

# Guidance notes: Governors' Role - Teaching, Learning and Assessment

*This Guidance Note is aimed largely at first-term Governors. It signposts fuller sources of background material and good practice guidance for more experienced Governors and Clerks.*

- **What do governors understand by outstanding teaching and learning and why is it important?**
- **Do governors know the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning in their college and how do they find out?**
- **How do governors ensure that teaching and learning is high quality?**
- **How do governors create a climate of learning for teachers/trainers to increase their professionalism and improve their practice?**
- **How can governors engage appropriately in the process of teaching, learning and assessment?**

## **Introduction**

The governing body is statutorily responsible for determining the mission, educational character, values and ethos of a college. The educational character is often viewed as the curriculum, which is the complete offer of learning programmes and qualifications and the ways in which they are delivered. It can be described as the total experiences of a learner in the college. Teaching, learning and assessment are an essential part of the curriculum and therefore at the heart of any college or training enterprise; they represent the core business of the organisation and are a key leadership priority for governors. Outstanding teaching, learning and assessment will guarantee success by ensuring strong demand from learners; it will also lead to a positive Ofsted inspection outcome. Ofsted will want to see that Governors understand the strengths and weaknesses of Teaching Learning and Assessment by curriculum area in their college.

The challenge for governors is how to show leadership in an area where they may lack knowledge and expertise. Effective monitoring of the quality of provision requires an understanding of the learner's experience as well as accurate information and reporting on outcomes.

## **Judging the quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Ofsted inspectors make judgements on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by evaluating the extent to which:

- learners benefit from high expectations, engagement, care, support and motivation from staff
- staff use their skills and expertise to plan and deliver teaching, learning and support to meet each learner's needs
- staff initially assess learners' starting points and monitor their progress, set challenging tasks and targets, and build on and extend learning for all learners
- learners understand how to improve as a result of frequent, detailed and accurate feedback from staff following assessment of their learning
- teaching and learning develop English, mathematics and functional skills, and support the achievement of learning goals and career aims
- equality and diversity are promoted through teaching and learning

### **Creating a learning college**

With a renewed emphasis on the centrality of the learner, the best colleges have reviewed their governance practices to bring the curriculum and specifically teaching, learning and assessment to the forefront of their activities. This has sometimes led to a major restructuring of the board, its constitution and processes. Good questions for governors to ask themselves are 'how much of our time do we spend on the curriculum and teaching, learning and assessment and how do we use that time'? In one instance, a college concluded that they were spending no more than 30% on these core activities, with the remaining 70% focusing on finance, capital and other related matters. They resolved to reverse these proportions and became one of the first colleges to receive an outstanding Ofsted report. In making this fundamental switch, governors were leading the move towards creating a learning college.

The annual report of the Ofsted Chief Inspector for 2010-2011 stressed that the key requirements for outstanding teaching and learning are:

- good observation systems involving peers and coaching for improvement
- critical reflection on practice
- supportive and targeted continuing professional development aimed at achieving outstanding, including sharing best practice and ensuring that the best is replicated elsewhere across college.
- high quality learning environments which motivate and enthuse learners

### **ACTIONS FOR GOVERNORS TO CONSIDER**

Following a series of workshops undertaken in the summer of 2013 by the Association of Colleges and the Learning and Skills Improvement Service and attended by more than 300 governors and clerks, the following practical advice was given:

#### **Understanding teaching and learning in action**

- Establishing a culture and protocol for dropping in to lessons as part of what governors do in their role
- Sitting with a trained observer to understand the process of graded teaching observations and the improvement process
- Reviewing video footage of an outstanding teaching and learning session
- Using a governor curriculum link scheme to bring live experience back to the board through visits and reported feedback
- Following approval of the college self-assessment report, identifying the governor links, both in terms of outstanding practice and areas in need of improvement
- Governors conducting a 'learning walk', either accompanying a specific student for half a day or following a group of students to get a feel for their experience. This could be based on themes e.g. Equality and diversity
- Drilling into aspects of the learner journey – using the data and discussing the experience with learners
- Reporting on teaching, learning and assessment as the first item on every full board meeting
- Governors understanding the relevance of the curriculum in relation to employability

### **Data and benchmarking**

- Ensuring that strategic key Performance Indicators are balanced to include teaching, learning and assessment
- Having easy to read and timely dashboards
- Using Red, Amber and Green ratings to focus attention on areas requiring improvement
- Using a balanced scorecard to measure success against strategic objectives
- Ensuring that qualitative data is available alongside quantitative data
- Getting external validation of internal data such as the lesson observation grade profile
- Using trend analysis and benchmarking to foresee potential developments
- Collaborative benchmarking with similar colleges across the region/country and establishing a peer review network
- Challenging the data presented by use of powerful questions

### **Board membership**

- Having a balance of teaching and learning expertise on the board, particularly experience of the FE sector
- Ensuring that all governors are 'fit for purpose', clear about current expectations and accountabilities and provided with adequate mentoring and development opportunities
- Engaging younger board members, including past students who have progressed into employment
- Ensuring a diversity of opinion and experience on the board
- Having a clear succession plan for members whilst maintaining a balance of skills and experience

### **Reviewing the board structure and agenda**

- Balancing the agenda to focus primarily on the core business of teaching, learning and assessment
- Having a full board meeting that has the self-assessment report as the single agenda item. This ensures that governors really own and understand the SAR and not just signing it off for compliance.
- Reviewing the performance of the curriculum and quality committee, leaving open the possibility of removing it and placing its agenda on each full board meeting
- Linking board reports to actions in the self-assessment report
- Asking at the end of each meeting, 'what impact have we had on teaching, learning and assessment at this meeting?'

### **Staff and learner input**

- Having an annual student/staff contact day
- Shadowing a learner/member of staff for a day
- Establishing a learner conference or focus group with students and governors
- Reviewing questions being asked in learner surveys
- Sampling 1 in 10 learners and asking them about their experience

### **Building the strategic leadership team**

- Acting as one team with the executive, building trust and openness that enables effective scrutiny, challenge and support in relation to the core business of the organisation
- Ensuring that resources are made available for high quality professional development of all staff

### **Leading through the effective self-assessment of governance**

- Ensuring that the governance self-assessment report is conducted with the same rigour as that expected of all areas within the college
- Creating a governance quality improvement plan that includes targets and timescales with regard to governors' involvement in and understanding of teaching learning and assessment

### **Governors' involvement in the college self-assessment report**

- Involving governors in the validation of college self-assessment reports; sitting in as observers on departmental validation meetings

### **On-going governor training and development**

- Ensuring that governor induction programmes incorporate the key responsibilities associated with teaching, learning and assessment
- Giving governors access to staff development sessions

**Further resources:**

**Exeter College - Governance focused on teaching, learning and assessment**

**Ofsted report on 'How Colleges Improve'**

**Ofsted's characteristics of outstanding teaching and learning.**

**Ofsted grade characteristics for effectiveness of leadership and management**

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