



Guidance note: Diversity of the college governing body

This guidance note is intended for both new and experienced governors, as well as Clerks and Chairs of Search Committees.

Background

“Composition of Boards 2.1 There are approximately 4,000 college governors who make up the boards of English governing bodies. Boards are around 15 to 20 members and have a mix of skills and experience. College governing bodies have always striven to be as representative as possible of the community(s) they serve, at the same time as securing the desired range of skills, experience and professional backgrounds necessary to properly undertake their corporate responsibilities on a sustainable basis. There has been some recent criticism that board make-up does not reflect their catchment or sector specialisms and in our July report we set out recommendations which included undertaking a base line survey and using that to inform any action required. As well as the issues of diversity, colleges report some difficulty in recruiting employer governors” (from *Creating Excellence in College Governance*, AoC Governors' Council, November 2013)

Key questions for Governors:

- **Is your College Governing Body diverse, inclusive, and reflecting the stakeholders and communities the college serves?**
- **Does your College Board have an appropriate balance of skills, experience, and knowledge?**
- **Is membership regularly refreshed through active recruitment and a succession plan?**
- **Does your College Governing Body seek to fulfil the Equality and Diversity Policies of the college?**

Diverse membership representing the communities the college serves.

It is likely in your communities that there are approximately 50% male and 50% female, and the percentages of the population from black and minority ethnic groups, and the percentages of people with some form of disability or learning difficulty will vary. The age profile of the local population also differs in different parts of the country, as does the employment profile.

If we seek to have college boards that reflect the makeup of the local population, we might expect that college governing bodies have about equal numbers of men and women and profiles of black and minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities and ages that reflect the local population. Boards may also seek to match the local employment profile e.g. large, medium and small enterprises.

What is the current membership profile of college governing bodies?

The AoC Governors' Council is currently undertaking a national base line survey of the membership of college governing bodies as noted above.

Two recent surveys are summarised below:

A report on membership of college governing bodies in the Eastern Region shows the following:

Gender: the survey found that overall two-thirds (67%) of non-executive governors are male. That is the same as in 2010. Similarly, there is no significant change in the proportion of chairs where 76% of Chairs are men (75% men in 2010).

Disability: Using the rudimentary question of whether or not non-executive governors are disabled, the survey shows that overall 3% of non-executive governors were identified as disabled. In 2010 we asked the same question and based on 398 responses the rate was 6.5%.

Governors' age ranges: The survey shows that over three quarters (78%) of chairs and independent governors are aged 46 or over compared to 82% in 2010. In terms of chairs 94% are in this range compared to 96% in 2010. The proportion of chairs over 60 years of age however has fallen slightly from 59% (2010) to 55% (2012) and the proportion of independent governors in this age range has also fallen by a similar amount, from 38% (2010) to 35% (2012).

Governors' ethnicity: The survey collected data using the standard ethnicity criteria used by LSIS and shows that at the summary level (i.e. without sub-groups e.g. Black African, white Irish), 88% percent of governors are white. This compares to 88% in 2010.

This ACER survey was based on responses from 34 colleges in the Eastern Region which is approximately 10% of the FE sector in England but may not be representative of the whole national sector. (*The make-up of ACER members' corporations*, by Brian Godbold, February 2013)

Report on Governance in FE Colleges from the Women's Leadership Network

The Women's Leadership Network undertook research into women in FE governance and published the results of the surveys at the end of 2012. This survey looked at more than just membership of college governing bodies. Some headlines from the surveys of Governors and Clerks include:

- College Boards have almost twice as many men as women on them
- Only around 17% of Chairs of College Governing Bodies are women, and the chairing of Committees appears to follow a gender bias
- Recruitment practices are rudimentary with the majority of Boards making appointments through informal personal approach and not open, competitive selection processes, and this can disadvantage women.

For the full report see:

http://www.wlnfe.org.uk/documents/FINALGovsSurveyReportvFinal2_000.pdf

Recruiting governors and succession planning

Some colleges believe that they have problems recruiting governors to ensure a diverse board with the necessary mix of skills and experience.

