

Could you help transform people's lives through learning by becoming a college governor?

Swindon College opens its doors to thousands of learners every year who benefit from the expertise of teaching and support staff and the excellent facilities of its main campus at North Star. With high levels of success rates and close support from the business and wider community the college provides a responsive portfolio of vocationally based courses at all levels including Higher Education. We work with a range of partners including local schools and employers to provide the best possible progression to higher level skills and are constantly looking to improve and provide an even better service. In the recently published Framework for Excellence results Swindon College is the top performing college in the area when it comes to learner achievement. So join a winning team...

...and be part of our success story!



The rewards are about being involved...

You will not be considering becoming a governor for reasons of self-interest or financial reward. Almost certainly you will have a genuine interest in the way that further education can and should meet the needs of many local employers and communities for essential qualifications and skills development, for personal development and the enjoyment of learning, for social interaction and for many other reasons.

...and there is a real challenge!

But we are in no doubt that you will develop greatly from the experience of being a governor. You will take responsibility with your fellow governors for a sizeable budget, for a large estate, for hundreds of staff and thousands of students. You will sometimes grapple with challenging decisions, where often there is a real tension between the values you may hold in wanting to provide first class learning opportunities, and the funding which is made available to achieve this. You will engage in serious debate with fellow governors and will surely learn much from their collective experience and backgrounds.

About Swindon College

You will almost certainly be aware of the college's existence – now based on a single site at North Star

with a recently completed major new building. You may have studied here or possibly even taught here, as we employ many part time as well as full time lecturers.

The college has a turnover of approximately £22m and we employ nearly 400 full-time equivalent staff, making us one of Swindon's major employers. We have close to 3,000 full time students, around 500 studying on HE courses and many more part-time students. Swindon College offers mainly vocational courses and covers a significant number of skills and occupational sectors from plumbing to health care to art & design and engineering.

What is 'further education'?

It is predominantly post-16 education and training, although the college does have large numbers of 14-16 year olds from our local schools gaining a practical skills-based learning experience. Our main focus is on vocational education and training, with popular qualifications being, for example, BTEC Nationals, NVQs and City and Guilds. We also teach some 500 HE learners every year on HND/C, Foundation Degree, Honours Degree and MA programmes. Some of these programmes are linked to our main HE partners Bath University and Oxford Brookes University.

Our place in the local community and economy

Some people say that 'FE' means 'for everyone', which is fine by us, and others say that it offers a second chance. It certainly does for many adults, but that does not mean to say 'second-best'! We are proud of our vocational traditions - which go back to the Swindon and North Wiltshire Technical School at the turn of the 20th century and, indeed, to the Mechanics' Institute even earlier and which are much valued by the local economy. This forms a neat link to emphasising the important role that Swindon College plays in meeting the needs of local businesses by developing the right skills, attitudes and aptitudes required to work productively in our fast moving high-tech economy. More and more our focus is on employment skills but we also provide a platform for many learners to go on to higher level study. The college also puts the vulnerable and those who need more basic help on the right track with a range of confidence building, practical courses that support progression into work or further learning at college.

How are we funded?

The college is mainly publicly funded and is one of a sizeable network of college providers which receives its further education funding through Government agencies. Swindon College works closely with the Skills Funding Agency which provides funding for adult learners and the Young People's Learning Agency who support 16-19 year olds. We are also able to charge fees to some learners. Despite the important funding and planning role of these Government agencies and Swindon Borough Council, the College's Governing Body runs as an independent corporation with powers which derive directly from the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 (as subsequently amended).

The work of the Governing Body

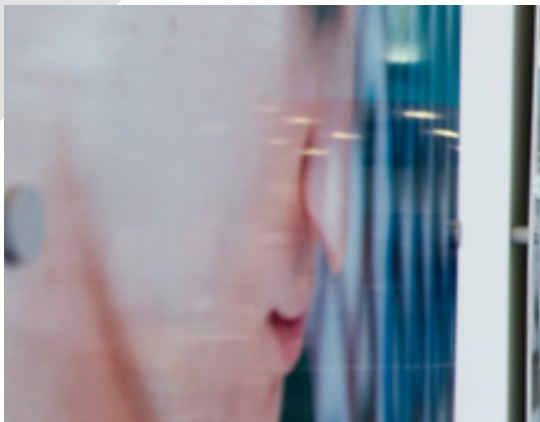
The Governing Body (sometimes called 'the Corporation' but more simply 'the Board') is made up of 18 people drawn from a number of different sectors of the local community – as well as staff and students of the college. The process of governance is enacted through full Board and sub-committee meetings during the year.

