Guidance note: Appraisal and assessment of individual governors

This guidance note is written to support clerks and chairs in considering the various ways of carrying out individual governor appraisals, and to help governors understand the different processes.

- **Who appraises the performance of governors and how are outcomes reported to the Board?**
- **How do you ensure that governors are appropriately trained and developed?**
- **How does the appraisal feed into the governance self-assessment report?**

Introduction

In order to achieve more effective and efficient governance, individual governor appraisal needs to take place. The objective of the appraisal is to enable the governors to evaluate their performance, to build upon strengths and address any areas for development. The purpose of appraisals is to manage performance, identifying training needs, identify gaps in skills and experience on the board and to enable effective succession planning for governors.

'A regular effectiveness assessment by a governing body should include consideration of:

The performance of the Chair and of other governors holding offices or undertaking defined roles within the governance structure.' AoC Foundation Code of Governance 2013

It is important that this expectation is discussed during a new governor induction. As the role is voluntary, having a formal assessment can seem daunting. Explaining how the performance of the board is dependent on the performance of individual members, helps individual governors see appraisal as a positive experience and will enable them to feel more confident and effective in the role.

Methods for carrying out individual governor appraisal

This can take various forms, including:

- self-assessment using a questionnaire, completed individually and collated by the clerk. (Examples of questionnaires.)

- one to one reviews with the chair of the corporation against a defined set of topics/questions (see appraisal meetings below)

- peer review with a fellow governor using a defined interview sheet to ask questions and collate responses to feed back to the clerk (see whole board interactive method below).

- the use of an external consultant to design and issue a questionnaire, or interview each governor and produce a report with individual needs and group needs. This can be helpful every three to four years to get an objective assessment.

[Example of hand-out for participants](#)

[Example of questionnaire](#) (from the Learning Board)

Things to consider when deciding on a method

To get an honest self-evaluation, the governor needs to feel comfortable with the process and have had some input to the method. It is essential that the governors are involved in agreeing the framework and questions/criteria for assessment.

Consider what you are going to do with the information gathered. Will it be confidential to individual governors, shared as a collated feedback or feed into the self-assessment report? If governors are going to spend time on an assessment, they will want to see the outcomes and how their feedback is being actioned.

The process can be used as a good learning activity to share governor experiences and lead into producing the self-assessment for governance and the governance development plan for the following year.

The process can also be a helpful way of updating your skills audit and identifying gaps and the need for succession planning.

Appraisal Meetings
(Include options for who does the appraisal i.e. Chair/ Vice-Chair)

In advance of appraisal meetings, governors are asked to complete a questionnaire in which they are asked to evaluate their performance over the year. The responses inform the discussion in the meeting where the following issues are discussed:

- Progress against targets agreed at the prior year's appraisal meeting
- Training and development undertaken and the identification of any further training needs.
- Contribution to the work of the Corporation including how they have managed any conflicts of interest
- Identification of any potential change in committee membership
- Identification of any aspirations to become a chair or vice-chair of the corporation or a committee
- Agreement of targets and objectives for the year (individual objectives or whole governing body aims – or could be both with some of the individual targets coming together?)

- How they demonstrate they adhere to the code of conduct for governors.

Appraisal Feedback

The content of appraisal meetings remains confidential to the individual governor concerned, the appraiser and the Clerk to the Board. However, appraisal meeting feedback is taken into consideration in the production of the governance development plan and in the annual review of membership.

A report summarising the key themes arising from the governor appraisal process is produced by the clerk and submitted to the board (often delegated to a search and governance committee) for information.

Example of a whole board interactive method

Some college have been using individual questionnaires, and are seeking more interactive ways of carrying out governance self-assessment. Below is **a suggested process - a focused 75 minute activity that** involves all governors, is inclusive and gathers both individual and whole board feedback**.** The questions can be tailored to meet the needs of each board.

Purpose of the activity:

- to build an assessment of overall board performance starting from individuals' assessments
- identify the strengths of the boards performance over the last 12 months
- identify areas for improvement in process, focus, effectiveness and impact of governance
- identify individual training and development needs for the Governance Development Plan
- identify whole board development opportunities for the Governance Development Plan

Step one

Pair's activity (30 minutes - 15 minutes each way)
Using the questionnaire below, interview each other and the interviewer take notes against each question. This will be handed to the clerk at the end to form the basis of the governance self-assessment.

Step two (15 minutes)

Join with another pair and share your responses to questions 3, 4 and 5. Identify the common themes, ready to feed back to the whole group. You will have five minutes to feedback your key points.

Step Three (30 minutes)

Collating the group responses. The Clerk will note the group responses to questions 3, 4 and 5 and collect the individual questionnaires. This information will be used to produce the self-assessment report which will go the following board meeting. It will also inform the governance development plan for individuals and the whole board for the following year.

Questionnaire

Looking back on the last year:

1. What works really well and has had an impact on college performance. Illustrate with examples for each aspect.
    a) in board meetings
    b) information provided
    c) other governor activities

2. What would make it even better?
    a) in board meetings
    b) information provided
    c) other governor activities

3. What do you personally need to help you be more effective? E.g. more information about the college context, training on finance and funding, or curriculum. Updating about the sector. What makes effective governance?

Strategy and forward planning

4. What strategic questions do we need to focus on next year?

5. Where will we make time to do this?

6. What changes might we recommend to the format of current meetings and agendas?

(Reproduce these questions into a handout with space to record answers; add name and interviewer.)

The Governance Unit at the AoC has lists of National Leaders of Governance and National Subject Specialists who can provide mentoring and support to develop governance and individual governors.

Other resources

Guidance notes on:

- [Board self-evaluation](#)
- [What is governance?](#)
- [The role of the student governor as a member of the governing body](#)
- [Being a critical friend](#)
- [Getting the best from the board](#)
- [Appraisal and assessment of the chair](#)
- [Asking powerful questions](#)

Other resources are available from the library.

May 2014