

Policy recommendations of the Expert Working Group on School Governance

Every school has a governing body which is responsible in law for the conduct of the school. Governing bodies have a key role in ensuring the effective performance of schools; making sure that schools are properly held to account; and helping schools to provide the best possible education for young people. The 300,000 school governors are one of the largest groups of volunteers in the country. Many governors provide wide-ranging support for their schools beyond their immediate responsibilities. This spirit of volunteering reflects the new Government's aim of fostering community involvement in public services. Governors could, and should be, seen as a core element of the "Big Society".

Research evidence shows that while schools may appear to be robust and secure, many 'good schools' rely on a relatively small number of staff/governors to maintain their high quality and to give impetus to their improvement. There is also evidence that good governance and accountability can be particularly challenging for schools in disadvantaged settings, the very schools that are typically in most need of support from the wider community. Good governance and accountability mechanisms will be crucial in ensuring the success of new types of school currently being planned, in particular the establishment of "free schools" and the creation of new academies.

Employers are exceptionally well-placed to support school governance by encouraging their staff to serve as governors and supporting them in their governance work. For employers such involvement is a highly effective means of both supporting their local communities and enabling their employees to develop work-related skills. Governors, who are supported by their employer, can also provide an excellent link through which schools can access a wide range of work-related support and opportunities for their students.

There is a continuing need to maintain and enhance the quality of school governance and to find new volunteers with the skills and commitment to serve as governors, particularly in schools in challenging circumstances. In order to improve school governance and to encourage a wider range of volunteers to come forward and take up this important community responsibility, the Taskforce Expert Working Group on School Governance recommends the following:

Policy recommendations

For Government

1. The Government should recognise more explicitly the importance of school governance for the strategic direction of the school, accountability for performance and support of its staff and leadership team particularly when new policies are being developed and initiatives are being implemented, for example with the introduction of new types of schools, such as "free schools".
2. The Government should clarify and simplify the responsibilities of governing bodies, ensuring that they focus on the scrutiny of substantive matters.
3. The Government should support a campaign, linked to the "Big Society" agenda, to encourage people with the relevant skills and commitment to volunteer, especially in schools in challenging circumstances, which often face difficulties in attracting high-calibre volunteers to serve as governors.
4. There needs to be greater awareness of the flexibility of the current arrangements regarding the size and composition of governing bodies. Legally, governing bodies may comprise between nine and 20

governors and governing bodies may invite others to join, for example as associate members. Many chairs are unaware of the scope governing bodies have to determine their size and committee arrangements to improve governing body efficiency. The Government should require clerks to provide chairs and their governing bodies with appropriate guidance on governing body size and committee arrangements particularly if there are issues relating to governing body size or structure, specific skills' shortages or persistent vacancies

For Government in conjunction with schools and professional organisations concerned with governance

5. All governing bodies should be required to ensure that there is full and appropriate representation of key stakeholder groups and that collectively the governing body has the capabilities required to govern their school effectively. To this end, all governing bodies should be required to undertake a skills audit and to evaluate their performance, training and recruitment annually.
6. The contribution of school governors to the education system and to society in general should be recognised publicly, formally, and in a range of ways.
7. Governing bodies should be encouraged to adopt a code of conduct such as the one endorsed by the Education and Employers Taskforce Expert Group on School Governance.
8. All new governors should be required to undertake an induction programme.
9. The particular importance of the chair of the governing body needs to be more fully acknowledged and recognised publicly in the way for example that magistrates are recognised. Induction and training should be obligatory for all chairs of governing bodies.
10. All schools should have a trained clerk, ideally accredited, who is able to act independently and who understands the legal and statutory requirements of school governing bodies and provides a professional clerking service. Such a service might be efficiently provided by local provider or by federations of schools.
11. The Department for Education's advisory group on school governance should be strengthened to give it a more strategic role in the development of school governance policy.

For employers, employer bodies and professional associations

12. Employers should be made aware of the importance of school governance and the benefits to their staff, and should encourage and enable their staff to volunteer as governors. Relevant national employer bodies, including the British Chambers of Commerce, Confederation of Business Industry, TUC, Institute of Directors, Federation of Small Businesses, Business in the Community, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and professional associations should work together on a co-ordinated ongoing campaign to raise awareness of the business benefits of employees becoming school governors.
13. Employers who support their employees as governors should consider how such individuals could help in developing and supporting broader education-employer partnerships, to provide a range of work-related support

Education and Employers Taskforce - Expert Group on School Governance

{members at 27 July 2010 – date of recommendations}

Member	Organisation	Position
Chris James {chair}	University of Bath	Professor of Educational Leadership
Steve Acklam (in attendance)	School Governors One-Stop Shop	Chief Executive
Alison Beer	Worthing High School	Headteacher
Brenda Bigland CBE	Lent Rise Primary School	Headteacher
Kate Champion	National College	Operational Director
Nick Chambers	Education and Employers Taskforce	Director
Tony Cohen	NSure	Director Chair of Governors of two schools
Clare Collins	National Governors Association	Chair
Ian Courtney	RBS Natwest	Specialised Relationship Manager School Governor
Dr Megan Crawford	Institute of Education	Reader
Martin Finn	EdComs	Managing Director
Geoff Friston (in attendance)	Department for Education	Policy Officer
Judy Greevy	HMRC	Head of Corporate Responsibility Diversity and Wellbeing
Rebecca Hilsenrath	LawWorks	Chief Executive School founder and governor
Ian Duffy	BP	Business Advisor, UK Social & Community Affairs
Emma Knights	National Governors Association	Chief Executive
David Marriott	NCOGS - National Co-ordinators of Governor Services	Chair
Christian Percy	Education and Employers Taskforce	Operations Director School Governor
Helen Richardson	NCOGS - National Co-ordinators of Governor Services	Former Chair
Tom Richmond	CIPD - Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development	Policy officer
Brian Stevens	FEdS Consultancy	Founder and Chief Executive