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Case study of transforming governance - John Leggott College

March 2015

This case study highlights how critical it is for governors to engage appropriately in the process of teaching, learning and assessment. Statutory functions of the Board of Governors include having responsibility for the oversight of the educational character of the institution as well as approving the quality strategy. Duties in relation to teaching, learning and assessment should form a key part of the governor induction programme.

It also illustrates how equality and diversity (E&D) considerations were embedded throughout an organisation following an Ofsted report, and demonstrates the link between improved governance arrangements and improved college performance in relation to student outcomes (in this case changes were made to governance processes, board membership and in the way the board challenges the senior management team (SMT)).

It provides an excellent practical illustration of many of the salient points in AoC's guidance note: [Getting the best from the board](#). It also illustrates many of the points from other guidance notes, including: [Governors' role in teaching, learning and assessment](#) and [Effective challenge of the senior leadership team](#).

In November 2011 John Leggott College was inspected and graded inadequate. Governors reflected upon their performance. The Ofsted Report highlighted some of the main causes of their inadequate performance:

- Governors were insufficiently focused on monitoring students' performance
- Governors (and senior managers) were not taking swift enough action to reverse the declining trends in success rates
- Arrangements for quality assurance and self-assessment were ineffective
- Equality & diversity actions to resolve differences in some students' performance had not been sufficiently effective

In addition Governors also recognised the following areas for development:

- Governors needed to provide sufficient challenge to the Principal and SMT
- Governors needed to receive adequate information in a timely and appropriate manner
- Governance arrangements needed a complete review to ensure that they were fit for purpose
- The Corporation membership was not sufficiently diverse and in addition did not reflect/ include all necessary skills to carry out its function effectively.

Phase one of the transformation

From this review the governors sought external support to work with governors individually and collectively to understand their responsibilities and advise of best practice.

They created a governance improvement plan and took the following actions:

- Governor Ofsted Action Group set up to monitor progress against development plan targets and receive data on lesson observations, attendance and retention
- Full governor training programme implemented to include effectiveness of teaching and learning, safeguarding, equality and diversity
- Clerk to Corporation and individual governors actively sought best practice examples from across the sector.
- Governance meeting structure revised and reduced committees, implemented monthly full Corporation meetings (strategic and business)

- Plan to reduce the number of governors from 20 to 15 and changing the length of terms of office for parent and staff governors from four years to two years.
- Reports to Corporation standardised - no longer than two sides, to focus on the key message set against target (including benchmark data), include risk assessment and the relevant manager to be in attendance to answer questions rather than “talking” through the paper.
- A review of the skills, appointment procedures and job description of the Corporation membership to ensure that the members were equipped with the skills required to undertake their roles and to provide impact
- Steps taken to improve the diversity of the Corporation membership to better reflect the college and local communities
- A development of the student governor role with training, guidance and support provided – including external training programme delivered by the NUS
- A review and implementation of the Corporation Self-Assessment based on Ofsted judgements and implementation of the new process
- A review of the FMCE arrangements and an action plan put in place to address any weaknesses in the current arrangements including training for governors on financial management
- Stronger governor ownership and involvement of the development plan to include attendance at a planning day to look at the strategic aims and whole college priorities, approval of the plan and the monitoring of the targets agreed throughout the year
- Clerk enrolled on the HE (Level 5) Award in Governance recognising that the clerking role is key to the effectiveness of governance.

Summary of the impact of these actions:

- Governors had a more comprehensive overview of the college than previously allowed through the committee structure, including a more in depth understanding of quality improvement issues with governors contributing to ensuring that the college’s performance was monitored closely. This allowed governors to challenge the Principal and SMT where they believe actions were not being carried out quickly enough.
- The success rates decline was halted in summer 2011 and improved in summer 2012 with the results bringing the College up to national averages for most areas of its provision.
- College and Corporation self-assessment was more robust and linked to Ofsted judgements/outcomes with the monitoring visit acknowledging the stronger self-assessment with a grading of “significant progress”
- Improved outcomes for groups of students previously identified as a priority.
- Improved student voice/empowerment – three student surveys undertaken throughout the year with governors understanding where improvements were being made or highlighting areas for further improvement. Student governors and Student Union made recommendations on improving feedback from students with the proposal of the college adopting course representatives which governors agreed.
- More robust Corporation appointment processes leading to awareness of skills gaps and a greater turnover within membership. Governors were aware of the need to review each individual’s contribution in terms of skills, attendance and diversity. This identified that there was a need to appoint a member with experience of a HE setting to understand what was needed for students to progress in this area.
- More diverse Corporation membership - moving from no ethnic representation to 14%, reducing the average age of governor to 48.5 years (previously the majority of governors were 55+ with almost half being over 60) and increasing female representation from 25% to 50%.