There may still be some colleges where the Board consists of many long serving members (sometimes over 20 years) who have served several terms of office, and where there may be a high proportion white retired males. At its worst a college board can become a self-perpetuating clique with closed recruitment policies confined to seeking new members from the networks and friends of current members.

However, outstanding colleges have recruited Boards that contain diverse members from different backgrounds with a diversity of experience and characteristics, with a balance of male and female members, a range of expertise from business, community

and education, and a range of social classes, as well as student and staff members. A board can deliberately set out to be inclusive to reflect as fully as possible all stakeholders and all communities which the college seeks to serve.

The college governing body can ensure that it takes an active role in recruiting a diverse membership that reflects the needs of the college, represents the communities it serves, and fulfils good equality and diversity practice. Some colleges have established a search committee which develops a mixture of recruitment strategies. Some colleges have adopted a succession plan for both college senior managers and governors (see the note on Succession Planning in the Excellence in Governance Library)

Over the years colleges have successfully used a number of strategies to source new members from their communities, and some are described below:

Contacts within the local community are important and can provide an effective source for potential governors. Over the years many governors have been identified through the organisation's and the governors' network of contacts. Whilst valuable, this approach should not be the only strategy used by a Corporation to seek new members, as it could lead to a perception in the wider community that the only way to become a governor of the organisation is to 'know the right people'. Some colleges source governance candidates by making contact with their local volunteer centres, explaining the role to the centre staff, and placing recruitment materials in their centres. Some colleges are looking for former students, with say 8-10 years' work experience in relevant employment areas and with the personal profiles that are being sought.

Advertisements in the local press, community group newsheets, targeted mail- shots and website advertising to specific sectors are valuable not only in terms of the number of responses they can attract but also in making contact with a wider range of people who believe that they can make a contribution to their local college or other sector organization by becoming a governor. Targeted recruitment can be particularly effective when seeking people with specific skills that have been identified by the Search Committee from the skills' audit. It can be equally effective in targeting specific groups of the community that the committee has identified are not well represented on the Corporation. (See recruitment section of governance website)

College and other sector organisation websites are highly likely to have a section within them for the Corporation, providing a useful platform to outline the work of the Corporation and its members and to publish statutory and other governance material.

In some organisations the clerk produces a brief information pack which is sent out with targeted mail-shots (for example, to all accountancy firms in the area if that is an identified need) or in response to enquiries.

Colleges and other sector organisations have also produced short recruitment films for their websites. This is not necessarily as expensive as it might sound: many colleges have a wealth of electronic footage of their sites and students that can be cut into new footage on governance, for example by adding an interview or voice-overs from the Chair, other governors, clerk, or principal. A governor meeting could also be filmed to provide footage to include in the presentation. Creation of the film could be a project that is undertaken by media students, providing them with an excellent opportunity of working to a brief to produce a promotional film, or by the organisation's staff.

The School Governors' One Stop Shop (SGOSS) offers a college governor recruitment service: <http://www.sgooss.org.uk/colleges>. SGOSS will work with colleges and put forward candidates for governance in colleges, and will seek to match specific skills requirements wherever possible.

Further information:

Every college will have an Equality and Diversity Policy and action plans which reflect the values of the college and statutory and legal requirements, for example from the [Equality Act 2010](#). This Act came into force on 1 October 2010. It combines nine separate pieces of legislation into one single Act, which consolidates and extends previous anti-discrimination law. The aim is to simplify the law, remove inconsistencies, bring it altogether in one place and make it stronger. The Act introduced new measures that have direct implications for colleges, not only as employers but also as service providers. The Equality Act defines a list of 'protected characteristics': age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

See also:

[Guidance note: Succession planning for senior staff](#)

[Equality and Diversity within Governance and the role of the clerk in embedding and promoting E&D within the work of Governance Committees](#), Landex, 2014

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