

Research Report



The Open
University

'A study into the experience of school governors recruited through the Open University.'

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Foreword

School Governors One-Stop Shop (SGOSS) is a small private company with charitable status. It was launched in 1999 with the remit 'To recruit Governors with management skills for Schools that need them most' and it works across England in partnership with Local Authorities and schools, to secure mutually beneficial placements. In September 2010 the placement of the 10,000 governor volunteer recruited by SGOSS was confirmed.

From its launch one of the organisation's key operational principles has been to establish and nurture the strongest possible working relationships with organisations that supported its remit and were willing to communicate the need for governor volunteers throughout their own networks. The Open University (OU) is one such organisation and we are extremely grateful for all the assistance they have given us, which has already encouraged almost 300 students, staff and alumni to apply.

I am very pleased to have been offered the additional opportunity that this research project on behalf of and funded by the OU represents. Almost inevitably there has been a wonderfully large and speedy response to our questionnaires, and this makes the findings particularly robust.

It is my hope that the partnership between SGOSS and the OU will go from strength to strength.

Steve Acklam, Chief Executive, School Governors' One-Stop Shop



1. Executive Summary of Key Findings

- i) For the majority of OU governor volunteers Giving Something Back to the Community (c 47%) and Improving Children's Education (c 36 %) are the major motivators.
- ii) Strategic areas such as Long Term Planning and Setting Critical Policies are where OU governor volunteers feel they have made the most significant contribution.
- iii) Although over 50% of OU governor volunteers felt the Briefing on the Governor Role Pre-appointment was Excellent or Good, the balance felt More Information, particularly with regard to Time Commitment, could have been helpful.
- iv) Over 95% of OU governor volunteers felt their Welcome and Induction to their Governing Body had been Excellent (26%) Good (41%) or Fair (28%).
- v) Suggested Improvements to the Induction Process concentrate on an induction pack, or perhaps the provision of a mentor governor.
- vi) Over 70% of OU governor volunteers had received Training in one or more areas, with over 90% of this training delivered by the Local Authority. 87% of those participating rated this training either Very Effective or Effective.
- vii) Over three quarters of OU governor volunteers were certain their Governing Body would Benefit from Additional Training Input.



2. Introduction

A well-informed, enthusiastic governing body can provide enormous support to a school but the role can be daunting for new governors. As such, it is imperative that all the necessary support is provided through an effective induction and ongoing training programme. At present, the majority of governor training is provided by schools and Local Authorities.

Effective provision of training will both ensure that existing governor volunteers are given the necessary support and aid the ongoing recruitment of new volunteers for this vital role, ultimately contributing to improved standards of education nationwide.

The OU are keen to learn from their own volunteers how effective they feel current training is, whether they feel there are any particular weaknesses, and to gain an insight into opportunities that might exist for the OU to improve the situation.

3. Research Aims and Objectives

- To quantify OU volunteer uptake of governor training opportunities
- To gain an insight into the effectiveness of existing training provision
- To identify areas where additional training would be beneficial
- To establish overall levels of satisfaction with the role



4. Method

An electronic questionnaire jointly prepared by SGOSS, the OU, and with expert pro-bono advice from Dr Anne Punter of the University of Hertfordshire, was e-mailed to 130 OU governors recruited by SGOSS and known to be in post at the beginning of 2010. A copy of the questionnaire can be found at Appendix A. The first mailing was completed on November 5th, and a reminder was distributed on November 15th.

Responses were requested electronically and the period for replies was closed on November 21st 2010. A total of 47 completed questionnaires had been received by the cut-off date, a response rate of over 36%. With the industry standard response rate for research validity standing at between 17% and 20% this makes the findings particularly robust. Initial collation of the responses was carried out by James Martin, Information Systems Manager for SGOSS, with subsequent evaluation and report writing by Steve Acklam, SGOSS Chief Executive. Design of the report was carried out in-house at SGOSS by William Pavey, Marketing Manager.

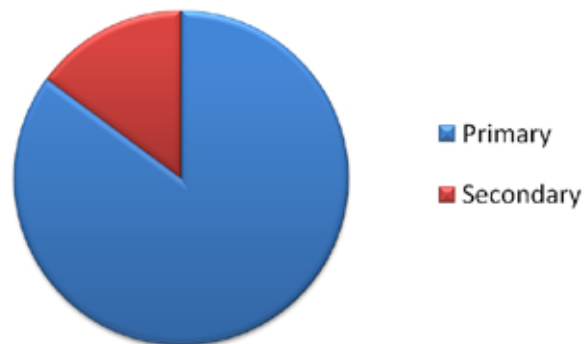


5. Findings in Detail

5.1 What phase school are you a governor at? (Question 1)

85% of those responding were governors at a Primary School and 15% at a Secondary School. This profile mirrors very closely the composition of the maintained school universe.

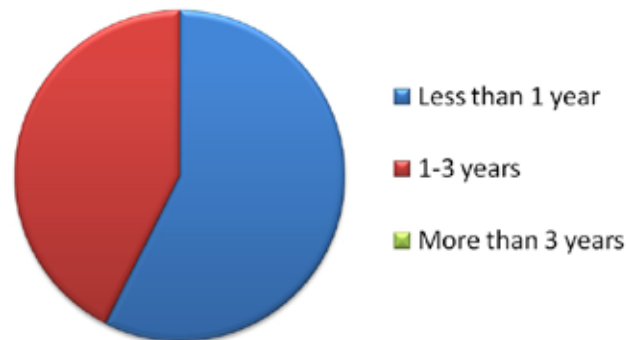
What phase of school are you a governor at?



5.2 How long have you been a school governor? (Question 2)

Recruitment by SGOSS through the OU has increased significantly over the past three years. It is unsurprising therefore that over 57% of respondents had been serving as a governor for less than 1 year; and the balance between 1 and 3 years.

How long have you been a school governor?

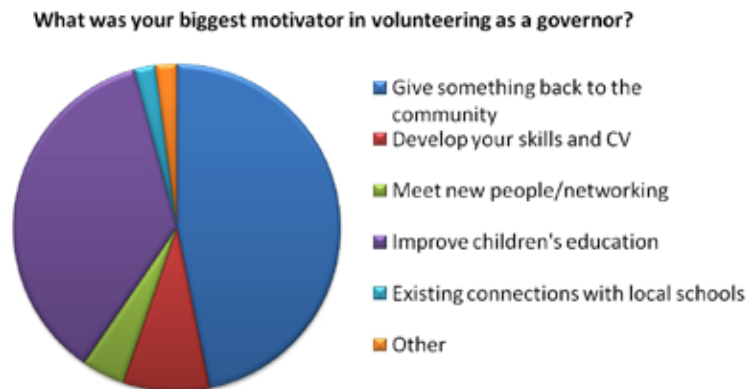




5.3 What was your biggest motivator in volunteering as a governor? (Question 3)

Primarily altruistic reasons are the major motivators for OU governor volunteers. Almost 47% placed Giving something back to the community first, and a further 36% had been stimulated to volunteer by a desire to Improve children's education.

This level of commitment to making a difference to children's lives makes the OU governor cohort of particular importance. Others had recognised the opportunity that being a governor offers to develop new skills and build networks, had existing connections with local schools, or were interested in learning about primary education.



5.4 What do you regard as your most significant contribution to date? (Question 4)

There was a common view that the most significant contributions are to be made with respect to strategy, whether this is expressed as Long term planning (27.7%), Setting critical policies (17%) or Selecting the head/Holding the head teacher to account (19.1%). 25% of respondents provided individual suggestions and these can be found at Appendix B.

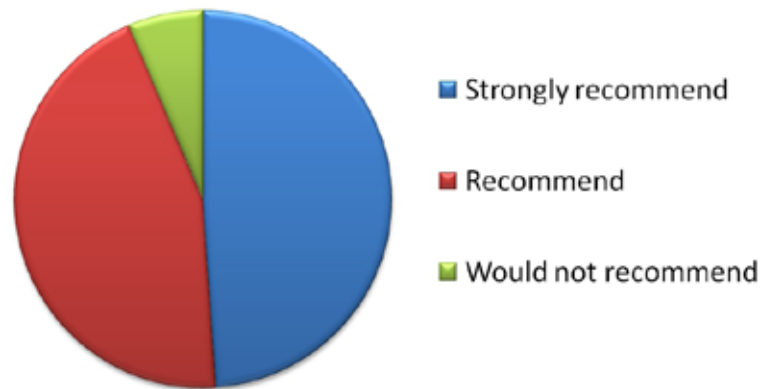




5.5 Is this a volunteering opportunity you would recommend to a friend and why? (Question 5)

Over 93% responded in the affirmative, (Strongly Recommend 48.9%, Recommend 44.7%) supported by comments such as “It is interesting and enlightening if you are interested in education”, “You always feel like you are contributing and there aren’t enough governors”, “It provides a great opportunity to pay something back to the community and participate in the well being of young people”. For a comprehensive list of reasons, see Appendix C

Is this a volunteering opportunity you would recommend to a friend and why?



5.6 How did you rate the explanation of the role of a school governor you received before appointment? (Question 6)

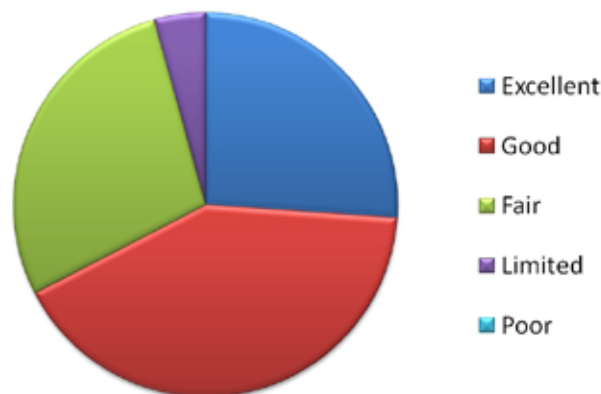
Almost 85% of respondents felt the explanation had been Excellent (6.5%), Good (47.8%) or Fair (30.4%). Among those who felt the pre-briefing was limited, the most common concerns related to the time commitment “What it means in practice and how much time is involved”, and break-downs in effective customer care “I was sent a letter quite a while after applying which assigned me to a school as an LA governor. I didn’t even know what an LA governor was!”



5.7 How do you rate your welcome / induction by your governing body? (Question 7)

Over 95 % rated their welcome/induction as between Excellent and Fair, with over 77% rating it Excellent or Good. Reported issues centred on some degree of disorganisation within the governing body, and perhaps a lack of awareness among existing governors as to how best to welcome a newcomer. Where the induction worked well it worked very well, “I was given a governor’s folder with all the information in it , as well as assigned to a buddy governor for extra induction”. No one rated this initial experience as Poor. For a selection of individual views, see Appendix D.

How do you rate your welcome/induction to your governing body?



5.8 Is there anything that would have improved your induction as a school governor? (Question 8)

Of 46 responses, 17 (37%) indicated that they had nothing to suggest, although in a number of instances this was because it was too early to tell, or they accepted that “Understanding of the role is something that happens over time and with practice”. Of those making suggestions for improvement, a number focussed on the quality of the induction process itself, or the absence of an induction pack, and there was some support for the provision of a mentor or buddy.

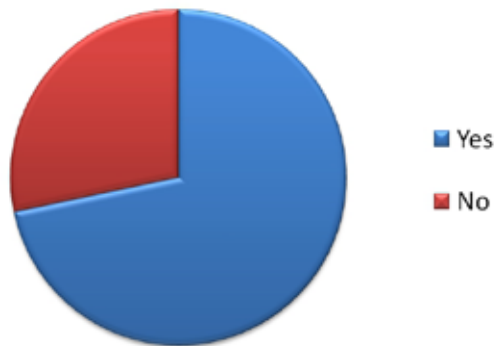
There is also an indication that for some volunteers the opportunity they had to visit the school pre-appointment , or to talk to serving governors, either remotely or face-to-face had not been made clear to them, and they felt it was a ‘gap’ in their preparation. Details of the 29 proposed improvements can be found in Appendix E.



5.9 Have you ever received any training as a school governor? (Question 9)

Almost 72% (33) of respondents had taken the opportunity to receive governor training.

Have you ever received any training as a school governor?

