

Guidance note: Monitoring overall college performance

This Guidance Note is aimed largely at first-term Governors.

- **You are a Governor at the college so would you recommend the college for my daughter/son/partner?**
- **Will she/he be well looked after, enjoy their time there, pass the exams and go on to a good job or university?**
- **How do you know that's true? What evidence do you have to show it? And how would you rate the college?**

Introduction

A key role of the Board of Governors is to monitor the overall performance of the college: not only to be able to recommend it to friends and family or local employers, but because overseeing the quality and development of the college is an important element of the Board's purpose.

The English Colleges' Foundation Code of Governance states that:

The Chair should ensure that the governing body receives appropriate, timely, and high quality information in a form that allows it to monitor and scrutinise the College's activities effectively, and to challenge performance where required.

The Board is expected to monitor the preparation of a college quality improvement policy and to ensure that each year the college assesses its performance and produces a self assessment report with an action plan for further improvement.

The college is also inspected by outside agencies such as Ofsted, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, and other validating bodies. The College Board should know how well the college is performing against the criteria of these agencies so that the results of such inspections do not come as surprise.

The governing body should be able to say whether, using the Ofsted grading judgments, the college is Outstanding, Good, Requires improvement, or is Inadequate without waiting for Ofsted to tell them.

The most successful colleges are built on a partnership between the governing body and the Principal and the senior leadership team, where governors display an appropriate balance of support and challenge to ensure that the college is continuously improving on its performance against a set of key performance indicators

What aspects of college performance does the Board monitor?

The Board's role is to oversee and not to manage so all the details of daily performance should not come to the Board. The college senior leadership team deals with detail and it is for the Board and executive to decide how much performance information is needed by the Board to monitor effectively.

Many boards have developed a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) with a summary of data provided through a dashboard report of key performance indicators often with a Red, Amber or Green (RAG) rating to highlight successful performance and areas where action is needed.

The annual college improvement plan will also include targets for performance that are agreed with the Board against which performance is measured.

Such performance targets will include comparative data from probably the past three years to look at improving or declining trends.

The College will also use benchmark data whenever available so that the performance of the college is measured against the best performing colleges. There are various sources of benchmarking data including a dashboard produced by Ofsted, MIDES data and FE Choices.

Key Performance Indicators

The College Board will decide with the college senior leadership team what KPIs are required to enable the Board effectively to monitor the overall performance of the college. These KPIs are likely to include some or all of the following data:

Learners

The quality and success of the college come from the experiences and performance of its learners which can be measured through information such as:

- Applications and conversion of these into enrolments
- Enrolments and year on year changes in targets and actual enrolments
- Programmes of learning: is the college providing appropriate programmes to meet the needs of learners and local employers? How do you know that?
- Attendance patterns: what action is taken where attendance falls below targets?
- Retention: what action is taken where retention falls below targets?
- Achievements: what action is taken where achievements fall below targets?
- Destinations: how successful are learners in gaining employment and/or higher education?

Staff

A vital element of college performance is the performance of all of the staff which is often described as 'the key resource'. Data on this might include:

- Framework of remuneration and terms and conditions
- Qualifications including teaching and assessment qualifications
- Staff development
- Results of teaching and learning observations
- Annual performance reviews
- Performance of the senior leadership team

Resources

The Board has a role in monitoring the resources of the college to ensure 'value for money' and to ensure the college remains solvent. Key performance indicators might include:

- Income diversity: sources of income from the Skills Funding Agency, Education Funding Agency, Higher Education loans, and other sources including commercial activities
- Financial planning including three year projections and annual plans
- Budget monitoring against targets of income and expenditure
- Investment such as staffing, buildings, equipment, IT, etc

External

Whilst monitoring college performance is primarily focussed on the internal activities of the college, Governors also need to monitor the external perceptions and reputation and performance of the college. These might include:

- Awareness of key partnerships
- Recognition of important stakeholders
- Relationships with Local Enterprise partnerships (LEPs), Funding Agencies, Local Authorities, local schools, other colleges, higher education institutions, etc
- Reputation and perceptions of the college

Strategy

The governing body is responsible for establishing and monitoring:

- The college's mission
- Educational character
- Values and ethos
- Planning for the future
- and strategic positioning including cooperation with other providers and mergers

Audit and Risk

The Governing Body is responsible for ensuring internal audits are undertaken and for monitoring the college's risk analysis and the action plans to deal with identified risks.

Actions for the governing body

Monitoring the overall performance of the college demands that governors identify ways of scrutinising the areas listed above. Governors often exercise their role by asking appropriate, insightful and challenging questions which might include:

- **Are our KPIs the right ones and telling the real story?**
- **Are the reports and data we receive timely, accurate and at the right level of detail for us to make judgments on performance?**
- **Do the dashboard of high level summaries and RAG ratings enable us to be confident that we know accurately the performance of the college?**
- **Are we confident that the college's self assessment report and its gradings of performance are robust and honest so that if we think we are outstanding in parts of the college our judgment would be verified by external inspectors?**
- **Do we know the areas of strength and areas where improvement is needed?**
- **Are the relationships between the Governors, the senior leadership team, and the Clerk open and transparent so that we have mutual trust and confidence in the data we receive and the judgments we make?**
- **When I recommend the college do I have the necessary evidence to be confident that what I say is accurate?**

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