofsted grades?

Theme 2. Board membership: how can we ensure boards³ have the right membership, including representation from the communities they serve?

Theme 3. Board structures: what are the most effective new governance structures for organisations managing an assemblage of colleges, independent training providers, academies, UTCs etc., or seeking to change their legal structure?

¹ Association of Colleges (2013) *Creating Excellence in College Governance*
http://www.aoc.co.uk/en/college_governors/review-of-governance/

² The consortium: the Association of Colleges (AoC); the Association of Employment & Learning Providers (AELP); the 157 Group; the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE); the Association of Adult Education & Training Organisations (AAETO/Holox); the Principals’ Professional Council (PPC); the University & College Union (UCU); the Network of Black Professionals (NBP) and the National Union of Students (NUS).

³ While the use of the word ‘board’ might not be technically correct in all settings, we are using it for convenience throughout this work to denote any formal governance arrangements.

Theme 4. Board relationships and behaviours: effective boards, the relationship with senior leadership teams (SLT), and working methods sensitive to time pressures.

Through sector-wide consultation, we developed a set of key research questions that addressed all these themes, two of which were identified for immediate research in Stage Two:

- A: Board Impact:** What is the impact of good FE governance on the learner experience, on the provider, on the employer community and on the wider community?
- B: Baseline Data on Board Membership:** What is the 'right' membership for FE boards, and how do they ensure insight from the businesses and communities they serve?

This report summarises the findings of Project A: Board Impact, drawing on the data from the baseline survey (Project B) where appropriate. It is part of the full project report, which comprises a suite of discrete documents:

1. Governance Activity: an index and two 'maps' setting out current activity in this area.
2. Relevant Literature & Links: a resource bank for those undertaking research
3. Project A: Board Impact
4. Project B: Baseline Data on Board Membership
5. A Strategy for Further Research into FE Governance

2. Methodology

Research Question:

What is the impact of good governance on the learner experience, on the provider, on the employer community and on the wider community?

This qualitative piece of research was undertaken through semi-structured interviews with a broad and representative selection of providers from all parts of the FE system.

The team carried out interviews in 24 providers, either face to face or by phone. We worked closely with consortium partners to ensure the range reflected the different approaches to governance that result from diverse organisational structures, sizes, budgets, funding streams, missions, clienteles, etc. Annex 1 lists the organisations that took part. 11 were adult and community learning (ACL) providers; seven were general FE colleges (FECs); six were independent training providers (ITPs).

For each provider our aim was to undertake interviews with:

- The chair of the board, trustees, governing body or LA lead committee
- The CEO/Principal/Head of Service

- Company secretary, clerk or equivalent
- A board member

In the time available, it wasn't always possible to schedule all the interviews, and among ACL providers in particular not all the functions existed, hence the larger number of organisations involved. A total of 64 interviews were carried out (22 ACL; 25 FEC; 17 ITP).

Before the interviews each provider was asked for a standard set of information about the membership, structure and meeting arrangements of its board (see Pre-Interview Questionnaire – PIQ - at Annex 3). The team also examined the most recent Ofsted reports.

Each interviewee was sent an explanation of the project and a set of interview questions (see Annex 2). The questions related to the definition of governance, accountability, members' understanding of their responsibilities, impact, employers on boards, decision-making, risk management and leverage of resources. Interviews were scheduled to last 30 minutes, although some continued longer. Where time ran short, the interviewers focused on the questions relating to impact and employers.

To provide a back-drop to the project, interviews also took place with Ofsted Inspectors, an adviser to the FE commissioner and senior staff at the Skills Funding Agency.

Issues in weak and failing providers

Although, in the main, they had observed good governance, the Ofsted Inspectors and FE commissioner adviser highlighted a number of issues they had observed in failing and or weak providers.

- Passive boards and lack of challenge;
- Senior leadership team controlling the information flow, and little independent advice;
- Poor administration and minute taking, with the clerk not in a position to question or provide advice directly to the board.

The Skills Funding Agency concerns were mainly to do with the financial skills of the board and whether boards were astute enough to be able to balance the budget in a reducing funding environment while still providing a quality experience for the student.

3. Findings

This section summarises the pre-interview questionnaires, then synthesises the responses for each of the questions and makes some brief summary observations and a number of recommendations.

All these findings apply to those interviewed from FECs, ITPs and ACL providers that have boards. ACL providers without boards are discussed in a separate section at the end (see p23), as their structures – and therefore their responses - were too different to be included in the general summary.

'She' is used throughout the interview analysis, regardless of the gender of the particular interviewee.

Where relevant, we have underpinned the commentary with data from the baseline survey (Project B).

Key points from the pre-interview questionnaires

20 out of 24 PIQs were received, and a detailed analysis can be found at Annex 4. All of the organisations included in the analysis had formal governance arrangements in the shape of a board of governors, directors or trustees.

Membership

- The six ACLs with board arrangements had 10-18 members, which seems to be fairly typical. One had a quarter female membership, while for the rest it was either almost 50/50 or more female than male. They reported 2-5 employer members, which also aligns with our survey. Four had staff and student members; two had third sector; two local community; two had elected members, while the local authority was represented on one.
- The seven FECs had between 12 and 20 members, which is in line with the survey. All had at least a third female membership, while three had more female than male members. They reported 0-12 employer members. All had student and staff members (legally required); five had business members; four had community members; two had other education representatives. Community membership was higher than reported in the survey and education representation lower.
- The four ITPs that completed the PIQ had between three and ten board members, making them fairly representative. The male/female split ranged from 6/1 to 6/4. They reported 0-8 employer members. Some had other stakeholder groups explicitly represented, including shareholders and executive staff.

Support arrangements

- All six of the ACLs with boards had dedicated clerks, three full-time and two part-time, while one used an independent clerk.
- All seven FECs had a dedicated clerk, one employed full-time, three part-time and two as independents who worked with other FECs. One used their Director of Policy & Research.
- Two of the ITPs had dedicated secretaries, one part-time, one full-time. The other two used the services of the chief executive's PA or an executive assistant from the company.

Structures/meetings

- ACL boards met three to five times a year; FEC boards three to nine times a year; ITP boards between monthly and quarterly.
- All the ACL boards had sub-committees, compared with 86% in the survey. Their remits were fairly standard: audit, remuneration, finance/resources, search and quality/standards. They met three or four times a year.
- All the FECs had sub-committees, generally four or five, generally covering similar remits to those in the ACL providers. One had nine committees, but these

included a project board and advisory groups. Several had committees that met at different frequencies depending on remit.

- Only one ITP had sub-committees, which was low compared with the 50% reported in the survey. The committee remits were: Audit, HR & Remuneration; Performance & Finance; and New Business. They met to the same frequency as the board (bi-monthly).

