

**Swindon College Governing
Body: Search Committee**

COULD YOU BE A SWINDON COLLEGE GOVERNOR?

External governor appointment

Information pack for applicants

Clerk to the Governors

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COULD YOU BE A SWINDON COLLEGE GOVERNOR?

- Do you have an interest in education and training?
- Would you like to contribute to Swindon College's further and higher education portfolio to meet the needs of learners and employers?
- Do you have experience of management and strategic planning or a specific skill/qualification relevant to helping the College develop?
- Would you like to contribute to the College's ambitious goals and make a real difference to the people of Swindon?

If the answer is yes to any or all of these questions, this information pack will, hopefully, give you an insight into the responsibilities involved in the role of College Governor. Thank you for your interest in this role and in Swindon College.

ABOUT SWINDON COLLEGE

Swindon College is a general further education college operating mainly from one site near the town centre. With a turnover of around £21 million, it offers courses primarily in work related areas and has industry-standard facilities in a number of these including construction, engineering and catering. The college has approximately 6500 further education students (including 500 apprentices) and 500 higher education students. Its main higher education partners are the University of Bath and Oxford Brookes University. The focus of provision is vocational education and training, taking into account local skills' needs, progression to higher education, further training opportunities and the 14-19 strategy for Swindon.

The College has outstanding (Ofsted rated) 'Train to Gain' (i.e. training for those in employment) provision and a further 2650 students achieved qualifications through this route last year either in the workplace or in college.

The College's success rates have risen over the last three years and it is now the *top performing college in Wiltshire for further education long and short courses, apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships and Train to Gain. (*'Framework for Excellence' Dec 2010)

Swindon has traditionally been characterised by low unemployment and relatively high wages but, despite this, the College serves many areas of social and economic deprivation. The economic downturn has had a significant effect on the town with major employers reducing staff numbers. The College has responded well to this and has run a number of courses aimed at the unemployed in addition to working proactively with employers. The College continues to grow its lower level provision to address the growing numbers of young people not in education, employment or training ('NEET's) and runs a number of innovative projects in the community in order to meet the needs of this market.

The College underwent a 'satisfactory' Ofsted inspection in March 2009 and the last Ofsted monitoring visit in 2010 noted that the College had made 'significant progress' in a number of areas including 16-18 success rates. Our latest inspection report is available [here](#).

The College was awarded the Matrix standard in 2010 and the Training Quality Standard in 2011, respectively recognising the quality of its advice and guidance and its high standards of business training and work with employers.

Click to read about the [College's Mission and Core Values](#).

THE APPOINTMENT OF GOVERNORS

The Governing Body has a membership of 18, including 2 staff members and 2 student members. The normal term of office for members is 4yrs but this can be varied at the Board's discretion. The College Principal, Andrew Miller, is also a serving member of the Board, which is served by a qualified Clerk, who is independent of the management of the college.

The Governing Body (the 'Board') is the appointing authority for its members. Where the office of any member becomes vacant the Board shall, as soon as practicable, take all necessary steps to appoint a new member to fill the vacancy. The Board will take professional advice from the Clerk on the eligibility of all candidates. A Criminal Records Bureau check will be carried out before members are appointed or re-appointed.

The process will be open and transparent. The Search ('Nominations') Committee will utilise the information gleaned from a skills and knowledge audit of existing members to identify any gaps in experience and expertise. Issues such as an appropriate gender and ethnic balance of membership and how well membership reflects the communities served by the College will be taken into account.

The Board makes appointments after the Search Committee, which is a mandatory and formally constituted committee of the Governing Body, submits recommendations, following an interview with an applicant. The Search Committee will then decide which name(s) is to be put forward to the Board for consideration and formal appointment. The Committee also advises the Board on the re-appointment of Board Members as appropriate.

The Search 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 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.

Should you decide to apply, along with your application, we should be grateful if you would complete a [Skills and Knowledge Audit Form](#).

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 expertise 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, 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 Board 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 Clerk. No information given to, or obtained by, the Search 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.

A *curriculum vitae* may be submitted in addition to a completed [Application Form](#) and references may be taken up if you are invited for interview.

The Board will not appoint members who are:

- under the age of 18 years except as a student member
- a member of staff of the institution except as a staff member or in the capacity of Principal
- adjudged bankrupt or are the subject of a bankruptcy restriction order
- with relevant convictions

There is no upper age limit restricting eligibility to membership. Prospective members will be asked to declare their membership of groups which are actually proscribed organisations or groups whose objectives can be shown to be inconsistent with existing policies of the College e.g. on equal opportunities

The reason for this request will be made clear to prospective governors, namely that the College is concerned to ensure those joining the Governing Body are committed to promoting the best interests of the College and that the College's particular policies are followed.

