



## **Principals' challenges, priorities and relationships with governors**

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### **Challenges & Priorities**

#### **Challenges**

- Keeping up with the pace of change is the biggest challenge.
- Retaining focus and clarity of purpose in a constantly changing world, especially when the role of Principal can be a lonely one.
- Balancing the budget. As the Chief Accounting Officer, the Principal is constantly under pressure to deliver more for less.
- Keeping staff engaged and motivated. Governors have high expectations on this.
- Data and dashboards.
- English and maths.

#### **Priorities**

The biggest priority is of course the day job. Within that, the students are a Principal's biggest priority, as is keeping faith with the mission of further education:

- Ensure students achieve the very best they can and progress.
- Ensure the offer is fit for purpose and leads to sustainable careers and employers.
- Ensure Governors receive information in an appropriate and timely fashion to enable the Principal to discharge their responsibilities.

### **Relationships with Governors**

#### **Code of Good Governance for English Colleges**

The Code of Good Governance provides the following:

- Core values and expectations
- A clear explanation of governance responsibilities



- The opportunity for a board to rethink and refresh their approaches.

Strong governance is an important part of any healthy, sustainable system. Successful governance is underpinned by the following and when they are not present the PPC finds that things can go wrong (which will come as no surprise to governors):

- Shared mission, vision and values
- Clarity of purpose and respective roles & responsibilities

These first two are absolutely key because they enable a board to set expectations and establish a shared understanding.

### **Trust**

- Governors should have high expectations for their Principal and college, but not mistrust.
- Holding a Principal's feet to the fire does not build trust and confidence.
- Empathy is an important part of this relationship of trust, so that the Principal can share problems and challenges with the governing body.

### **Accountability**

- This is shared - a partnership between the Principal and the board.
- Trust and verify – the board should be able to trust what the Principal reports but also verify how this has been reported, through scrutiny and challenge.
- It is underpinned by ethics and standards – never lose track of the fact that this is a public service.

### **Professionalism**

- This is about respecting each other's expertise and knowledge
- Mutual respect must be shown

### **Support**

- Governors have a duty of care to Senior Post Holders – they employ the Principal & Senior Post Holders, which is arguably one of the most important things they do.
- Governors must enable them to do their job against external and internal pressures.



## **Communication**

- Vital, but needs to be appropriate and professional.
- An experienced Clerk has a key role here in making sure the governors get the information they need and keeping the balance between governance and management.
- Principals want their voice to be heard, and their professionalism and expertise recognised and respected.

## **Key issues**

### **Restructuring**

Due to Area Reviews this is causing a lot of concern and leading to particularly long periods of uncertainty which is not good for Principals or colleges.

- Principals are understandably concerned about their future, in view of rationalisation.
- There is a concern that there are a number of principals who fail in the first 18 months of their new role.
- It is therefore recommended that in the first 12-18 months of a new principalship, the governing body should consider mentoring and support for the Principal. It is more cost effective than the Principal failing and the governing body having to reappoint.

### **Relationships with Governors**

When communication breaks down and misunderstandings occur, it often leads to issues around the following topics:

- Governors and trust
- The way Principals feel they are being treated
- Grievance and allegations
- Disciplinary and capability
- Legal issues



## Conclusion

This is a rapidly changing world, with Area Reviews presenting a real game changer. Some of the biggest challenges for Governors are:

- The need to look beyond their own institution
- Establishing their appetite and approach to risk
- Acquiring and interpreting the data and information needed to make decisions

These need to be addressed if we are to have successful colleges led by strong governing bodies and confident, competent and talented principals (succession planning is another key issue for the sector).

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*The PPC is a professional body representing principals & senior post holders. It is part of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL). The PPC represents the interests, views & aspirations of individual members, rather than the whole institution, offering individual advice to members in respect of governance, accountability & leadership.*