Chairs

- The chairs had been in post between 6 months and – in one ITP – 15 years. One ACL chair had been in post for 35 years, but for most it was three years; none of the FEC chairs had been in post more than six years.

Governance and accountability

1. How would you define the word ‘governance’ as it is practised in your particular organisation?
2. To whom is your board accountable?
3. What does the board do to ensure that all members fully understand their role and accountabilities?
4. Does the board make use of the support available to help meet the standards set out by Ofsted? How effective is it, particularly given limited time among board members?

Definition of governance

Summary

All those interviewed had a clear and common understanding of what was meant by governance. There was a sense among the colleges that this had changed in recent years and needed to change further if they were to become more entrepreneurial. Later responses suggest that the boards that felt they had the most impact were often those that continuously and actively discussed the way they were putting governance theory into practice.

‘Strategy’, ‘oversight’, ‘scrutiny’ and ‘challenge’ were the most commonly used words, regardless of the type of provider or individual role.

‘Compliance’ was also mentioned frequently, and, among ITPs, the word ‘legal’.

Several college interviewees also referred to the need to act on behalf of the taxpayer and ensure public money was well spent. A college chair who had sat on several boards in different sectors commented that the definition was the same for any sector or type of organisation.

“It’s important to lift their eyes beyond current performance to what they are aiming for in the future.”

College board member

Several college interviewees emphasised the importance of stepping back and looking at the whole picture - the framework, its fit in the community, its overall mission and aims, and the ultimate focus on the needs of learners.

One college principal dismissed the prevailing “angst” over what boards were meant to do: governance was simply about fulfilling the functions set out in the “sound framework” of the Instrument & Articles. Her definition went beyond the board to include structures such as the Academic Board and the financial memorandum with funding bodies, which were “part of the backbone and framework” of the college.

“As the college becomes more entrepreneurial it needs to be more about strategic decision-making.”

College chair

Among the college chairs, several commented on the way FEC boards had changed over recent years and the need for them to respond to new challenges, become more entrepreneurial and think about the type of board they wanted to be.

Accountability

Summary

Accountability to learners and the community – in its widest sense – were considered as important as the ‘harder’ accountability to funders and regulators. Provision was often shaped by a clear sense of the particular community served. As can be seen in the section on impact, the board played an important role in acting as the guardian of their provider’s particular mission.

Almost every interviewee provided the same core list: funders, learners, staff, employers, wider community.

ITPs also included the Charity Commission and Company House. ACL providers mentioned the local authority, although the community was generally considered more important. Only one ACL provider mentioned the Skills Funding Agency as a body to which they were technically ‘accountable’.

Some commented that only the funder(s) and regulators had real leverage, and one college chair pointed out that this was a gap in the system in terms of community accountability, comparing it to the very different regime under which a local authority operates. But others suggested that stakeholders could exert ‘soft’ leverage through their patronage of and support for the provider; and most described various forums they had set up to provide community stakeholders with opportunities to influence.

Among the colleges, there was a sense of growing integration in the community, with accountability shifting accordingly. One had worked hard to become “integral to the city’s daily life”, explicitly shaping its provision to the needs of its very disadvantaged community, and getting actively involved in local regeneration. Others were putting in place new structures for that purpose.

“Technically we’re accountable to shareholders; morally we’re accountable to learners, clients and staff.”

ITP chair

In a similar vein, those ITPs that served very specific communities had a particularly strong sense of accountability. For example one had been established as a group training association for the engineering sector. The board was drawn from the industry, clearly understood its needs and felt directly accountable to it.

The clerk of a college board that had recently adopted Policy Governance⁴ commented that accountability to the community as a result. They planned to complement their small board with a 'second chamber' Advisory Council, to which the board would be formally required to have regard.

A college principal pointed out the tensions that could be created by such broad accountability. Government exhorted providers to respond to the needs of their customers, but then used funding to dictate specific responses (e.g. the shape of apprenticeship frameworks or the continuing study of English and maths), which might not align to what those customers wanted or thought they needed. She wasn't against this approach in principle, but felt there should be greater honesty, particularly with employers, who were increasingly being told they were in the driving seat.

Members understanding of their role and accountabilities

Summary

Public and third sector providers were increasingly recruiting against a clear skills profile, bringing them into line with common practice in private companies. This helped to ensure effective practice, although thorough induction and regular training were still important, while several ITPs also emphasised the need for clear structures and well-defined responsibilities.

The time commitment required of volunteers was a growing issue, particularly as more members were coming from the private sector, but working practices could be adapted to respond to this.

All the interviewees were confident that their members understood their role.

All had formal induction processes; regular, tailored training – both internal and external - around gaps in skills and knowledge; and formal and informal opportunities for members to discuss new policies and areas of uncertainty. Colleges used board away days partly as opportunities to receive topic briefings, discuss new challenges, and have longer-term strategic conversations. Skills audits were mentioned by a number of interviewees, particularly in identifying gaps that might be filled through recruitment.

“They understand very clearly their responsibilities or they would not have been appointed.”

ITP chair

ITP interviewees focused on the very structured approach their boards had adopted, with delegations clearly defined and recorded, specific roles for members, and meetings built around key performance indicators (KPIs).

⁴ Policy Governance was developed by John Carver as a way of enabling boards to provide strategic leadership. It seeks to establish clarity between the roles of board and management, allowing the former to be involved in appropriate decisions without 'meddling' or 'rubber stamping'. It does this by establishing a set of policies that govern the way the board works and the boundaries within which the leadership team can make decisions.
<http://www.carvergovernance.com/index.html>

Effective recruitment was widely seen as critical in ensuring members had the necessary skills and knowledge.

A college board member said that eight years previously not all members would have been clear on their role and accountability, but that there had been a metamorphosis, mainly due to much more robust and focused recruitment.

Similarly, a member of a college board that had recently restructured said that, in the old board, half the members “didn’t have a clue”. The new board had been through a rigorous, skills-based recruitment process and a comprehensive induction, and, under the new regime, board discussions included continuous self-analysis.

One of the ITP boards co-opted new members and asked them to attend at least three board meetings before they were invited to join the board. They also met staff and learners as part of their induction.

However, there were some potential gaps.

In one college, opinions varied about members’ understanding of their role. The principal said that the board over-scrutinised and was sometimes too operational, and the clerk concurred. At another college, the clerk commented that they had to sometimes remind members about their role so that they “did not encroach on management territory.”

Several college-based interviewees raised the issue of the limited time that volunteers could put into extra training, particularly as an increasing number of board members were running their own organisations. One principal pointed out that if a member didn’t attend a training session, nothing was done to bring them up to speed, and she wasn’t sure if that was tracked. Nor did the board work to any competence framework.

Training in ACL providers seemed to be rather patchier than among other providers. The chair of one thought that no training was needed for the governors (presumably at the time of the interview, rather than in general). Another realised as a result of the interview that it hadn’t been high on the agenda of late; and a board member from the same institution commented that there was very little training, although she could cite a long list of areas where it was needed.

Regardless of type of provider, Ofsted standards were regularly reviewed and discussed. This had gone up the agenda of an ITP that was about to set up an academy. But several interviewees commented that support in this area was lacking, or were vague about what was offered. For board members with no educational background the language used by Ofsted was difficult to understand. Some providers had used Ofsted inspectors as part of their preparation for inspection.

One college board member was rather scathing about Ofsted’s value as a guide to standards following his experience of shadowing an inspector; and an ITP CEO felt that Ofsted was too initiative- rather than strategy-driven and could learn a lot from business.

Board impact

5. Can you identify the three occasions in the last three years when the board has, in your view, had the most measurable impact? (Impact might be on organisational performance, learners, the employer community and/or the wider community.)
- What evidence did you have of the impact?
 - Were there any particular board characteristics/behaviours/practices that contributed to the impact?
 - Are there any particular practices that have reduced the board's impact?
 - Are there ways in which impact could be increased? E.g. Could it do more to ensure the learner voice is heard? Would that make a real difference?

Summary

Boards can have direct impact in a wide range of ways, although that impact can't always be immediately or easily measured. Their impact is often made through improved planning and risk management, providing checks and balances, and making a project more feasible and sustainable.

Impact can be enhanced by boards having recruited members with the right skills and background knowledge rather than to represent any particular stakeholder. Smaller boards mean every member can make a real contribution. Keeping focused on mission helps increase board impact, and a strong collaborative relationship with the senior leadership team is critical. But things can still go wrong, especially when boards rely on the SLT for all their data and information.

Impact was real and wide-ranging...

All interviewees were asked to give specific examples of when the board had had a measurable impact. The following illustrate the range:

- A number of examples were given of boards deciding to change the principal or CEO, or change their role in response to a new business model. In one ITP, the chair had stepped in and helped run the organisation while they recruited, resulting in the board discovering that it was working with insufficient and inaccurate information. Despite senior leadership team opposition, changes were made and the organisation was now on a much sounder footing, with a new format for board meetings.
- Following a merger with another college, a board completely changed their governance model having decided the old model was not fit for purpose. Principal, members and clerk agreed they were much more effective as a result.
- The board of an ACL provider fought against a merger with a local FE college, which had been recommended as the result of a KPMG review. The report was eventually "shelved" by the local authority.

- A board decided to change the provider's mission and shape provision so that it specifically met the needs of a very deprived community that suffered from poor-performing schools.
- Strategic decisions had been made to: pull out of particular markets and enter new ones; maintain facilities despite reducing recruitment, which had subsequently started increasing; persist with provision despite its expense, because it fitted with the provider's mission.
- An ITP board had decided to get representation from the local community, which then drove its outreach programme, attracting those not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- An ITP board reduced the supply chain of providers, affecting finances in the short-term, but improving the long-term quality of provision.
- A board used members' professional expertise to challenge the model and arrangements for a new business, resulting in a contract that was better future-proofed and more accountable.
- A college board used its commercial acumen to challenge partners in a difficult estates issue - the Principal didn't think he could have won the day on his own.
- There were several examples of boards helping to shape the business case for new projects and insisting on a proper business plan for every aspect of the college's work; focusing on risk and making sure it was properly assessed and managed; giving substance to the principal's vision by pushing her to develop feasible plans.
- There were several examples of boards deciding that some aspect of performance wasn't good enough or consistent enough, investigating closely and insisting on plans being developed to improve it.
- In several cases, boards enhanced 'learner voice' by strengthening student representation and making sure they were contributing fully to the board's work.

Most of these examples were cited by more than one interviewee from the same institution, suggesting a degree of consensus about the impact the board had made.

...but couldn't always be directly evidenced

In most cases, the interviewee could point to evidence of the impact, although some admitted that it wasn't always immediate or immediately apparent. Improved Ofsted grades, the ability to deliver contracted programmes, increased learner numbers, improved staff morale and even a Gold liP standard were all cited.

However, it was often difficult to single out the board's specific contribution to an outcome when so many other factors were at play. Quite often it was about redirecting the emphasis of a particular strategy or simply making a project better. Several responses highlighted the difference between the impact of individuals – particularly those with relevant knowledge or experience – and the collective impact of the board, which was often more about influence.

At least in the case of colleges, it would seem that initial ideas and strategy came from the principal and the senior leadership team, but the board played a critical role in providing the necessary checks and balances, making sure the strategy could be and was implemented. The board helped the SLT look at things differently, consider risks properly, and see pitfalls they hadn't spotted.

The most commonly cited contributors to board impact were the skills, experience and make-up of the board.

Having members experienced in and skilled at strategic thinking clearly made an enormous difference, as did having a good range of skills and backgrounds, including business people, those with other management skills, educationalists, academics, and those working at a national, regional and local level. It also helped to have members with good 'forensic' skills and a persistent approach.

Several ITPs benefited from board members with strong sector knowledge, who could use their understanding of a particular environment to advise on strategy. Having an effective membership depended primarily on carefully planned recruitment. One principal suggested that her peers who complained of ineffective boards had perhaps not put the necessary time and effort into recruitment.

ACL providers seemed to be particularly strong on benefiting from 'learner voice'. One had recently received an LSIS Leading Learner Voice Award, while two had been judged outstanding in this area by Ofsted.

Having a small board (10-12 members) could also make a big difference, as every member knew they were there to contribute and there was no room for reticence or for 'yes' men. The clerk of a college board that had adopted policy governance said that she would definitely go down that route with other boards having seen how much more effective the discussions were. The meeting burden was no greater, and more frequent meetings gave greater momentum.

"I try not always to be too structured, but to allow time for strategic thinking and talking rather than information overload."

Chair of board

Agility was mentioned by several – being willing to move quickly and nimbly in the marketplace, being open to change and willing to take properly managed risks. This was seen by a college as an advantage of the policy governance model.

A college principal emphasised the importance of having a clear learning philosophy at the heart of their mission and regularly discussed at board meetings. Not only were board members intrigued and engaged by what might be quite a new and unfamiliar area, but they needed to be reminded that while they were running a business, it was specifically a *learning* business. Inspectors who recently graded that particular college outstanding for its governance had been "astounded" by the knowledge of teaching and learning displayed by board members.

Similarly, an ITP Chief Executive felt that the heart of her board's approach was 'never forget our mission'; it helped them to focus on what they should *not* do, and to be clear that new contracts needed to amplify rather than obscure what the provider was about.

The chair was key

Apart from keeping to the agenda and ensuring a well-structured discussion, effective behaviours included: insisting that members had prepared for the meeting; ensuring the discussion was kept at the right level, steering away from operational issues; making sure everybody had a voice and used it, particularly in areas where they could add value; ensuring members respected each other's perspectives and opinions; being a facilitator.

Boards were more effective where they were involved early and could 'co-create'...

Good forward planning was essential, as was involving the board in planning how and when they would be involved in new issues as they arose. One board had an annual planning day when they looked ahead to upcoming issues and planned how they would be tackled. Meetings were scheduled two years in advance.

It was vital to have a strong sense of collaboration and partnership with the SLT, and to know that they were working towards the same, agreed ends. There had to be a strong sense of trust and the SLT must be prepared to accept constructive challenge. They needed to be aware that the board would review issues at a very detailed level if they needed to. Although focused on strategy, the board shouldn't rely on data alone, but use personal visits and knowledge to develop an understanding of what was happening on the ground.

One college board member commented that it wasn't always easy for those from a commercial background to understand that decisions made by the board wouldn't always be acted upon by managers. Operational leaders had to be prepared to commit and act.

...and benefited from going back to basics

Having had experience of a board that had decided radically to change the way it operated, one principal highlighted the importance of going back to basic principles. This was obviously necessary when moving into new business models, but perhaps all boards should do it occasionally just to ensure they were still fit for current and future circumstances.

Impact can be reduced by:

- Short timescales and sudden changes of policy – or conflicting policies - coming from government.
- When agendas were squeezed and there isn't enough time for strategic discussion.
- When people allowed personal enthusiasm or expertise to take them into operational issues.
- When boards were not challenging enough and didn't feel empowered or able to tackle difficulties.
- Members having less time to spend on board issues, particularly business members who were having to keep their own companies afloat.

"I told the clerk that nothing should ever again be minuted as just 'noted' by the board – everything should be properly discussed, even if we all agree!"

Chair of Board

- For national providers, the move to localism and LEPs – it was difficult for an organisation working nationally to forge 39 strong partnerships.

Impact might be increased by:

- Easily digestible summaries of key issues aimed specifically at board members - trying to understand the context took up a lot of valuable discussion time.
- A better understanding of teaching and learning.
- Greater semi-formal interaction between boards – the FE world was very ‘atomised’, whereas other sectors seemed to interact more.

But even when all the behaviours were right, things could still go wrong

Even when the board was pro-active, governors often only had the information put in front of them and/or the auditors. If that went wrong they could still have problems. One board had recently found itself in a deficit position even though reports had said they would have a balanced budget within the year.

Employers on boards

6. Do you think that having employers on the board makes/would make a measurable difference? Has it contributed/would it contribute to the impact already discussed? Does it/would it entail any conflict of interest?
 - *[If relevant]* How does the board go about recruiting employers – which approaches work best?
 - What does the board do to ensure its employer members actually act as employers?
 - Does the organisation have other ways of engaging with the employer community to achieve particular outcomes?
 - Do you think that the new emphasis on employer ownership of skills – e.g. apprenticeship funding due to go direct to employers – will change governance arrangements?

Summary

Effective employer engagement is critical to most providers’ business, and they are becoming increasingly sophisticated in the way they do this. However, it is not essential – and might even be undesirable – to have employers represented on the board. Rather, board members need good ‘business’ skills – strategic thinking, challenge, commercial acumen, risk management, ‘forensic’ skills - which might have been gained through a number of routes. That said, familiarity with a particular industry might be of value in some circumstances. It will always depend on the particular provider’s needs at the time.

Appropriately skilled and experienced people might not be in a position to commit the necessary time, but many boards are finding innovative ways of enabling them to contribute effectively.

All providers understood the importance of engaging effectively with employers, and felt that representation on the board wasn't a good enough engagement strategy.

The following were just some of the approaches to employer engagement mentioned: account management; business clubs, industry round tables and employer forums; sector programme design groups and curriculum-focused industry boards; employer-specific and general advisory boards; support for activities such as student projects, presentations, events and job fairs;. Several of the ITPs had direct contracts with large employers.

One college board was experimenting with different ways to engage with employers, e.g. asking them to act as a 'critical friend' and advisor; and to participate in 'Forward Groups' to speak about their needs, how they saw the future of their industry, etc.

"Working with employers is integral to the sustainability of the business and is more than a token employer on the board."

College Principal

Another, which had reduced its membership to 12, was setting up a complementary 'second chamber' – a semi-formal Advisory Council, chaired by a former board member, with around 25 representatives from key parts of the community including employers.

Boards also saw their own engagement in external activities as important. Several were involved in their Local Enterprise Partnerships and local strategic partnerships, and one mentioned that their councillor members had their own business networks. An ITP was represented in the local Chamber of Commerce and regularly attended its meetings.

For a minority of the ACL providers this was an issue of less importance, since their focus was more on the community as a whole, with provision aimed primarily at addressing social disadvantage, developing employability skills and, to some extent, learning for leisure and pleasure purposes.

It should be noted that, while all the providers we interviewed seemed to have multiple stakeholder engagement strategies in place, 12% of college respondents to our survey reported no such arrangements.

However, having business-related skills on the board was critical...

While some of the boards interviewed had deliberately gone out to recruit employers, most were more interested in their 'business skills' - which might be held by a range of people with organisational experience - than representation of any particular employer or sector. Many colleges principally serve SMEs, making it difficult to single out an appropriate employer representative. Even ITPs that had all-employer boards said that they had been chosen for their skills and experience rather than the company they worked for.

"[They] have brought commerciality and a certain harshness and sharpness. They question unsentimentally, making no assumptions. They balance those who have come from the 'traditional' world where provision was demand led."

College Principal

Several interviewees warned against recruiting governors who were part of any 'special interest group', including their own industry or sector.

But there was overall consensus that business people – in the widest sense of the word - made a difference. In particular, they were seen as very good at audit and risk analysis, at reputation analysis and communication. In general they didn't favour bureaucracy, and were able to focus quickly on the 'nub' of any issue.

One ITP, however, was unusual in that it was focused on a single sector, and therefore saw sector representation on its board as critical. Its board comprised representatives of regional, national and international engineering companies.

...and intelligence on skills needs was also helpful.

