



Effective Governance: Case Study

Community Engagement: Adult Community Learning Services

Summary

This case study shows how a National Leader of Governance (NLG) can support an Adult Community Learning Service to refresh their governance arrangements so they have sound informative community engagement strategies.

Code of Good Governance/Ofsted Guidance

This assignment was principally concerned with setting the mission and how to ensure the service's advisory board had working relationships with the community and the council.

In the Ofsted Further Education and Skills inspection handbook, this assignment relates to setting the mission and demonstrating the programme offered is relevant to local community needs.

Issue to be resolved

The ACL service had requested guidance to address two key issues. These were:

1. The advisory board had recommended to the service that they should widen their mission, but council officers were not convinced.
2. To demonstrate their evidence, the advisory board wanted to have more effective community involvement which could reinforce their appraisal of need.

Context

The ACL service is part of a local authority and the local authority are the accounting officer and ESFA registered provider. This medium sized ACL service had been given an Ofsted 2 at its last inspection.

Delivery arrangements had been restructured five years earlier, with a single mission agreed which was to work with the unemployed to help them get into sustained employment. However, the workforce needs of the area were changing and the unemployment figures were very low.

An advisory board had been in place for many years and this board was given the task of determining the offer. However, the advisory board's terms of reference were in

need of revision and many who sat on the board felt their voices were not being heard. They were citing the need to change the mission as an example of the reluctance of the LA to make any change.

They wanted to broaden the mission because the unemployment figures were very low, and there were now other local issues including low-skilled in employment, gig workers and integration issues for the older person. They felt the focus of the service needed to be broadened but were not being listened to.

Methodology

The NLG requested a range of documentation for review in advance of the visit including: advisory board minutes; advisory board memberships; remit and links to the council; SAR; the most recent Ofsted report; the organisation chart and the business plan. This documentation provided a picture of the service.

The NLG identified four main areas to prioritise:

1. Declining participation numbers.
2. Advisory board arrangements and links to the council including board membership.
3. Business development process within the council and their links to the ACL service.

The NLG then made a half-day visit to the local authority, which included discussion with senior officers of council, head of service and chair of the advisory board. This was followed by a workshop with LA officers, the head and deputy of the service, and three board members where an action plan was set up.

The NLG produced a final report which set out the purpose of the visit and the workshop, the findings, and detailed recommendations for the provider to take forward which addressed the issues.

Findings and actions

Board Recommendations

Key findings

The advisory board had focused on the right issue and its solution, without broadening the mission and offer the service was unlikely to meet participation targets but, it was not able to explain the issues they were trying to address to council officers. Council officers had felt, because the service was well led, they did not need to be close to the service and had left the head of service to manage it. This arrangement had worked well until there was need for a business change of direction but, there was no process or effective relationship between the council and the advisory board to do this.

The NLG reviewed the relationship and through interviews and workshops identified several actions that all agreed on:-

- The remit of the advisory board needed to be reviewed and formal links to the council needed to be reinstated.
- Senior LA staff should attend the advisory board and be part of the discussions on the future offer.
- The council's scrutiny arrangements needed to be strengthened and, at least once each year, the lead councillor for the service should meet with the advisory board.
- The council needed to provide the data they hold on demographics and educational attainment to the advisory board.
- The advisory board membership should be refreshed to cover new areas of work.

Recommendations

The NLG recommended that the identified action be done within the following three months.

Results

The ACL service and the council agreed with the recommendations made in the NLG's report and all these recommendations were implemented.

Key outcomes from this assignment were:

- Advisory board has a new agreed remit and there are regular reports to/from the council.
- Senior council officers have set up a rigorous performance system so that trends are recognised early and the head of service feels she is now being supported through this period of change.
- Advisory board membership has changed and there are new members with different backgrounds, including employers, faith groups and other LA departments, such as housing and community care.

Conclusions and Next Steps

The advisory board was very positive about what had been achieved through the NLG's visit and noted they did not know how they could have got their voice heard without such an intervention.