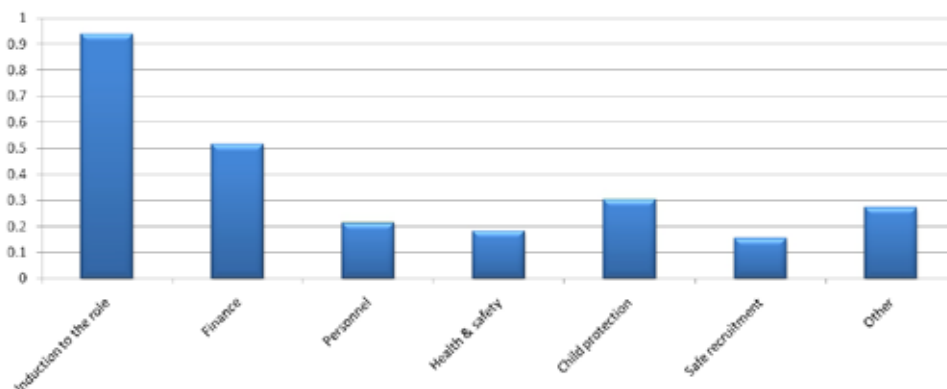


5.10 In which areas did you receive training? (Question 10)

Of the 33 who had received training almost 94% had undergone some form of induction training. With regard to more specific inputs, 51.5% had received finance training and over 30% training on Child Protection. Other major topics covered included Personnel, Health and Safety and Safe Recruitment.

A number of individuals had also received specific training in areas such as Ofsted inspections and Head Teacher Performance Management, presumably necessitated by events within the school, or the responsibilities they were undertaking. Take up of training at this level reflects extremely favourably on the professionalism and commitment of OU volunteers. Details of these additional courses can be found at Appendix F.

In which areas did you receive training? (please click all appropriate options)

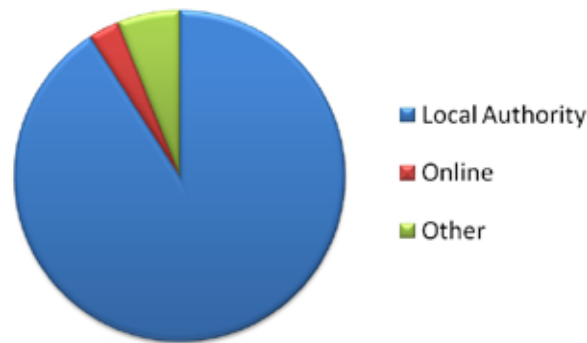


$$18 \times 12 =$$

5.11 Who provided your training? (Question 11)

Almost 91% of those undergoing training had received it face-to-face from the Local Authority, and only 9% had received it online.

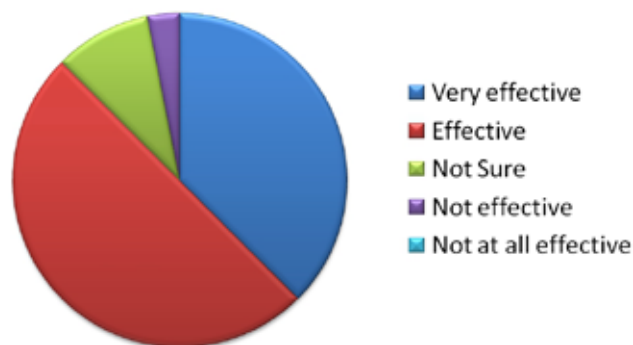
Who provided your training?



5.12 How would you rate the effectiveness of this training? (Question 12)

Almost 90% of respondents rated the training Very Effective or Effective, with another 9% Not Sure, possibly because they had no reference points, or again it was too early to tell. Only 3% stated that the training they had received had been sub-standard (not effective) and while any comment of this nature is disappointing, the fact that the number of volunteers feeling this way was so small is very reassuring.

How would you rate the effectiveness of this training?





5.13 Would your governing body benefit from additional training opportunities? (Question 13)

For over 75% of those who responded the resounding answer is YES, with suggestions for the content of such training falling into two main areas.

