



Effective Governance Case Study 5

Responsiveness

Summary

This case study explains how a National Leader of Governance (NLG) can support a college in revising their course offer.

Code of Good Governance

This case study underpins principal responsibility 5 – Responsiveness.

Issue to be resolved

1. Is the programme offer responsive to local need?
2. Were stakeholders and partners convinced of the relevance of the offer?

Context

A medium sized college (graded 2 by Ofsted) which was financially viable but had been criticised by stakeholders as training too many hairdressers and not enough engineers. Governors wanted to demonstrate that either their programme offer was relevant or change it so that stakeholders had confidence in their stewardship.

Methodology

The clerk contacted the Association of Colleges (AoC) Governance Unit and asked for an NLG experienced in analysing data and determining new programmes. An initial visit defined the need of the college and built their confidence that the NLG was able to assist them. The visit helped clarify the issues and the work streams. The main themes were:

1. Existing Programmes
2. Future Programmes
3. Formulation of new plan
4. Board relationships and interaction with business and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)

Findings and Actions

The NLG suggested they set up a small team to undertake research and determine what action was needed. Taking each theme in turn, the NLG worked with this team which included a designated governor, principal, clerk, the heads of schools and the MIS manager. They explored what steps should be taken for each issue. It was



important at this stage that the actions were owned and managed by the college.

1. Existing Programmes

The NLG encouraged the team to review the existing programmes by undertaking a series of research activities

- a. To review in a systematic manner the data for each programme, concentrating on demand, recruitment figures, initial enrolment and after 6 weeks, success and qualifications, destination and job prospects, salary on completion of course, student and employer satisfaction of course and/or university completions.
- b. To benchmark against sector norms, other local providers and schools and Ofsted.
- c. Cost of each course, staff student ratios and contributions to the running of college.
- d. To determine whether each programme was meeting the benchmarks for quality, relevance and cost.
- e. Consider removing from the offer those programmes which did not meet the quality and cost benchmarks.
- f. Before removing programmes, consider the risk to local business and the overall student offer. For example, some programmes may not be cost effective but if the college is the only provider then a special dispensation may be needed - but that should only be done with visible employer support.

2. Future Programmes

The team then reviewed the information available which would help them to understand future need. The NLG encouraged the team to:

- a. Source external material from the LEP, UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) and local Jobcentre Plus on:
 - Job vacancies,
 - Priority Immigration Profession/Job list,
 - Population and school demographics,
 - Economic growth areas,
 - Report on employer skills needs and employment patterns
- b. Ask the LEP to come and present to the team their views on future skills shortages.

3. Formulation of New Plan

With guidance from the NLG the team:

- a. Formulated a new plan for the future.



- b. Matched the existing offer to future needs.
- c. Determined areas that would need to be stopped, others that would need to be phased out and the new provision that would need to be resourced.
- d. For each programme, they considered who were the main stakeholders and determined a consultation and communication plan.
- e. Catalogued the risk to reputation and financial considerations.
- f. Drafted a plan for the full board to adopt.
- g. One of the main actions (before final decisions were made) would be to present their findings to the LEP and local industry in the hope they would get endorsement and buy in.

4. Board Relationships and interaction with Business and the Local Enterprise Partnership

Through this exercise the team realised that they were building new links with business and schools, Local Authority and the LEP. Up to this point the college had no history of advisory groups or formal links with business and industry and no representative from the LEP on the college governing body. The team recognised this was a failing and it was agreed that the college should consider how to broaden out the role of employers and consider implementing the recommendations in [It's about work](#).

As part of their plan to ensure future proofing they recommended:

- Establishing vocational advisory boards chaired by a local employer.
- All new programmes to be endorsed by the relevant industry group or employer.
- Refresh governing body to include more employers with experience in finance and strategic planning.
- Chair and principal to develop and attend employer group networks.
- Establishing a continuous development programme for teaching staff, including time back in industry.

Results

The college agreed the recommendations of the working team and the executive is now working through the consultation on each of the programmes. Through this consultation they have been persuaded by employers to keep provision in a specialised area and have secured employer sponsorship to ensure it remains financially viable.

To note: Since this activity has taken place the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) has published their contribution to the Productivity Agenda and are proposing that colleges participate in area reviews which could rationalise provision and lead to mergers.

Conclusions and next steps



Although the exercise was extremely time consuming, the college found it an enlightening experience and the work that is now taking place should put them in a better position when local commissioning comes in

References and useful material

[UK Commission for Employment & Skills \(UKCES\)](#)
[Using Labour Market Intelligence in a College Context](#)
[Colleges in their Community](#)

[It's about work](#)

[LEP's Plan](#)

[Core City Agreements](#)

[Productivity Plan](#)

[Area Review Framework](#)

[More Responsiveness governance resources](#)