

BECOMING A COLLEGE GOVERNOR

Are you interested in becoming a Governor at St Helens College?

Are you interested in the work of your local Further and Higher Education College? Would you like to contribute to the College's ambitious goals and make a real difference to the people of St Helens?

If the answer is yes to any or all of these questions, this section will hopefully give you an insight into the responsibilities involved in the role of College Governor.

THE CORPORATION'S RESPONSIBILITIES:

The Board of St Helens Corporation operates within the terms of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 (as amended by the Learning and Skills Act 2000) (*Primary Legislation*) and under the Instrument and Articles of Government (*Secondary Legislation*).

Under the Articles of Government the Board is responsible for:

- the determination and development of the educational character and mission of the College and for the oversight of its activities;
- publishing arrangements for obtaining the views of staff and students on the determination and development of the educational character and mission of the College and the oversight of its activities
- approving the quality strategy of the College;
- the effective and efficient use of resources, the solvency of the College and the Corporation and safeguarding their assets;
- approving annual estimates of income and expenditure;
- the appointment, grading, suspension, dismissal and determination of the pay and conditions of service of Senior Post Holders and the Clerk to the Corporation; and
 - setting a framework for the pay and conditions of service of all other staff.

Boards of Further Education Colleges have the power to appoint and to re-appoint new Board Members.

The Corporation at the College currently consists of 18 Members appointed from a variety of backgrounds and includes two student Members and two staff Members. The College CEO, Simon Pierce, is also a serving Member of the Corporation. The Corporation is served by a Clerk to the Governors (Governance Director), who is independent of the Management of the College.

The Corporation makes appointments after the Search and Governance Committee, which is a mandatory and formally constituted Committee of the Corporation, submits recommendations. The recommendations are based on a personal interview, which you may be requested to attend. The Search and Governance Committee will then decide which names are to be put forward to the Board of the Corporation for consideration and formal appointment. The Committee also advises the Board on the re-appointment of governors as appropriate.

The Search and Governance Committee will consider a candidate's personal suitability for appointment regardless of ethnic origin, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, political affiliation, religion or disability. In general, no formal qualifications are required as the range and depth of experience and skills is more important. The Search and Governance Committee does, however, operate according to a skills matrix and will often seek candidates with professional qualifications to fill specific vacancies. In making recommendations to the Board, the Committee will not only consider the personal suitability of candidates, but also the number of vacancies, the balance of skills and expertise on the Board and the need to ensure that the composition of the Board broadly reflects the community that the College serves.

The number of candidates for appointment often exceeds the number of vacancies and it may be the case that although personally suitable, you cannot be recommended for immediate appointment, either because there are no vacancies, or there is an over-riding need for the Board to ensure that its composition broadly reflects the community it serves in terms of age, gender, geographical spread, skills and experience, etc. Achieving a balance is, however, a secondary consideration to the most important requirement, which is that a candidate must be personally suitable for appointment. If you are not selected on this occasion, and with your approval, your name will be added to a database of prospective candidates and you will be contacted from time to time, to keep you informed of the latest position on vacancies, both at Corporation and Committee level, where external co-opted members are also sometimes sought.

You may request to have your details deleted from the database at any time by contacting the Governance Director.

The proceedings of the Search and Governance Committee are conducted **in the strictest confidence**. No information given to, or obtained by, the Committee is used for any purpose other than the consideration of candidates for appointment as Board or possibly Committee Members. The process itself is, however, not confidential and there is no reason why candidates should not mention to those known to them the fact that they have applied. It is certainly proper to discuss your candidature with your referees and, if you are in employment, with your line manager.

A curriculum vitae may be submitted in addition to a completed application, and references may be taken-up if you are invited for interview. Potential Governors are also asked to complete a skills audit.

Board members are also requested to serve on at least one Standing Committee of the Corporation. The Corporation at St Helens currently has six Standing Committees.

Board meetings are normally held in the early evening (traditionally these have been held on Thursdays, commencing at 4.00 pm up until approximately 6.00 pm dependent on the number of agenda items).

Committee meetings are held at varying times dependent on membership needs. An annual calendar of meetings is published each year before the start of the College year, which starts on 1 August.

An annual one-day strategic away day is also scheduled.