One college board member had got into governing because his company employed young people and his managers were always complaining about their skills. As an employer he was clear that he not only brought particular skills, but also contributed his understanding of the types of skills that employers needed, and he was confident that his college listened.

“Having background in industry sectors and a commitment to the company are priorities for non-execs, rather than being an employer.”

ITP CEO

The ability of governors from the business world to bring useful contacts and resources and to act as advocates for the college was also mentioned by several interviewees. However, this wasn't necessarily limited to those in the private sector.

Boards need to be aware of the potential disadvantages to recruiting members from the business world.

It shouldn't be assumed that business people will automatically have the right skills - most are not exposed to corporate governance, and they can find the practices of an FE college in particular difficult to grasp.

Business people might find it particularly hard to commit the necessary time and interviewees reported that they were becoming increasingly difficult to recruit, even from large companies. When they were recruited they often couldn't turn up to meetings. Some college boards were beginning to adapt their ways of working in order to make it easier for business people to participate, e.g. by starting meetings earlier and being explicit about which items on the agenda they were particularly needed for.

One college board had adopted a new technology strategy, with members increasingly meeting in small groups using Google Hang-Outs (similar to Skype); documents were stored on a shared online system; and meetings were often held at breakfast time. A board member suggested that member value should be gauged by their overall commitment and effect rather than by their attendance.

There were differing views on conflict of interest for board members from local employers. A clerk who had previously worked at a college with a large local employer on the board said that she didn't favour that approach, as there were definite conflicts of interest. In contrast, the CEO of an ITP pointed out that as charity trustees, there could be no preferential treatment or financial benefit to either individuals or their companies.

Employer Ownership of Skills

Asked specifically about employer ownership of skills, this was seen as more of a concern by ITPs than colleges, although some ITP interviewees felt that it would pose more problems for college boards – which they thought unprepared for the change - than for theirs. Most college interviewees, however, felt that their employers generally weren't large enough to change their purchasing habits, or they felt that it might change the customer base but shouldn't affect governance.

One ITP board member thought it might make employers more selective and could lead to more poaching. The CEO of another ITP thought it would reduce the number of employers on boards as board members couldn't also be funders. One ITP CEO saw it as a business opportunity as they could provide a managing agent and accreditation service to employers, while a board member of another said they were considering how they might meet the training needs of other third sector organisations.

Ways of recruiting governors

A range of methods were mentioned:

- Open advertising by the search committee;
- General county council advertising for governors for schools and colleges;
- Trustees Unlimited;
- Personal contacts – “tapping on the shoulder” – which “can result in duffers”;
- Through engagement in apprenticeships;
- Through the employer relationship unit;
- Through consultation boards;
- Through involvement in external bodies, such as Local Enterprise Partnerships.

Decision making and risk taking

7. How does the board handle decision-making? What formal processes does it use?
8. What is the board's attitude to risk? How does it handle risk management?

Summary

Clear decision-making authorities and processes are important, but no particular approach comes across as recommended. Smaller boards operating without committees might be better placed to ensure decisions are made and risks assessed based on the full picture, but detailed work by committees can also be highly effective. Some providers have particularly sophisticated risk management processes in place, often introduced by those with professional expertise.

Most of the boards had clear decision-making delegation to committees, with clerks providing advice and appropriate reminders.

Many of the boards were still operating with traditional board + committee structures, and seemed to feel that this helped effective decision making, as delegation was clear and detailed work in committees informed more strategic debate at the main board. However, the clerk of a college that had adopted policy governance said that this model was just as effective, not least because all members had a full picture of all aspects of the business.

Some boards used a system of ad hoc sub-committees to work up proposals on major projects, sometimes using external advice and assessment.

Apart from in the area of induction, it was here that clerks seemed to be most active, playing an important role in advising when proper resolution was needed and helping to structure the process, including making sure items were brought back as required.

Some of the ITP interviewees thought that smaller boards made for more effective decision-making, and also made use of emails between meetings to enable smaller decisions to be made quickly. 'Meatier' issues might entail a discussion paper by the CEO or other executive members, a discussion and a vote.

All organisations had formal risk management process in place, with many drawing on business and external expertise.

Several boards had benefited from members' expertise to ensure robust processes.

- The chair of an Audit Committee had made it his business to introduce good risk management, partly because he was a banker, but also because five years previously they had been in a high risk situation with a major capital project and had had a poor Ofsted inspection.
- Another Audit Committee counted the CEO of a major national organisation among its members, along with an actuary. They had instigated Risk Registers and a Risk Appetite Schedule (RAS), which was reviewed at their annual away day. The RAS set out those areas of the business where they were quite risk averse, and others where they were 'risk hungry'. This gave the executive team a working method for understanding the board's potential level of support for risk in new and existing projects.
- A Finance Director came from the private sector and had been introducing good practices.
- A co-opted member from the audit profession only sat on the Audit Committee.

"Taking and managing risk with due diligence is an essential part of the leadership of the board."

ITP chair

It was suggested by a college that the policy governance model made risk management easier, with all papers having risks covered. Members were very risk aware and always had a full and proper discussion on this area.

An ITP CEO mentioned that, while they were not a plc, they were aware of the UK Corporate Code and worked to best practice. Checks and balances were provided by internal and external audit.

One ITP pointed out that their biggest risks were government policy and being “knocked off course” by funding changes which meant they couldn’t control their cash flow. Having a contract year and funding agency year with different start and finish points left a period when cash flow was unknown, which was in itself an example of poor governance, but outside their control.

Reputational risk was mentioned by several interviewees as being as important as financial risk, particularly when developing new partnerships or setting up new entities such as academies.

Focus on leveraging high-value partnerships and resources

9. To what extent is your board focused on helping leverage high value partnerships and resources in the area and/or in the organisation’s specialism?
10. Has this helped to promote and strengthen provision and/or make it more relevant to employers and the local community?

Summary

Not all boards see such leverage as part of their role, and choosing board members for their networks and contacts is generally not a high priority. But where it is decided that board members should play such a role, there need to be proper rules in place to ensure it is done appropriately.

This varied according to the board, with some seeing it as an SLT role, whereas for others it was “part of the job description”.

The members of one college board regularly attended events on its behalf and talked to people about the college. Some members had good links, and the college was happy to exploit them. They saw the role as being tied up in where they were taking the organisation in the future.

One chair said that her members weren’t really working as ambassadors, but they saw this as an area for immediate development. A discussion scheduled for their next away day would seek to put some rules around the ambassador role – when it was appropriate and what was appropriate.

Another board explicitly saw this as part of the remit of their planned Advisory Council. The chair was well-known locally, and its members would change as different issues and projects arose.