A member may resign from office at any time by giving notice in writing to the Clerk. The Board may give notice in writing to a member if at any time the Board is satisfied that any member is unfit or unable to discharge the functions of a member or has been absent from meetings of the Governing Body for a period longer than six consecutive months without permission. This would follow an appropriate resolution being put to and approved by the Board. The reasons would be made clear. The member would be informed in writing of the procedure to be followed. A member would be given the right of reply.

THE GOVERNING BODY AND ITS COMMITTEES

You may wish to view the [pen pictures](#) of the present members of our Governing Body.

Board members are also requested to serve on at least one Committee of the Governing Body, five of which have been established. Two committees are mandatory:

- The Audit Committee; and
- The Search Committee

and three have been set up by the Governing Body to assist in its work:

- The Quality and Standards Committee
- The Resources Committee; and the
- Remuneration Committee.

Board and Committee meetings are normally held in the late afternoon (traditionally these have been held on Tuesdays, commencing at 1600hrs up until approximately 1800hrs, dependent upon the number of agenda items). An [annual calendar of meetings](#) is published each year before the start of the college year, which starts on 1 August.

THE GOVERNING BODY'S RESPONSIBILITIES

The Governing Body ('the Board') of Swindon College operates within the terms of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 (as amended by subsequent primary legislation) and under the Instrument and Articles of Government as issued by the Secretary of State of the day.

The Board is responsible for:

- the determination and periodic review of the educational character and mission of the college and for 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 for 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.

Put more simply, the Governing Body is responsible for the overall functioning of the College. It is responsible for the quality of the service to its students and their welfare, for the financial health of the college, for the proper use of public funds and for ensuring effective management. It also has responsibility for setting and monitoring targets for the retention and achievement of students – ensuring that students continue their studies and achieve their learning goals.

Governors are also responsible for monitoring their collective and individual performance to ensure that they operate to a high standard. A good Governing Body will carry out a regular

review of all aspects of its work and operation. It has important legal responsibilities set out in the instruments and articles of government. Other responsibilities are agreed with the Skills Funding Agency as a condition of receiving public funds. A successful college is one which provides an effective educational service and which is financially secure.

In England, Boards of Further Education Colleges have the power to appoint and re-appoint new Board Members. There are exceptional circumstances where the Secretary of State and the Skills Funding Agency may appoint Board Members, but the vast majority of appointments are made by Boards themselves.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNOR

As a member of the Governing Body, individual governors must work effectively within the framework of responsibilities set out above. Governors are required to:

- act in the best interests of the Governing Body.
- support decisions of the Governing Body and its committees once they have been reached on the basis of collective responsibility even though you may have spoken against a proposal during the debate at a meeting.
- give due priority to attending meetings of the governing body and the appropriate committees of the governing body. Each governor is usually a member of one committee in addition to the main Board.
- attend College events (such as student prize-giving) so as to gain an understanding and appreciation of the work of the college, and to meet students and staff.
- enable effective oversight of College affairs to be carried out and, to assist with this task, to participate in 'link' arrangements with Curriculum Areas. In particular, governors are expected to familiarise themselves with the College's curriculum and quality assurance systems.
- participate in training which enhances your contribution to the Governing Body.
- understand that individual members of the Board have no specific powers. This means, for example, that statements may only be made on behalf of the Governing Body by those authorised to do so.

In our **selection** of a new governor we would look for the following **attributes**:

- Committed to lifelong learning and the role of Swindon College in providing the best possible learning and teaching within Swindon's urban community and its wider hinterland.
- Willing and able to promote the equal opportunities policy adopted by the Governing Body to ensure that barriers do not exist to the entry of any potential learner, employee or Governor to the College.
- Willing to share skills and expertise gained in other work settings eg education and skills development, finance, estates management, human resource management, information technology, legal etc.
- Willing to meet students and staff and to give advice and support to College managers as appropriate

- Able to attend meetings of the Governing Body and at least one committee given that these usually are scheduled from 1600-1800 hrs.
- Willing to attend Governor training events as advised by the Clerk to the Governing Body and to attend College events, to gain a deeper understanding of the College and further education.
- Effective team membership skills, able to contribute to a collective process of information dissemination and decision making.
- Effective communication skills.
- High standards of probity.

Further specific **desirable characteristics** are:

- Experience in the field of education or at least be able to demonstrate an active interest in the subject.
- Experience of a senior management role in at least a medium scale organisation and/or have a full appreciation of issues which affect the senior management role in such organisations.
- A professional qualification or demonstrable expertise in a field which is of relevance to the oversight of the affairs of the College; such areas would include finance, accountancy, property management, human resources management, the law, marketing, information technology, higher education, the public sector and the voluntary services.
- Knowledge of Swindon and its environs from which the majority of students are drawn.

