



Career Path of a Further Education College Governance Professional/Clerk/Governance Director/Company Secretary – Part 1

Summary

This paper has been developed to provide background information for those thinking about becoming a clerk and those who would like to pursue a career in education or private sector management.

Becoming a Clerk/Governance Professional

Colleges are exciting and dynamic places to work. Collectively the college sector educates or trains over 2.5 million students annually. Colleges differ in size and are often one of the largest employers in their area; some are very large with an annual turnover of over £120m while the average is around £30m. The role of a clerk is multifaceted. The clerk is an advisor, a leader, a planner, a communicator, a diplomat, a manager, an administrator and a challenger. Crucial to the role is the requirement for the clerk to work with the governing body in developing them to improve their effectiveness and monitor their performance.

The clerk leads, advises and supports the work of the governing body in a variety of ways. The clerk requires a clear understanding of the procedures appropriate to a public body, and the tact and judgement to guarantee as far as possible that the governing body operates within its powers and abides by those procedures. In addition, his or her role will include ensuring effective governance, planning governing body business, reporting progress on the implementation of the governing body's decisions, as well as leading, developing and implementing improvements or changes in governance practice.

The clerk's role also involves essential administrative support for the governing body's work. Governors act in a voluntary capacity. Most have significant commitments and responsibilities elsewhere. It is an essential part of the clerk's role to provide, or arrange for, the level of detailed administrative support that will enable the governing body to function effectively without making unreasonable demands on the time of individual governors. The timetabling of, and preparation for, meetings; the commissioning and assembling of papers; the preparation of agendas and minutes; and the administration of matters concerned with the membership of the governing body, are all areas where effective support can be crucial in ensuring the efficient conduct of business. Clerks are responsible for ensuring that the college complies with standard financial and legal practice as set out in the Instrument and Articles and maintains the standards of corporate governance. Although they are not required to provide legal advice, clerks must have a thorough understanding of the laws applicable to their areas of work.



Clerks act as a point of communication between the board of governors and college executive, reporting in a timely and accurate manner on college procedures and developments.

Colleges are legally required to employ an independent clerk and similar positions can be found across all sectors. This role often has the title Chartered Secretary.

Typical work activities

A clerk's role covers a wide variety of responsibilities and these depend, in part, on the college for which they work. Typical tasks include:

- organising and preparing agendas for, and taking minutes of, governing body and committees;
- maintaining statutory registers, including register of members interests, attendance, dealing with correspondence, collating information and writing reports, ensuring decisions made are communicated to the relevant governors or member of the executive team;
- contributing to meeting discussions as and when required, and advising governors of the legal, governance and statutory implications of proposed policies;
- monitoring changes in relevant legislation and the regulatory environment and taking appropriate action;
- liaising with external regulators and advisers, such as inspectors and auditors;
- developing and overseeing the systems that ensure the college complies with all applicable codes, in addition to its legal and statutory responsibilities.

In addition the clerk should ensure that the governing body:

- receives and considers appropriate information on the college's curriculum, quality, student performance and finances;
- sets and regularly monitors targets for enrolments, retention, achievement and success rates and other such key performance indicators as the governing body determines; and
- undertakes financial forecasts and monitoring in line with the financial memoranda agreed with the Skills Funding Agency or Education Funding Agency.

The work of a clerk in a college that has a business arm and is registered as a company may be more specialised than in a smaller college. For example, the liaison role with shareholders and compliance responsibilities may make up a major part of the work, and may include maintaining the register of shareholders and monitoring changes in share ownership of the company, paying dividends and managing share option schemes, and taking a role in share issues, mergers and takeovers.

Attached in Annex A is a typical job description.



Salary and conditions

The clerk may be described as the professional officer employed by and serving the governing body, sometimes described as Company Secretary or Governance Director. The contract of employment will be between the clerk and the corporation. The principal cannot be employed as the clerk. As with senior post-holders, the governing body has direct responsibility for the clerk; it oversees the appointment, grading, suspension and dismissal of the clerk and determines the clerk's pay and conditions as necessary.

The corporation has direct responsibility for the entire employment of the person who is the clerk if that person also has another post within the college. The clerk's role may be a full-time or part-time position. Some experienced clerks may service more than one governing body under separate contracts for services.

The governing body may decide to appoint a deputy clerk and/or administrator to assist in clerking duties. It is also desirable for the clerk to have appropriate secretarial support.

- A starting salary is generally around £25,000, rising to £55,000, depending on the numbers of hours worked.
- At the top end of the salary scale, if combined with a director's role, a clerk can earn £70,000 or more. An annual bonus may also be included in the salary.
- Normal office hours are usual although additional hours in the evening are often required to accommodate meetings.
- The work is mainly office based. Some travel may be necessary in larger colleges that have subsidiaries or multiple sites.
- There are many opportunities for experienced clerks to be self-employed or to work freelance. Clerks may also work as sole traders, in partnerships or companies, offering company secretarial services, or in professional practices, offering similar services as part of a larger organisation.

Professional entry requirements

Graduates are preferred by many boards, while others may consider candidates with relevant HND qualifications and good personal skills.

A pre-entry postgraduate qualification is not needed, but professional qualifications, particularly the FE College Clerks level 5 qualification, or the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators (ICSA) examinations are widely accepted as the most recognised qualification for the role.

The following subjects may offer some exemptions from the professional examinations - law, business and management, accountancy and finance, politics, government and public administration.

As most clerk positions will require a professional qualification and/or significant professional experience, it is highly unlikely that a recent graduate would enter directly



into the role. Pre-entry experience in administration is therefore desirable and also strongly recommended.

Some graduates qualify as lawyers or accountants with the aim of becoming governance professionals later, while others may consider a full-time diploma course leading to a full or partial ICSA qualification. For the majority, however, formal training in company secretarial work starts after a few years of administrative work experience. Suitable experience can be gained in areas such as university or college administration or registrar offices, personnel, accounts, sales administration and office management. Once in post, AoC Create offers a Clerks' Induction course for newly appointed clerks.