- The strengthening of teaching and learning processes. Governors challenged the capacity of SMT to undertake the required number of teaching and learning observations in a swift manner which led to the appointment of a temporary senior post holder. Two governors attended the teaching and learning course provided for HoD with an external consultant. All governors who attended the Corporation Planning Day observed a part of a lesson as part of the effectiveness of teaching and learning aspect. Monthly reports were presented to governors on teaching and learning including the grading of lessons both moderated and un-moderated, the strategies in place to improve lessons and the sanctions available if improvements do did not occur.
- Better understanding of robust and effective governance through peer networking with regional sixth form colleges. Attendance by the governors and the Clerk at regional events such as training and networking meetings developed their understanding of the impact that governors can provide for students. This included focus on every Corporation agenda on what had been the impact for students.

These actions helped result in the College receiving a “requires improvement” judgement in February 2013 re-inspection.

Phase two - Actions

- Governors led on setting the strategic direction of the college with the Clerk responsible for project managing the consultation of the development plan, vision and mission and governors using part of the Corporation Planning Day to determine educational character.
- Governors monitored and interrogated the quality of experience provided for students and their outcomes by engaging further with students and by maximising the role of the student governor.
- Governors regularly reviewed their effectiveness and arrangements through having a systematic approach to meeting statutory duties and approving and monitoring priorities that were focused on teaching, learning and assessment by fully exploring and utilising the new freedoms and challenges facing colleges.
- Governors set senior managers clear and challenging annual targets which were linked to strategic priorities and reviewed termly through the approval of challenging key performance indicators which are monitored at termly Board meetings and the setting of the Principal’s targets which were timely, focussed and relate to the quality of teaching, learning & assessment.
- Governors scrutinised the impact of equality and diversity further through the appointment of a named governor, attendance at E&D group, regular monitoring of legal responsibilities and impact of promotion and the continued review of the diversity of Corporation membership.
- Governors have demonstrated that they are leading by example by being more proactive about communicating with stakeholders.
- Governors worked to ensure the consistency of teaching and learning (including the reduction of achievement gaps for students) through rigorous performance management and regular monitoring and challenge.

Impact

- Governors can demonstrate an ambitious vision brought about by extensive consultation with stakeholders, including students, and taking into account local and national drivers leading to an aspirational and challenging Development Plan.
- A more robust process for monitoring the challenging key performance indicators, improvement plans and risk management process.

- Governors' challenge of senior managers has led to better outcomes for students demonstrated by success rates in 2012-13 which were at or above national averages for most courses.
- Governors' further scrutiny of the impact of equality and diversity has led to more active promotion of equality and diversity within college demonstrated in the formulation and undertaking of the E & D action plan, a narrowing of the achievement gap and a more diverse Corporation membership.
- Governors are receiving information to allow them to monitor and challenge senior management and that they are consistently testing the aims within the Development Plan to be able to assess the consistency of delivery.

All of this contributed in the College receiving a judgement of "Good" following the latest re-inspection in March 2014 with the following being some of the comments made about governance in the report:

"Leadership and management are good. The Principal and senior team, supported by governors and staff, have developed an ambitious vision that promotes excellence and high aspirations for students' performance. This vision is understood well by staff and students."

"Governance is good. Governors have a strong focus on providing challenge to improve teaching and learning and students' outcomes. Governors are clear on the strengths and areas for improvement of the college."

Next Phase - Moving forward

Governors are looking forward with the aspiration of achieving Outstanding at the next inspection. They are aware of the direct impact of their performance on current and future students attending the College. There will be a new governance leadership team in place for the next academic year and their first role will be for all governors to meet for a Planning Day in September. The aim of this session will be to consider how they can sustain the many strengths of governance whilst moving the College forward in achieving the vision that they set in the ambitious and challenging development plan.