“All our members are well connected and act as ambassadors. They have the credibility of being independent, but they are also extremely knowledgeable about the college, and can counteract out-of-date perceptions of what the college does and how it operates.”

College board member

Several boards – both college and ITP – had strong engagement with their LEP, which was helping to align their future development with local needs. One ITP CEO

mentioned working closely with their local authority so that the company was seen as a local resource.

And finally...

We asked some of the college principals what they would do if they had a 'blank sheet of paper' to redesign their board, and whether they would even have a board. One admitted that she would rather not have a board, but thought that there "needs to be something there, if only to appoint the principal". It is perhaps worth noting that her examples of impact all focused on her knowing that she had the board behind her every step of the way. Given that a board was required, she would prefer it to be small and to "stick to doing what's necessary".

The other principals questioned felt they couldn't operate without their board. One pointed out that, as a risk-taker, she needed somebody to put the brakes on and "put her through the mangle", even though that might be frustrating at times. Board members brought skills, perspectives and expertise that the college wouldn't otherwise benefit from.

Some recommendations emerging from the findings

- Boards should make explicit reference to their role during their discussions, and regularly analyse how successfully they are fulfilling it.
- The provider's mission should inform all board discussions and should be reviewed regularly to ensure community accountability operates in practice.
- Active engagement with wider community activities – such as regeneration – will ensure the provider is contributing fully to local economic and social development.
- Boards should put considerable time and effort into recruiting, inducting and training members to ensure a good understanding of their role and the right skills to fulfil it.
- To be fully effective, boards need to ensure that every member comes with the skills needed to think strategically and challenge constructively, while also ensuring social and cultural diversity.
- Boards should ensure they have several sources of data, as well as a good personal understanding of how things work on the ground.
- Boards should regularly review the way they operate and be prepared to be innovative in order to ensure they are using members' time effectively and are able to accommodate the needs of a diverse membership.
- Boards need to make sure that risk is part of every discussion, and that processes are designed to properly embed risk management rather than pay it 'lip service'.
- Where it is decided that board members should use their networks and contacts to the advantage of the college, there need to be proper rules in place to ensure it is done appropriately.

The position of adult & community learning providers⁵

ACL providers are particularly diverse in their organisational models and their governance arrangements. A number of those we interviewed had delegated governance and thus can be regarded as independent organisations, resembling FE colleges in structure and with similar governance arrangements. We have integrated their responses into the analysis above, as we found that they aligned with those of colleges and ITPs.

However, there is another, important category of ACL provider: local authorities in receipt of public funding for FE and skills, which maintain a direct delivery service and to which delegation has not been granted. Six of the ACL providers were in this category, with governance arrangements that were part of the wider arrangements in place across their local authority.

The normal model is that decision making is through Cabinet, and is led by the full Council. Cabinet comprises the Leader and other Councillors, acting as Portfolio Holders ('lead members'). The disposition of portfolios is determined internally, through a party political process, and lead members will not necessarily have been selected because of their expertise in, or their understanding of, their portfolio.

Councils also have a Scrutiny & Overview Committee – with membership also selected through a party political process - which holds the local authority to account in terms of how effectively its work is contributing towards the economic, social and environmental well-being of the community it serves.

ACL service delivery will be part of a directorate that can vary significantly from authority to authority: up to eight have been identified for ACL, and the services are frequently moved between directorates. Responsibility is usually devolved internally to senior Council officers, and it is not unusual for local authority ACL Heads of Service – the equivalent of a college principal - to be accountable to an Assistant Director and thence 'up the line', rendering them in effect fourth-tier managers.

It is also not uncommon for the Head of Service to meet only relatively occasionally with their lead member. Meetings usually take place in preparation for Scrutiny Committee or Cabinet meetings, although the extent to which ACL features on agendas varies considerably. Where it is located within a wider education portfolio, it is more likely to be considered by elected members on a regular basis.

Summary

These interviewees have an even broader sense of accountability, as they are employed by the local authority and are part of its internal hierarchy. This seems to result in less clarity about where their accountability lies. The local authority structure means that governance is very much at arm's length, and relies heavily on the level of knowledge and personal interest of the current lead member, and on the focus and dynamism of the directorate of which the service is part.

⁵ This description of governance arrangements for ACL providers that are part of a local authority is drawn from a Hoxlex report commissioned by LSIS in May 2013.

Although there is little opportunity for business involvement in their formal governance, involvement with local employers can be quite strong, whether through council structures or their own stakeholder work.

The real strength of the local authority context lies in the strong focus on partnership working, which enables ACL providers to be part of a local strategic approach to support for skills and employability.

Governance and accountability

The interviewees were all Heads of Service (HoS), apart from one Portfolio Holder. The HoS were all clear about the local authority's governance structure and where they sat within it. Their views on accountability varied widely. One described it as "slave to several masters". Between them they mentioned: the Council (the most common response), funders, learners, local people, employers, their line manager and – on one occasion - Ofsted.

"The lead member receives reports, presents them to Cabinet and has them scrutinised by the Scrutiny Committee; but in practice, the service largely manages itself."

Head of Service

The question about 'member understanding of role/accountabilities' was taken to refer to the lead member. The overwhelming feeling was that members did not understand the service and were therefore poorly placed to challenge its activities. Only one HoS said that her lead member was actively interested and received regular briefings.

Board Impact

In general, the arm's-length nature of the relationship with councillors meant they did not have a strong impact on the day-to-day or strategic management of the service. There was even a sense of potential negative impact from one Head of Service who pointed out that councillors often saw things in a party political context rather than as an education or employment issue.

In contrast, where lead members *did* take an interest, they could use their influence in Cabinet to ensure a better general understanding of adult learning needs and its support for HoS proposals. One HoS said her lead member "raises the profile and reputation of the service".

Only one specific example of impact was offered – that of a lead member identifying a gap in employability skills in his constituency, resulting in the service offering appropriate provision.

When asked whether impact could be increased, one HoS suggested that this might be achieved by ensuring the service sat within the right directorate. She was hopeful that her recent move to Regeneration would provide a more relevant and dynamic environment for her work.

Employers on boards

Inevitably there are business people and employers working as councillors. However, their interests primarily lie in representing their constituency and constituents, not particularly business or employment interests.

The HoS did, however, work with local employers where possible. Employers might be involved in various boards established by the council. One example given was of a Learning & Skills Board, which extended its remit to include a greater focus on skills for employment, influencing the provision of the ACL provider. The same council was also heavily involved in offering apprenticeships within their services.

Another provider had been commended by Ofsted for its work with stakeholders, including Jobcentre Plus, and had recently developed bespoke employability skills provision for over 45s. However, the HoS also mentioned that, although she attended meetings of an Employment & Skills Board that included large local employers among its members, she couldn't guarantee that she would get to speak to them.

