

# Professional development through school governance.

Oliver Kean  
June 2019



ALLEN & OVERY



BANK OF ENGLAND



# Introduction

The importance of business skills to school governance has long been recognised by Governors for Schools, which, since 2000, has been placing professionals with business expertise on to school boards in order to improve schools.

However, as the demands of school governance increase in the context of greater accountability and autonomy for academies and trusts, anecdotally it has become more apparent that being a school governor provides a powerful training and development opportunity for employees.

To test the reliability of this hypothesis we designed research that would answer the following questions:

- Do employees' governance and professional roles require the deployment of corresponding skills?
- What skills and other personal attitudes/behaviours relating to their employment role do employees develop through being governors?
- How might we capture and evidence governors' development?

We gathered data from a wide range of employees who had become school governors, through a combination of a survey and focus groups.

The findings, which are set out on the page opposite, suggest a high degree of overlap between the skills governors use on the school board and in their professional roles.

Governors also report high levels of development among many of the most transferable skills along with increased levels of confidence, which they have been able to apply back in the workplace.

As part of the research, we created a prototype skills matrix to help governors guide and record their development. Over 90% of the governors we spoke to said that they would use such a resource.

Refining and enhancing this resource is now a key focus for Governors for Schools in order to maximise the learning potential for employees, and demonstrate to employers the benefits of promoting school governance as a leadership development opportunity.

# Key findings

- The research revealed a close match between the skills used in a school governance context and in a corporate/professional context. In particular, governors recognised significant overlap in the following areas:

- Providing challenge and asking probing questions
- Strategic planning
- Developing professional relationships, and
- Leading, persuading or influencing others

- Governors reported strong development in these transferable skills, which in turn has led to enhanced performance in the workplace. In addition to the areas set out above, governors also reported strong growth in:

- Preparation, flexibility and agility
- Analysing performance data and KPIs, and
- Financial skills and value for money

- Many of these attributes and competences are associated with high level management and leadership roles. They are particularly valuable for those seeking career progression up to CEO level and for non-executive director roles, and are highlighted extensively in corporate skills development frameworks.

- All the employees said that they felt more confident and assertive after becoming a governor. This was grounded in the proven self-belief that they could function quickly, effectively and assertively in an unfamiliar, high-level and challenging setting without being intimidated.

- Self-esteem was further boosted by the respect they attracted from others because of the perceived gravitas of the school governor role.

## Employees told us...

“It has led me to become more involved at work in strategic questions – restructuring, re-organising ... thinking about impact.”

“I’ve learnt to seek the detail, rather than just nodding something through. This has helped me to carry out appraisals I do at work.”

“I feel more confident making a decision and asking for the right information to reach it”

# A professional development pathway

Being on a school governing board has the potential to provide powerful professional and leadership development that is complementary to that offered in the workplace.

School governance should therefore be seen as a key element of talent development programmes for those being prepared for senior management positions, right up to CEO and non-executive director level.

Equally, with people living longer, and moving roles and jobs more frequently, it's clear that the skills developed through being a school governor provide an excellent grounding for employees as they progress through changes in their working lives.

## Our next steps

- 1.** Governors for Schools will share these findings with the Learning and Development teams of existing and emerging business partners.
- 2.** We will advocate for the professional development resulting from volunteering as a school governor to be recognised in conversations about individuals' progress and development, and, more broadly, to become an important element of talent management programmes.
- 3.** In addition, we will develop an online tool to track and recognise employee's governor activities and development they have experienced, building from the prototype skills matrix created through this research. This will make it easy for employees to demonstrate learning and development to their employers.

**To read the full research report and findings, please visit our website:  
[www.governorsforschools.org.uk](http://www.governorsforschools.org.uk)**

**With thanks to**

**ALLEN & OVERY**



**BANK OF ENGLAND**