The Governing Body, in brief, is responsible for:

- Determining the mission and overall strategy of the College
- Approving the quality strategy of the institution
- Ensuring the efficient use of resources, the solvency of the college and safeguarding its assets
- Approving annual estimates of income and expenditure
- Overseeing the appointment and performance of certain categories of senior staff and setting a framework for the pay and conditions of employment of all staff
- Monitoring whether the College's senior management is effectively delivering the mission and strategy.

A college Governing Body approximates to a Board of Directors in a business enterprise. The thrust of the board's work should be outward-looking and strategic to its key stakeholders and future-oriented in determining effective policies and strategies for the development of the College. Considerable freedom and discretion is given to the College Principal and Chief Executive and his or her senior team for operational management.

There is a legal framework within which the board works and the Clerk to the Governors provides guidance on such matters and on the best processes to adopt in the interests of 'good governance'. The Board is spending public money and should be open and accountable in all that it does.



What are my accountabilities and liabilities as a governor?

The Governing Body is accountable for the success of the College and for working within the legal framework laid down in the Instrument and Articles of Government. Only the Governing Body has authority, not individual governors. The Board can only speak with one voice. Individual governors can, of course, present advice to managers outside Board meetings but this is only advice. Only members acting collectively as the Board can take binding decisions.

This means that, in practice, individual governors have no legal liability. However, should the Board take decisions which are beyond its powers, it could be held collectively liable and individual governors could be held individually liable. However, there is no example of this to date in the sector. There have been examples of 'failing colleges' where Governing Bodies have been replaced, albeit extremely rare, but the Skills Funding Agency do have the power to do this.

How might my experience and skills help?

The members of the Board provide a range of experiences from different types of employment, organisations and cultures. The College's own senior managers provide the knowledge and expertise required to run the college effectively. Governors provide insights from the way things are done in

industry, the professions, local government etc. which can often lead to improved solutions being identified, or methods proven elsewhere being 'borrowed' by the college.

Governors really can add value by bringing their diverse experiences to bear on the many and varied problems which face College managers. Effective governance is about clarifying what the institution's customers want and ensuring that they get it, consistent with the College's funding and resource capability. It is about ends rather than means, which is the College Principal's domain. Governors must represent the needs of the community if they are to present the right level of challenge to managers to deliver the services the community needs and expects.

So, these are essentially intellectual skills and do not require experience of further education. The collective wisdom of the Governing Body is formidable and of great potential value to the Principal and his/her senior team. There are some specific technical skills which the Board needs; for example, the Audit Committee must have a qualified accountant or auditor on it. But, more than anything, members need to have an interest in education and learning, lively minds and be energetic and demanding in their pursuit of excellence, working in the interests of the local community.





What sort of time commitment will there be?

Governors should expect to attend one meeting a month, excluding August, lasting approximately two hours. Then there are occasional visits to special college events, such as annual awards ceremonies where student success is celebrated, and some visits to observe the work of the College's staff and students. We wouldn't wish to underestimate the commitment needed to make a success of this role. Governors normally serve a four year term of office.

An exciting time to become a college governor

The Coalition Government believes strongly in the contribution that colleges make to the national skills agenda. The Government wants to give greater freedom and independence to FE colleges to make the right choices for their local communities. It is the governors' responsibility to ensure that the primary purpose of the college, which is to improve the

employability of its students through the development of economically valuable skills, is met. The College's courses must be of a high standard. The voices of learners need to be heard, and the voices of employers too.

And the Governing Body needs to nurture and promote the reputation of Swindon College, building on its proud tradition of service to the people and employers of Swindon.

How do I apply?

Please contact Alasdair MacDonald, the Clerk to the Governors on **01793 498203** or by e-mail to **alasdairmacdonald@swindon-college.ac.uk**. If you have a short career resume, that would be helpful. The clerk can supply you with further information and try to answer any queries you might have.