With regard to more formulaic topics such as the roles and powers of governing bodies, legal responsibilities and legal status of different types of schools, the governor role on sub-committees, there is a wealth of printed information already available supported by the excellent publications of organisations such as the National Governors Association.

In other much more personal/individual areas such as assessing (own) performance, developing strategy and general team building, how to be more involved and more proactive, the provision is not as easy to identify, and may give the OU something to consider. The 23 specific suggestions for improvement can be found in Appendix G.

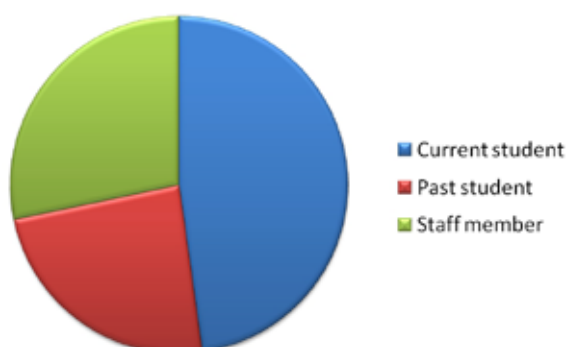
Would your governing body benefit from additional training opportunities?



5.14 What is your connection with the Open University? (Question 14)

The spread of connections shows an interesting split of almost 50% current students, 24% past students and 28% staff members, where the latter percentage is particularly noteworthy. The split across academic disciplines is equally interesting with almost equal proportions of humanities and science/commerce based qualifications and aspirations.

What is your connection with the Open University?





5.15 Would you be willing to provide a case study?

We are delighted that 17 respondents offered to provide case studies if asked, and SGOSS is very grateful for this.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

C1 School Governance as a volunteering opportunity appeals to a wide cross-section of the OU population, and volunteers from within the OU take their involvement extremely seriously.

R1 SGOSS and the OU should explore options to develop their partnership with the aim of encouraging more volunteers, particularly in areas, or for specific schools, where the needs are greatest.

R2 To maximise the contribution that OU volunteers can make and minimise their concerns, SGOSS and the OU should co-operate in the production of an internal briefing pack that addresses issues such as time commitment, governor categories, and the process from application to appointment.

C2 While existing training provision is generally viewed as valuable and of a good standard, there is an overwhelming perception that governing bodies could benefit from additional training.

R1 Working together SGOSS and the OU should ensure that OU governor volunteers have access to existing high quality briefing materials addressing issues such as roles and powers of governing bodies, legal status of different types of schools. Where such material does not exist or fulfill the perceived need, consideration should be given to its provision.

R2 The OU should consider the feasibility of providing training and or materials that would assist their governor volunteers in areas such as assessing performance, strategy development and team building, and how to be more involved. SGOSS suggests that such facilities could have a broader relevance than just for school governance.



7. Appendices A- G

Appendix A

A survey from the Open University and the School Governors' One-Stop.

Part 1- Being a School Governor. Some general questions about your experience of being a school governor.

1. What phase of school are you a governor at?

Primary

Secondary

2. How long have you been a school governor?

Less than 1 year

1-3 years

More than 3 years

3. What was your biggest motivator in volunteering as a governor?

Give something back to the community

Develop your skills and CV

Meet new people/networking

Improve children's education

Existing connections with local schools

Other

If other please specify



4. What do you regard as your most significant contribution to date?

Holding the head teacher to account

Long term planning

Setting critical policies

Budget allocation

Recruitment and selection of a head teacher

Other

If other please specify

5. Is this a volunteering opportunity you would recommend to a friend and why?

Strongly recommend

Recommend

Would not recommend

Please provide reasons

Part 2- Induction

Some questions evaluating the effectiveness of your induction as a school governor.

6. How do you rate the explanation of the role of a school governor you received before appointment?

Excellent

Good

Fair



Limited

Poor

Please explain what, if anything, could have been improved

7. How do you rate your welcome/induction to your governing body?

Excellent

Good

Fair

Limited

Poor

Please expand where appropriate

8. Is there anything that would have improved your induction as a school governor?

Please explain.

Part 3- Training

Some questions evaluating any school governor training you may have undertaken and how this might have been improved.

