



## Guidance note: Recruiting staff, student & parent governors

*This Guidance Note is aimed largely at clerks in colleges and at Search Committee members.*

- **We need to fill a vacancy for a staff governor. What issues should we consider?**
- **How should I recruit a student member to the Board?**
- **What do I need to consider when appointing a parent governor?**

### **Introduction**

Once a vacancy has been identified for a staff, student or parent governor, there are basic procedures which can be implemented and specific regulations which may apply in your college.

Traditionally these categories of governors have been elected following an election by their peers. However, more recently with the new freedoms, some corporations have started using the same advertisement and interview process to fill these roles.

Whichever method is used all governors, regardless of how they are selected, must meet any suitability criteria, for example whether they have been declared bankrupt under the terms of the Insolvency Act 1986.

### **According to the Instrument and Articles**

The composition of the Board is determined by Part 2 of the Instrument and Articles of Government 2008 (I and A, 2008), although some colleges may have chosen to use their recently granted powers to adapt or amend the I and A, 2008 to meet their own specific needs. If this is the case, the onus is on the Clerk to check, before offering any vacancies, whether any numbers of staff, student or parent governors have been proscribed.

This section of the I and A, 2008 also provides various combinations of staff governors, for example 1 from the academic staff and from the non-academic or both selected from all staff, and stipulates that parent and student governors can be selected by a representative body.

## The role of the Clerk

The role of the Clerk is key in recruiting staff, student and parent governors. Once a vacancy is identified it is up to the Clerk to

- check the Instrument and Articles and the corporation's standing orders for any local variations on selection of staff/student/parent governors
- ensure an up-to-date role description/person specification is available
- identify, if an election is necessary, what method will be used to allow people to vote and liaise with any relevant college departments such as technical services
- conduct an exit questionnaire of the outgoing member to ensure that any improvements can be put in place before a new member is elected
- generate publicity material which will attract candidates
- work with candidates to ensure they understand the role of staff/student/parent governor
- distribute election material in a timely fashion to allow eligible voters to consider options

It is the Clerk's job to ensure, if it is an election process, that elections, whether they are run using an old-fashioned ballot box with a lock and key or an electronic method such as on-line voting, are fair, transparent where appropriate and efficient.

## Recruiting staff governors

Recruiting a staff governor can be a difficult process because of the perception of the role itself amongst staff. It can be seen as a role which places someone in direct contact with senior management and the principal and this aspect can deter suitable candidates. The onus is on the clerk to engage with staff, starting with any internal adverts, in an attempt to explain the role and emphasize the shared responsibility of the Board. It is also useful to remember that any outgoing staff governor can share their positive experiences.

Whether a member of staff is full or part time, what kind of courses they may teach on or administration they may do or whether they are a member of a union is not a determining factor in their eligibility to be a governor. The only limitation which is placed is that once a member of staff leaves, their term of office automatically comes to an end.

The staff governor is there to give a staff perspective, not to represent staff. This is why some colleges have moved to an open application and interview process rather than an election. It allows those candidates to apply who wouldn't have put themselves forward for an election, and doesn't send the signal that because they were elected they are representative.

### **Recruiting student governors**

Student governors can be chosen from their representative student body, such as a Students' Union or Student Parliament or can be directly elected by their peers. In practice, it is probably easier, as the clerk, to work with a student representative body as this gives access to students directly which a clerk would otherwise not necessarily have and, in all likelihood, the chance to work with a member of staff who is already engaged with students in an organizing capacity.

There are no restrictions on whether a student should be full-time, the nature of the course they are enrolled on or whether they are adult or 16 – 18 years old. As with a member of staff, once a student leaves the college on completion of their studies they are no longer eligible to be a student governor and their term of office automatically ends. All students, whether enrolled on full time or short courses would be eligible to participate in the selection process.

It is essential to work with students throughout the recruitment process to enable them to understand the role of student governor and its demands. It may be worth considering some succession planning, if possible, so that students can attend meetings as observers if they know they will be stepping in to the role at the beginning of the new academic year having been elected the previous term.

Effective engagement at this point in the process can mean better attendance and participation from students who could otherwise be easily overwhelmed by the role.

As with the staff governor, some corporations are considering moving to open application and election for the student governor positions.

### **Recruiting parent governors**

Parent governors can offer a different perspective on the college experience and can often bring valuable expertise and knowledge. However, many colleges do not have parent governors anymore, partly because the term of office was too short to allow them to become fully effective governors. It is up to the individual institution as to whether parents are asked to select a governor, the only limitations being that the student of which they are a parent is under 19 and that there are no more than two on the Board at any one time. Once that student completes their course, the term of office of the parent governor automatically ends.

Parent governors can be elected by a parents' association or nominated and elected from the whole parent body. It is key that the clerk engages early with any potential parent governors, ensuring a smooth transition in to the role and that the parent understands the nature of the role itself. It is often acknowledged that there are those parents who stand as governor with a specific agenda which is not necessarily representative of the whole parent body or the college. Early engagement and clear communication is helpful in ensuring any candidates understand the nature of the role of governor.

### **Good practice in recruitment of staff, student and parent governors**

The recruitment process will differ at each institution, depending on the needs and nature of the Board. However, there are points of good practice which can be borne in mind during the process:

- that the process itself should be as transparent as possible, adhering to all appropriate legislation and the Nolan principles
- that clerks are key in ensuring that prospective staff, student and parent governors understand the nature of the role and the responsibility, to the corporation not to representative bodies if elected
- that it is important to work closely with representative bodies to ensure smooth and fair running of any elections and also to ensure that any publicity materials reach as many people as possible.

### **Useful documentation**

The following should or can be consulted during the recruitment process:

- Instrument and Articles of Government 2008
- Corporation's standing orders
- AoC guidance notes, particularly
  - Ensuring the Diversity of College Boards
  - The Role of the Staff Governor (? – LSIS publications)
  - The Role of the Student Governor (? – LSIS publications)
- AoC website – recruitment section for case studies and templates.