ON BEING A GOVERNOR

Here are some of the things that our present governors say about their experiences:

“Being a governor allows me to use my business skills in an entirely different setting to my day job.”

“I never cease to be amazed by the commitment of staff, students, fellow governors and stakeholders towards moving the College forwards.”

“You are ultimately responsible for the performance of the College but without being involved in the nitty- gritty. The governors are responsible for the strategic direction.”

“I became a governor because I wanted to put something back into the community from which I had earned my living.”

“I find myself learning about and discussing subject areas I could not conceive of in my work role.”

“Having studied at the College for many years it is rewarding to put something back in.”

“If you have a particular skills set, then there are specialist committees which you can sit on and which will use your knowledge and experience.”

“I was passionately interested in education without being an educational professional...becoming a governor seemed a good way to use my talents and experience.”

“I find meeting students and the input at meetings of the student governors particularly rewarding.”

“Time spent reading reports is compensated for by time spent with staff and students.”

“Apart from the more formal meetings, there are other meetings or gatherings which are more social in nature...above all I enjoy meeting people.”

“When making decisions, governors should always ask themselves whether the decision will improve the student experience...that is a great discipline.”

CODE OF CONDUCT

Board members are expected to abide by the [Code of Conduct](#) for Board members which sets out required standards of conduct 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 Governing Body and the Principal. The Code is aimed at promoting effective and well-informed college governance.

(Please note: it is not essential to read the full Code of Conduct at this stage of your enquiry.)

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.

Governors 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 governors for decisions taken by the Board.

The Board operates an active [Register of Interests](#) which all members are required to complete upon joining the 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.

COLLEGE STUDENTS

The ‘learner voice’ is very important to the Governing Body and the elected Chair of the Student Council and one other elected College student are appointed as members of the Governing Body. Governors regularly attend student events e.g. presentation events, prize-giving celebrations, graduation ceremonies, and their involvement in such activities is much appreciated by the College Senior Management Team and staff of the college.

The College has a raft of policies to ensure that the learner voice is audible and is listened to and governors play an active part in monitoring their impact.

COLLEGE STAFF

A most sensitive part of the work of a Governor is achieving the right balance in communications with staff and managers in the college. The Swindon College Corporation (i.e. The Governing Body) 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 currently four - the Principal, the Deputy Principal, the Vice Principal and the Clerk. The management of staff in the college is the responsibility of the Principal and the senior management team. The function of the Board is to provide overall strategic direction, involving strategic planning, objective setting and appropriate delegation. The Principal and the senior management team are responsible for achieving the objectives, targets and strategies by the day-to-day management of the staff in the college.

Governors should strive to establish a constructive working relationship with the Principal and senior managers and all concerned should aspire to be mutually supportive, while maintaining a professional relationship at all times.

The Governing Body at Swindon College operates a 'Links' programme, whereby each individual Governor is linked with a senior manager who facilitates visits to a chosen curriculum area, enabling both staff and students to have a direct link to the Board via their link Governor.

The staff voice is very important to the Governing Body and there are two elected Staff Governors who serve as members of the Board.

View the College's management structure [here](#).

GOVERNOR INDUCTION, TRAINING AND CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Newly appointed Board Members are invited to undergo a structured induction programme upon appointment. 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.

Regular training sessions are held for all governors on matters of College policy or practice or on Government policy for FE. Short sessions are often held before the start of Board meetings. An on-going individualised development programme is in place for all members, which is reviewed on an annual basis. This is based on an assessment of individual training needs. Governors are provided with the opportunity to attend external development events as appropriate including an annual national Governance Conference.

BOARD SELF-ASSESSMENT

As a publicly funded body, the College is required to conduct a rigorous annual self-assessment of its performance, from which an annual improvement plan results. The Governing Body is expected to oversee this process ensuring that it is robust, with definite outcomes, which the Board then scrutinises to ensure that action plans are implemented.

The Governing Body is also expected to demonstrate a real concern for its own performance, with annually agreed key performance indicators, and assessment of performance - of the chair, of individual members, of committees, and of the Board itself.

EXPENSES AND ALLOWANCES

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

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 risk of personal liability arising will be very small indeed. The College currently has Governors' Indemnity cover included with the College's Insurance provision.

CRIMINAL RECORDS BUREAU CHECKS

Each new Governor is required to undertake a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check, which is administered by the college's Human Resources Department. (This requirement may cease following the Government's intended review of guidelines in this area.)

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 site and facilities, and to meet key staff if required. If you wish to have an informal discussion first, please contact the Clerk to the Governors. Or, if you are ready to do so, please complete an [Application Form](#) and return it on-line, or in hard copy if you prefer, to:

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