

Becoming a Governor at Buckinghamshire College Group

Some Frequently Asked Questions

1) What is a College Governing Body?

The Governing Body of a College, often called the Corporation or a Board, is set up by the Government in College Instruments and Articles which are altered from time to time. Governing Bodies in their present form were founded about 20 years ago when Colleges became independent organisations.

The key purpose of the Board is to oversee collectively the affairs of the College and to meet the legitimate interests of learners, staff and other interested stakeholders.

The Members of the Board determine the educational character of the College, oversee its financial development and establish its vision and strategy.

2) What are the roles and responsibilities of Governors?

The attached leaflet gives considerable detail about the roles and responsibilities of Governors but in summary these are:

- The determination of the College's educational character and mission
- Approving quality strategy
- The effective and efficient use of resources to ensure solvency
- Approval of a budget and monitoring it
- The appointment and terms of employments of senior post holders and the Clerk
- Establishing a framework for pay and conditions

The role is a strategic role not a management role and the College follows the 'Carver' principles whereby Governors focus on the strategy or 'ends' of the College and the managers focus on implementation of the strategy (or 'means'). The Governors monitor the performance of the College and its most senior managers (called senior post holders). This split of duties can be set out as follows:

Governors:

Agree overall policy
Agree overall framework and budget
Set framework
Take an overview
Appoint Principal and Chief
Executive and Senior Postholders

Principal:

Proposes
Implements
Organises
Directs
Manages
Informs

The job of a Governor is to support the senior managers to help them succeed and fulfil their duties. Governors have to invest appropriate time, work as a team and appoint a Chair and Vice Chair. The Principal and her team are responsible for the day to day running of the College.

3) How is the Board formed?

The Board is formed of the Non-Executive members (from whom the Chair and Vice Chair are drawn) plus the Principal/Chief Executive. The expected maximum number of Members is eighteen, and quorum for transaction of business is seven. There are two student and two staff Members and the remaining Members come from the social and economic community within which the College works. Members serve for a maximum of two periods of four years and this turnover allows new Members to join and for gradual changes in the social composition in the Board to reflect changes in the community.

4) How do the meetings work?

Board Meetings are one way in which the Board discharges its duties. As a matter of Board policy, all meetings of the Corporation must have a predefined purpose, be furnished with action-oriented information, have a focussed agenda, and allow reasonable time for adequate debate and considered decisions.

To achieve this Board meetings follow these rules

- Papers will be circulated a minimum of seven days in advance of the Board meeting.
- The board meeting will be conducted on the assumption that Members have read Board papers prior to the meeting.
- Each paper will be annotated to the effect that it is for 'discussion', 'decision', or 'information'.
- 'Any other business' items should be raised with the Chair prior to the Board meeting. Items tabled at the meeting will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances.
- An agenda will be laid out in advance.
- Draft minutes are posted on the Intranet.
- There are about six Board meetings per year

5) How does the Board work as a team?

The Board needs to operate as a team under the leadership of the Chair and these guidelines are followed:

- Arrive before the scheduled start time.
- Empty chairs represent a serious matter. Attendance records are kept!
- Read the Board papers in advance.
- Address issues, not personalities.
- Focus on what is right, not just what is wrong. Be positive and constructive.
- Focus on strategic issues and do not deal with matters which are the work of the College Managers.
- Three minutes should be long enough to make a point.
- No 'War Stories'.
- Keep to the point and the topic being discussed – focus.
- Do not use Board meetings to demonstrate superior intellect or knowledge.
- Do not inhibit the expression of alternative views.
- Information only items will not normally be discussed.
- Comments should be made through the Chair.
- Meetings will finish on time, as prescribed by the Chair.
- An attendance log and forward meetings schedule will be maintained.
- Collective responsibility is maintained by all Members for decisions taken.
- Rules of confidentiality for sensitive items must be observed.

6) Are there Committees?

There are three Committees and occasional working groups. Their function is to recommend actions to the full Board. Each Board Committee operates to terms of reference set and agreed from time to time by the Board.

The current sub-committees are:

- Audit
- Search & Development
- Remuneration

7) How are Governors Involved in College Life?

Apart from attending Committee meetings and the full Board, Governors take part in development events two or three times per year and these allow discussion and debate on developments of strategic importance to the College. Governors also act as an ambassador for the College and often attend College events and this is one way that they have contact with students and staff.

8) Is Governance For You?

Being a Governor is a vital contribution to the growth and development of the College and gives an opportunity to make a rewarding contribution to the local community of the College. But this work takes time and dedication.

Meetings are usually held at 5.30pm and last between one and two hours. Attendance at meetings, development events and other functions takes about 80 hours per year. There is no payment for this work though expenses can be reimbursed.

Governors follow a code of conduct, have to declare any interests and complete a register of interests and meet the eligibility requirements set out in the Instrument and Articles.

If you feel governance is for you, please contact Carol Smith, PA to the Clerk to the Corporation via CSmith@aylesbury.ac.uk or on 01296 588523 who will be happy to send you an application form.