9. Have you ever received any training as a school governor?

Yes

No



10. In which areas did you receive training? (please click all appropriate options)

Induction to the role

Finance

Personnel

Health & Safety

Child Protection

Safe Recruitment

Other

If other please specify

11. Who provided your training?

Local Authority

Online

Other

If other please specify

12. How would you rate the effectiveness of this training?

Very Effective

Effective

Not Sure

Not Effective

Not At All Effective



13. Would your governing body benefit from additional training opportunities?

Yes

No

If so, please specify in which areas (e.g. legal issues/specific issues relating to education agenda)

Some further information.

14. What is your connection with the Open University?

Current Student

Past Student

Staff Member

If a current or past student please detail subject studied or qualification achieved.

Appendix B

If other please specify

1. Helping to bring the school out of special measures.
2. Sitting on committees, but still finding my feet with being able to provide meaningful input.
3. Community Cohesion.
4. Bringing outside contacts into the school, and helping to firm up policies for governors.
5. Acting as a "Critical Friend".
6. Serving on a complaint's procedure panel.
7. Taking over as chair.
8. Offering early years support.
9. Appointment of acting head teacher when substantive appointee left abruptly.



Appendix C

Please provide reasons

1. Self gratification.
2. It really helps you understand how schools operate, and gives an indication of the expectations imposed on them.
3. To provide the education system with support which is so desperately needed. Children need the best education, and we as a community can contribute to the school's success.
4. It's very fulfilling because you feel like you are making a difference to something that matters (children's education). Plus you are working as part of a team, all with the same level of commitment to getting things right.
5. Helps you understand the complexities of running a school and strain staff are under. It also helps to give something back to the community and use my knowledge and experience to enhance the school.
6. Great training, and feeling of fulfilment.
7. It would depend on the person and what they were looking for. For me it was about becoming a part of the community I had recently moved into.
8. Helps you learn how schools are run, or not run, and what obstacles can get in the way.
9. A good education system is essential to a society's future and, therefore, it is important that all sections of society give support to the development of future generations. Being a governor is an important part of this process.
10. Because you really feel you are part of the school and your views do count in the planning of the school.
11. In order for the person to contribute positively to a child's life it helps to know more about how school functions.
12. None of my friends are interested in education.
13. Education is a gift that should be appreciated and developed; it is the door for a fulfilling adult life.
14. There is a feeling of doing something worthwhile within the community and being part of education which is important especially within the primary school age where a good education begins.
15. Most rewarding, but hard work if you have major changes occurring within the school.
16. Great to be involved with other communities and to use your expertise for the good of others.
17. You always feel like you're contributing, and there aren't enough governors.
18. It is rewarding to know that our children's future is taken care of. This can be achieved by all of us working together with the school staff and local authority to ensure that the children have the education and safe guarding they need.



19. Making a contribution to local community.
20. It is interesting and enlightening if you are interested in education.
21. Too early to recommend.
22. Contributing to community, influencing local education, teamworking.
23. It helps you to improve your network and also your leadership skills.
24. It's important that schools are held to account particularly by future employers and higher education professionals.
25. Interesting and challenging role.
26. A good volunteering opportunity to give something back to the community.
27. If someone had an interest in the education of children and wanted to contribute.
28. Giving input and support.
29. Meeting times can be difficult but the role is very rewarding.
30. It is educative and also leads to social development ,especially of children.
31. I would recommend to anyone who was interested in education - not just 'anyone'.
32. It provides a great opportunity to pay back something to the community, and participate directly in the well being of young people.

Appendix D

Please expand where appropriate

1. The courses available are excellent and highly recommended.
2. I attended the first meeting and was introduced by the Chair to the governors who have been part of the governing body for several years. It could have been better, but I am confident that in this academic year I will become comfortable.
3. Everyone was very friendly but no-one asked me what my background was so I felt people didn't really know who I was and what I could bring to the governing body.
4. A little dis-organised, but OK.
5. I was given a Governor's folder with all the information in it, as well as assigned to a 'buddy' governor for extra induction.
6. Induction courses were excellent. My previous knowledge of education had been limited to my own.
7. The headteacher was very welcoming but the existing governors weren't particularly friendly - I had to make the effort.
8. No induction pack was provided.
9. The GB was quite disorganised.
10. Training sessions run by Leicester City were really helpful.