Again, the move to Regeneration by one HoS was seen as likely to bring far more effective direct employer involvement in her work.

Decision making and risk taking

There was something of a split in the responses to these questions. Half of those who answered cited rigorous council processes, compliant with codes of conduct and effective practice. Two HoS, however, were not so confident. One pointed out that the decisions she made could be scrutinised but rarely were; the other that she and her managers took suitable actions that were "not necessarily reported up the line".

Focus on leveraging high-value partnerships and resources

Although these providers did not have traditional boards to provide contacts and networks, partnership working featured particularly strongly, which was not surprising given the local authority context.

Partnerships covered both planning and delivery. In some areas they were via committees in specific interest areas, such as 14-19 or adult skills, working with Jobcentre Plus and other local providers. In one area, a Learning & Skills partnership - comprising the voluntary sector, other providers and stakeholders such as the Department for Work & Pensions and the district council - was working to promote and improve engagement with vulnerable groups and unemployed people.

One HoS commented that such partnerships had strengthened provision as they were "no longer just talking shops".

One HoS was part of a Community Learning Trust pilot and was working with voluntary sector partners, the arts centre, a local theatre, libraries and museum services and a local college. Most of the partnership had existed before the pilot.

Another HoS worked with 24 voluntary and community partners. Their current aim was to bid for LEP and ESF funding to increase the number of apprenticeships and

hopefully begin to run traineeships. Another was working with over 70 providers to offer programmes in a range of settings from schools to community-based venues.

4. Conclusions

The providers involved in this work were all good or outstanding and many shared the same value set. Whatever their legal status, a set of good governance principles and behaviours underpinned their work.

We didn't ask specifically about the Nolan Principles of Public Life⁶ but, although the appropriate behaviours were apparent, we would have expected there to have been more reference to them. They were only explicitly mentioned once, by a clerk with reference to the induction sessions she ran. It might help board members if the codes they used – such as the English Colleges Foundation Code of Governance - set out the core values articulated by Nolan. Other providers might consider whether they needed to determine their own codes, which could include the principles. Their adoption would provide an ethical framework for the personal behaviour of governors and board members.

The interviews provided evidence that the majority of these providers' boards were displaying the following principles, characteristics and behaviours, which should be adopted by all Boards:

Principles

- A commitment to ensuring high quality teaching and learning, and protecting the student interest through good governance.
- A recognition that accountability for funding derived directly from a range of stakeholders, and the need to demonstrate accountability to those individuals and organisations.
- A commitment to full and transparent accountability for public funding including clear published policy on how complaints were handled.
- A commitment to the publication of accurate and transparent information.
- A commitment to the achievement of equality of opportunity and diversity throughout the organisation.

Characteristics

- Seeing themselves as guardians of the organisation's mission, as well as of its financial success.
- Organised and clear governance structures, with well-understood delegations and authorities.

⁶ Selflessness – Integrity – Objectivity – Accountability – Openness – Honesty - Leadership

- Priority given to financial health, including adopting effective systems of control and risk management that promoted value for money, met mandatory audit requirements, and produced accurate and quality-assured provider data.
- A strong focus on board members having good business-related skills and acumen.
- Chair and senior leadership team creating an atmosphere for constructive challenge, and acting on the outcome.
- Clerks/company secretaries having the status within the organisation to chase progress and commission reports
- Recognition of individual contributions.

Behaviours

- Ensuring the organisation's sustainability by setting the strategy, ensuring robust planning and monitoring successful delivery.
- Selecting and recruiting the right senior team and implementing rigorous performance systems that would lead to dismissal if targets and outcomes were not met.
- A range of strategies for engaging with employers.
- Strategies for ensuring students could progress to relevant jobs and/or further study.
- Chair, Principal/Chief Executive and clerk/company secretary striving to ensure boards received the right level of information to make decisions.
- Keeping under review composition and membership, assessing skills were fit for purpose and undertaking succession planning.
- The board reviewing regularly its effectiveness and that of any committees in its structure and involving external experts in that review.

Annex 1: List of Participating Organisations

Adult & Community Learning (ACL)

Local Authority

Cambridgeshire County Council Adult & Community Learning
Derby Adult Learning & Skills
Doncaster Council
East Riding of Yorkshire County Council
Lewisham Community Learning Service
Liverpool Adult Learning Service

Providers with delegated governance

City College Peterborough
Redbridge Institute Community Learning & Skills
Walsall Adult & Community College
Westminster Adult Education Service

Independent ACL provider

Workers Educational Association

Further Education Colleges (FECs)

Activate Learning
Barnet & Southgate College
Guildford College of Further & Higher Education
Hertford Regional College
Highbury College
New College Durham
Warwickshire College

Independent Training Providers (ITPs)

Independent Training Services
Learndirect
NETA Training Trust
Ridgemoor Training Ltd
Shaw Trust
TQ Training

Annex 2: Semi-Structured Interview Outline

1. How would you define the word 'governance' as it is practised in your particular organisation?
2. To whom is your board⁷ accountable?
3. What does the board do to ensure that all members fully understand their role and accountabilities?

Does the board make use of the support available to help meet the standards set out by Ofsted? How effective is it, particularly given limited time among board members?

Board Impact

4. Can you identify the three occasions in the last three years when the board has, in your view, had the most measurable impact? (Impact might be on organisational performance, learners, the employer community and/or the wider community.)

What evidence did you have of the impact?

Were there any particular board characteristics/behaviours/practices that contributed to the impact?

Are there any particular practices that have reduced the board's impact?

Are there ways in which impact could be increased? E.g. Could it do more to ensure the learner voice is heard? Would that make a real difference?

Employers on the board

5. Do you think that having employers on the board makes/would make a measurable difference? Has it contributed/would it contribute to the impact already discussed? Does it/would it entail any conflict of interest?

[If relevant] How does the board go about recruiting employers – which approaches work best?

What does the board do to ensure its employer members actually act as employers?

Does the organisation have other ways of engaging with the employer community to achieve particular outcomes?

Do you think that the new emphasis on employer ownership of skills – eg Apprenticeship funding due to go direct to employers – will change governance arrangements?

6. How does the board handle decision-making? What formal processes does it use?
7. What is the board's attitude to risk? How does it handle risk management?
8. To what extent is your board focused on helping leverage high value partnerships and resources in the area and/or in the organisation's specialism?

Has this helped to promote and strengthen provision and/or make it more relevant to employers and the local community?

⁷ We are using the word 'board' throughout this project as a convenient way of denoting any formal governance arrangements.