The maximum term of office to which a Board Member may be appointed is initially for four years, and Governors can be re-appointed for a further term-of-office (up to a maximum of 2 terms unless there are exceptional circumstances).

Code of Conduct:

Board Members are expected to abide by the *Code of Conduct* for Board Members, which sets out requirements for the standards of conduct expected of Board Members, to enable them to understand their legal duties and to assist them both in carrying out their duties and in their relationship with the Corporation and the Principal and Chief Executive. The Code is aimed at promoting effective and well-informed college governance.

The Code also includes the seven principles of public life set out in the second report of the *Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life*, which recommends that governing bodies act with: -

Selflessness - taking decisions solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity - acting without obligation or influence to outside individuals/organisations.

Objectivity - taking decisions on merit.

Accountability - being accountable for decisions and subsequent public scrutiny.

Openness - being as open as possible and giving reasons for decisions.

Honesty - declaring private interests and avoiding conflicts of interest.

Leadership - promoting and supporting principles by leadership and example.

The Board operates an active Register of Interests, which all Board Members are expected to complete. In completing the Register, Board Members are invited to register all business interests, financial or otherwise. The Register is open to public inspection and an annual update is undertaken.

Board Members nominated by particular groups should not speak or vote at meetings as if delegated by the group they represent. No Board Member is to be bound by a mandate given to him or her. Members are required to take a view on each matter before them and reach a decision based on the merits of the issue. There is collective responsibility amongst Board Members for decisions taken by the Board.

COMMUNICATIONS:

Relationships with Students:

The student voice is very important to the Corporation and two student Governors are elected each year. Corporation Members regularly attend student events e.g. presentation events, prize-giving celebrations, graduation ceremonies, Student Council meetings, etc. and their involvement in such activities is much appreciated by the College Executive and staff of the College. Improving learner performance and listening to the student voice are number one key priorities for the Corporation.

Relationships with College Staff:

The most sensitive part of the work of a governor is achieving the right balance in communications with staff and managers in the College. The Corporation is the employer of all staff in the College, but does not direct the work of staff, other than designated senior post holders of which there are three currently in the College, (the CEO/Principal, the Chief Finance Officer and the Governance Director). The management of staff in the College is the responsibility of the CEO and Senior Leadership Team. The function of the Board is to provide overall strategic direction, involving strategic planning, objective setting and appropriate delegation. The CEO and the Senior Leadership Team are responsible for achieving the objectives and targets and implementing strategies through the day-to-day management of the staff in the College.

Governors should strive to establish a constructive working relationship with the CEO and Management Team and all concerned should aspire to be mutually challenging yet supportive in their approach, while maintaining a professional relationship at all times.

The staff voice is also very important to the Corporation and there are two elected Staff Governors who serve as Members of the Corporation.

Governor development:

Newly appointed Board Members are invited to undergo induction development once appointed. The aim of this is to help new Members understand their duties, obtain sufficient knowledge of the College and acquire a working knowledge of the policies and procedures employed by the Board. The Board also offers a mentoring service for any new Member, who can link with a more experienced Member if required.

An ongoing training and development programme is in place for all Members, which is reviewed on an annual basis. Governors also attend external events as appropriate.

Expenses and allowances:

Board Members are not paid for carrying out their duties. Board Members may claim reasonable expenses for travelling and subsistence associated with attendance at meetings, development events and conferences.

Eligibility requirements:

Board members are required to certify their eligibility to be a Governor both on appointment and then on an annual basis; this is based on the requirements of the Instrument and Articles of Government.

Personal liability of Board Members:

In principle, Board Members are not liable for the debts of the College. It is generally the case that provided Board Members act in good faith and understand fully their duties and responsibilities, the risks of personal liability arising will be very substantially reduced. The College currently has Governors' Indemnity cover included within the College's insurance provision.

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks:

Each new Governor is required to undertake a DBS check, which is administered by the College's Human Resources Department.

Making an application to become a College Governor:

If prospective applicants wish to visit the College before making a formal application, the Clerk can assist in organising a tour of the three sites and the facilities, and to meet key staff if required.

If you wish to submit an expression of interest in becoming a College Governor, please contact the Governance Director in the first instance.

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