Appendix E

Response Text

1. Not really, but spending a few days in the school to see how it operates is beneficial.
2. Yes. One suggestion would be to introduce the new governor to the school teachers and pupils during school time. This will give the new governor a better understanding of the school and how it works. It would also be useful for governors to have a short session with each class to hear views (positive and negative) from students directly as this may not always be noticeable at governor's meetings.
3. Perhaps an on-line forum for governors so that those new can ask questions and share their governing experience when they can't manage to make face to face meetings due to other commitments. It would have helped me immensely to know what the experience of other governors was at other schools.
4. A course prior to starting to learn commonly used jargon, buzz words etc. Also what the local authority envisage a governor should do.
5. A visit to the school would have been nice.
6. An explanation from an existing governor, as well as better explanatory literature before the appointment started.
7. Lots of things. We are not paid and not trained unless we volunteer for training (which is not compulsory).
8. A meeting with the chair and head teacher together before the first governors meeting.
9. Clearer explanation of duties.
10. Maybe more time to acquaint new governors to the role.
11. A warning about the hours!
12. I'm producing an induction pack for the school and a policy for induction as a result of my experience. I have been made very welcome at the school since the initial issues.
13. Should have done the LA Induction course sooner.
14. My induction was good. I also learned a lot from the training I received.
15. There was no specific governor appointed to help new governors and no induction pack.
16. More support in relation to the individual school.
17. Being assigned a buddy?
18. Maybe getting more involved with primary sectors only.
19. Receiving minutes and agenda in advance of the first meeting would have helped.
20. A well organised introduction pack.
21. A pack of key documentation.
22. Too many to list.



23. An induction pack, provision of mentor.
24. I did not have an induction.
25. The quality of the induction day was questionable.
26. A more generic outline before in depth induction!
27. Perhaps some of the Governor Induction Course as a document that can be given to new governors before they go on the courses.
28. Fellow governors that understood not everyone can spend all day in the school.
29. Greater discussion and involvement of those at development sessions, less being “talked at”.

Appendix F

If other please specify

1. Self Assessment
2. CfBT Governors Foundation Courses Module1: Roles & Responsibilities, 2& 3: Governors and School Improvement & 4: Resource Management
3. Special Education Needs, Head Teacher’s Performance
4. Preparing for an OFSTED inspection
5. Youth Matters
New Ofsted Framework
6. Performance Management FMSiS for Govs
7. Head teacher performance
8. School visits and their purpose
9. Community cohesion

Appendix G

If so, please specify in which areas (e.g. legal issues/specific issues relating to education agenda)

1. I think so, but am not sure as I am still fairly new to this role. I have had training in Safeguarding Children, Classroom Management and work/teach at a language supplementary school and have a good understanding of issues.
2. I would have like to receive some training on the school inspection process.
3. Our body needs to challenge the school more.
4. On-going training, whether in a new area or as a refresher, is important. The online support through Modern Governor modules is extremely useful.
5. I believe everyone can benefit from training.



6. For Governors with a non-educational background it would be of benefit to explain the running of the school reg. subjects taught, the examination system, Ofsted, the funding of how much from where and how some statistic about performance are calculated.
7. We're looking into having some group training.
8. Legal issues.
9. Yes, we are regularly assessing our performance and identifying appropriate training.
10. More advanced induction training to cover legal and human resource aspects.
11. We have recently become a Trust. Any course for governors that explain any new amended responsibilities?
12. Issues related to appointment of new headteacher.
13. Teamworking, budgets, typical cost of school books, software, IT hardware etc.
14. Developing strategy and general team building.
15. On Legal, Procurement and Commercial Aspects.
16. Specific to a governor's role on 'sub-committees'.
17. Induction of a governor.
18. Finance.
19. Specifics of the roles and powers of governing bodies.
20. How to be more involved and pro-active.
21. Legal responsibilities and the legal status of different type of schools.
22. Updates as government finds its feet (particularly why academies with so little parent representation on their governing bodies are meant to be Such A Good Idea).
23. Governor development as a whole school and team building.