Annex 3: Pre Interview Questionnaire (PIQ)

Research Project A: Board Impact

PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE: GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

Dear Colleague

Your organisation has kindly agreed to take part in short research project investigating the impact of good governance in the FE sector. Full details are available in the Project Brief, which you should also have received.

We would be grateful if you could complete this short questionnaire, which will provide us with some helpful background to the interviews we are scheduling. It should be completed electronically and returned to your project contact to the deadline agreed. If you have any questions, please contact your interviewer in the first instance.

Thank you for your help.

The Project Team

NB Throughout this project we are using the word 'board' as a convenient generic term to denote any formal governance arrangements.

Organisation:	
Your name:	Your role:
Telephone:	Email:

1. What are the current governance arrangements for your organisation?

Please check the appropriate box

- Board of governors
- Board of directors
- Board of trustees
- Lead committee
- Other, including group arrangements *(please specify – box will expand as you type)*

- We don't have any formal governance arrangements *(please go directly to Q10)*

2. How many members are there on the board?

3. What is the male/female split?

Male	Female

4. How many members of the board are employers?

5. Please name any other stakeholder groups that are explicitly represented on the board (eg learners, staff, community) *(boxes will expand as you type)*

Stakeholder Group 1	
Stakeholder Group 2	
Stakeholder Group 3	
Stakeholder Group 4	
Stakeholder Group 5	
Stakeholder Group 6	

6. Support arrangements

a. Does the board have a dedicated:

- Clerk
- Secretary
- Other support arrangements *(please specify)*

b. On what terms is the clerk/secretary employed?

- Employed solely by us: full-time
- Employed solely by us: part-time
- It's part of their wider role in the organisation *(please specify)*

- They provide clerking/secretarial services for a number of organisations

7. How often does the board/committee meet?

8. Sub-Committees

a. Please give the names of any sub-committees operated by your board

Committee 1	
Committee 2	
Committee 3	
Committee 4	

b. How often do the sub-committees meet?

9. How long has your current chair been in post?

10. *(Only to be answered by those organisations that have no formal governance arrangements)*

a. How does your organisation ensure there is a challenge function similar to the one a board would provide? *(boxes will expand as you type)*

b. How do you report, and to whom?

c. How do you involve employers in the development of your programmes?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire

Please email it to your project contact by the agreed deadline.

Annex 4: Collated Responses to PIQs

PIQs received:

- ITPs 4 out of 6
- FECs 7 out of 7
- ACL 9 out of 11

Q1. What are the current governance arrangements for your organisation?

	Board of governors	Board of directors	Board of trustees	Lead committee	Other	None
ITPs		3	1			
FECs	7					
ACL	5		1	1	Lead member x 3	

Q2/3 How many members are there on the board (including vacancies)? What is the male/female split? How many employers are there?

	No.	M/F	Emps	Type	No.	M/F	Emps	Type	No.	M/F	Emps
ITPs	8	6/2	8	FECs	14	6/8	12	ACL	18	13/5	5
	3	2/1	0		12	7/4	3		10	5/5	2
	10	6/4	0		19	14/15	4		12	3/7	2
	7	6/1	2		16	9/7	2		14	4/7	2
					20	6/8	0		12-	8/6	2
					18	9/7	8		16		
					14	8/6	0		12	7/5	4

Q4 Please name any other stakeholder groups that are explicitly represented on the board (eg learners, staff, community) (boxes will expand as you type)

ITPs	Construction employer group Shareholders Executive staff Company owner
FECs	Staff x 7 Student x 7 Academic Business x 5 Community x 4 Education HE
ACL	Staff x4 Student x4 Third sector x2 Local community x2 Elected members x2

	Local Authority Knowledge of adult learning Retired
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Q5 Support arrangements

	Dedicated Clerk	Dedicated Secretary	Other
ITPs	1	2	Chief Executive's PA
FECs	7		+ Deputy Clerk (x1)
ACL	6		

On what terms is the clerk/secretary employed?

	Sole employer - full-time	Sole employer - part-time	Part of wider role	Provide services for a number of organisations
ITPs	1	1	PA Executive Assistant	
FECs	1	3	Director of Policy & Research	2
ACL	3	2		1

Q6 How often does the board/committee meet?

ITPs	Monthly x 2 Bi monthly Quarterly + additional mtgs for single item agendas	FECs	9 pa 6 pa 5 pa + strategy mtg 4 pa + 3 briefing mtgs 4 pa + Away-day 4 pa Termly	ACL	5 pa 4-5 + extra as req'd 4 pa x 3 3 pa

Q7 Sub-Committees

a. Please give the names of any sub-committees operated by your board

	Name of sub-committee (mtg frequency)
ITPs	None – 3 HR & Remunerations; Performance & Finance; New Business; Audit (bi monthly)
FECs	9: Audit; Search; Remuneration; People & Change; Appeals; Campus Redevelopment Project Board; Curriculum, Quality & Standards; Finance, Estates &

	<p>General Purpose; Advisory Groups (termly)</p> <p>Audit (3/4 pa); Appraisal/Remuneration (1 pa); Search (as req'd)</p> <p>F&GP (6 pa); Audit (4 pa); Curriculum & Standards (4 pa); Search & Governance (3 pa)</p> <p>Finance & Resources; Audit; Quality & Standards; Employers & Engagement (Termly)</p> <p>Finance; Audit; Search; Remuneration (3/4 pa)</p> <p>Strategy & Resources (5 pa); Quality, Curriculum & Students (3 pa); Audit (4 pa); Academy Development (5 pa); Search (4 pa); Remuneration (1 pa)</p> <p>Audit (4 pa); Academic Standards & Quality Assurance (3 pa); Resources (4 pa); Search, Governance & Remuneration (3 pa)</p>
ACL	<p>Search & Governance; Audit; Finance & Resources; Curriculum, Quality & Performance; Senior Staffing (3/4 pa)</p> <p>Finance & Workforce; Adult & Community Learning; Adult Skills; Business & Apprenticeships; Study Skills (4 pa)</p> <p>Monitoring of Performance; Staffing; F&GP (termly)</p> <p>Performance Review & Quality (4 pa); Finance & GP (monthly); Search; Health & Safety; ad hoc special committees</p> <p>Finance & GP; Quality & Performance; Search & General (as req'd)</p> <p>Equality & Diversity Scrutiny Panel; Education & Strategy; Finance & Resources; Membership, Volunteering & Marketing; Audit (4 pa)</p>

Q8 How long has your current chair been in post?

ITPs	6 months 22 months 5.5 years 15 years	FECs	4 months 5 months 6 months 1 year 3 years 6 years 6 years	ACL	1 year 2 years 3 years + 3 years 3 years 35 years
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