



Effective Governance: Case Study

Promoting diversity in the governing body

Summary

This case study explains the role of a National Leader of Governance (NLG) when seeking to promote diversity in the governing body of a college as it enters a period of rapid strategic change arising from Area Review.

Code of Good Governance

This case study underpins principal responsibility 8 – Equality and Diversity.

Issue to be resolved

A board diversity analysis showed that more needed to be done to increase representation of governors in categories including: female; non-white; younger ages; disability. Providing a better voice for under-represented groups was an associated issue.

Context

A college rated as “good” by Ofsted, including for Leadership & Management (2014). About to enter a merger as a result of Area Review, with a new Chair Designate due to lead it through this process who wished to promote best practice in board operations.

Methodology

The clerk contacted the AoC Governance Unit and asked for a NLG experienced in this field. A scoping phone call between the clerk and designated NLG confirmed the requirements and helped develop a tailored proposal which was accepted by the college. The NLG determined the college’s priorities through the clerk and researched specific support materials.

It was agreed that a small governance group (including the Chair, Principal and clerk) would work through the issues and opportunities in developing board diversity in their local context.

The session took the form of a presentation and structured discussion, leading to indicative actions.



Findings and Actions

The planned inputs through a presentation recognised that the college served a predominantly white community with significant socio-economic disadvantage. That is, the support started from the college's current place and planned direction - into a merger which extended opportunities in equality, diversity and inclusion.

Reference materials recognised the benefits of diversity rather than treating it in the abstract; for example, the business benefits of a board being seen as representative of, and engaged with, all sectors of the communities served. In group discussion, the value of planning this into the designate board for the merger became clear.

The NLG suggested to governors that their starting point was encouraging, in that their 2014 Ofsted report had noted "more diversity" in governance was evident and also that they had commissioned this work recognising that actions need to be accelerated.

Evidence of how other local public bodies (such as the Health Trust) act on diversity was also cited, as some of their approaches were transferable. Governors discussed stronger "marketing" of the board and enabling "testing out" of the governor role by having associates on committees or task groups who could become familiar with the governance contribution; whether scheduling of board activities (including meetings) could be revised to be more inclusive; defining diversity more broadly in the local context so KPIs could be clearly focused; and the links with teaching, learning and assessment, including through student and staff governors.

Some probing questions were developed for governors and the executive team in leading diversity, both in the next round of self-assessment and in merger planning. In discussion, these were focused by governors, the clerk and the Principal on practical actions they knew were important in the months ahead. These covered more detailed diversity reports on students and the workforce; and individual governors championing diversity with local community groups.

Results

The group agreed particular actions including recommendations to the full board and amending current approaches so that the value of diversity was more prominent in board operations and planning, including merger planning. This included contact with bodies, including local authorities, health trusts and universities as well as other colleges, as peers in developing relevant strategies, alongside more focused work with community groups to develop a more diverse potential governor "pipeline".



Conclusion and next steps

Overall, participants said they found the NLG engagement very valuable. The Chair intended to raise the benefits of this approach (a focused discussion on actions to promote board diversity), in regional and national governors' groups. The Principal intend to revise certain marketing approaches with the clerk, to open up a clearer line of sight to governance for the wider public.

It was agreed that the issues raised would be essential elements of forthcoming internal self-assessment of leadership and management, and for merger planning.

Source Material

AoC Guidance Note: Diversity of the College Governing Body. April 2014.

AoC Governor Development Module 13 on Board Effectiveness.

Women's Leadership Network evidence: www.winfe.org.uk

School Governors One Stop Shop (SGOSS: also covers colleges):
<https://www.sgooss.org.uk/colleges/college-governance.html>

The Good Governance Institute's Insight Programme, aiming to improve quality and diversity of NHS Boards: <http://www.good-governance.org.uk/the-insight-programme-improving-the-quality-and-diversity-of-nhs-boards/>

Why Should Anyone Be Led By You? What it Takes To Be an Authentic Leader. R. Goffee and G Jones. Harvard Business School Press 2006. AoC Guide for Governors and Senior Leaders on New Structures – Collaborations, Federations and Mergers. March 2016: