

## **RSA Education Governance Network**

### **Introduction**

As governors and as citizens in the wider community we are all potential agents for change in education. In an unpredictable and often challenging world, schools are rethinking the way they educate young people. Governance shapes, creates and commits to an education institution's ethos, sets its ambitions and steers its strategic direction. It is the means by which a community ensures that its education institutions are serving the interests of its learners, the local community and the wider public and acting in a way that is consistent with their aims and values.

Governance is an opportunity for learners, parents, staff and the wider community to participate in shaping our shared future. For it to fulfil this democratic potential, existing governors should seek to develop schools capacity to engage these stakeholders in governance.

To support this ambition the RSA is starting an Education Governance Network, a space for people to support effective and innovative approaches to school and college governance. Drawing upon the aims and values within the RSA's Charter for Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the network will nurture good and innovative practice and explore how the broad values of governance translate to everyday contexts.

### **Background/Scoping**

#### **Sources of Support and Development for School Governance**

Over the last fifteen years there has been a concerted effort to make education governance more efficient and robust, particularly in secondary and primary schools. Provision of basic training has been standardised across England and inductions for new governors cover a few key functions.

The two main sources of support and development available to Governors are their Local Education Authority and the National Governors Association. Training is not compulsory, however, and the quality is variable.

LEAs are urged to provide experienced governor mentors for new governors, though these are not compulsory. They are asked in turn to ensure that adequate training has been provided by the LEA in line with the National Strategy for Governor Support. In practice the experience of being inducted as a new school governor varies enormously between LEAs. Many governors first and only point of contact with third party support is with the LEA's own induction training sessions. These cover the basics of school management; an overview of school funding structures and lines of responsibility; analysing data, results and other school information; school budgets; health and safety; and the composition of the governing body. This training either takes place as a one-day intensive weekend session, or as two or more evening sessions. Occasional seminars on specialist subjects also take place.

The National Governors' Association has a series of information booklets available at a relatively small cost, or free for members. These cover topics such as Ofsted/ Inspection, Curriculum, Financial Responsibilities of the Governing Body and Succession Planning. They also organise conferences and seminars, produce a magazine, 'Matters Arising' and lobby government. It undertakes limited original research, notably surveys of its members. It provides a small selection of governance-related publications and research of the last ten years for download on their website. The NGA have endorsed the *First Certificate in School Governance*, an inexpensive distance learning programme based on a booklet which deals with the key functions and principles of managing a school. If candidates answer 70% of the questions correctly, they are awarded the Certificate.

There are a few moderately active online communities – Governors UK being one of the largest.

DCSF also runs a large resource and support service online at Governornet. This mostly explains current government policy and links to outside sources of information, advice or support.

## **Policy Context**

The DCSF's National Review of School Governors will report in late autumn. It has been charged with investigating how school governing bodies can give their schools a clear strategic direction and ethos; listen to parents and communities and; turn around failing schools.

One of the models of governance to emerge from the DCSF review is that what are needed are smaller, better trained groups of governors. The government's proposed model of an "interim executive board" for failing schools has been criticised by Fiona Millar, among others, as a means of bypassing widespread parent and grassroots involvement in favour of more tokenistic public consultation and business involvement in running schools.

Beyond government there is little detailed policy work being done on school governance, the recent University of Bath/ BITC report being a notable exception. The Conservatives have referred to school governance mostly in relation to their proposal for increased decentralisation and voluntarism in public service provision. However, there is little consistent thinking about the role of governors in delivering more locally-run schools. The Liberal Democrats have a working group on Schools which has a remit that includes governance, due to report in spring 2009. There is growing support for a liberalised school provision market, with strong local leadership. However, not enough attention has been paid to the role of governance in making that approach to education and schooling work.

## **Project Outline**

The RSA's Education Governance Network will model governance as an opportunity for citizen-centric change in schools and colleges.

### Aims and objectives

The network will do the following:

1. Identify and answer key questions about the purpose and principles of governance
2. Network governors to share practice and support one another in creating new approaches to emerging issues in governance
3. Encourage more RSA Fellows to become school governors (and encourage more outstanding governors to become Fellows)

### Values

The Education Governance Network will take a holistic view of governance as something that involves staff, learners and the wider community. Drawing on the RSA's broader work on future citizens and institutions, it will be a hothouse for innovative thinking and "next practice". Its vision for governance in schools and colleges is that:

- It provides a skill set and a profile of members that help the institution achieve its long term goals.
- It shapes, reflects and commits to the ethos of the institution.
- It interacts with and responds to the changing world.
- It challenges and supports the school or college's executive team
- It is accountable and it holds others to account.

### Strands of Work

The network will respond to these aims and values through a range of activities:

- Exchange events – face-to-face workshops focussed on exploring emerging challenges to governors, learners and tutors and designing practical governance responses to them.

- Using online and offline platforms to create “communities of practice” to hothouse new approaches to governance in schools and colleges across time and different contexts.
- Testing and refining the existing vision paper at a series of regional workshops (initially in three RSA regions).
- Map the support available to those involved in governance. Map the journey to being active in education governance.
- RSA staff conducting research in partnership with Fellows in the network on the different impact of existing practice and/ or innovations in governance (our own or other people’s)

It may also do the following:

- Work in partnership to produce materials/ methods inspired by our work and learning
- Aggregate good ideas and practice and act as a portal for innovators in education governance
- Respond to the upcoming national review of school governance report.

### Structure

The RSA’s network is co-created with its members to respond to their needs and ambitions. For the time being membership will be restricted to Fellows of the RSA, and is open to anyone with an interest in governance in education with relevant experience and the opportunity to put the network’s ideas into practice. It is hoped that non-Fellows who are interested in working within the network will use it as a route to Fellowship, although associate membership will be available to non-Fellows in exceptional circumstances.

The members of the RSA Education Governance Network will set its ethos and priorities through its vision statement. They will also propose specific activities and areas of action for the network. The RSA staff assigned to the project will be responsible for translating those priorities into a programme of practical work and research, for budgeting and fundraising and for coordinating any other work at 8 John Adam Street related to the project.

An advisory group will support and challenge the RSA staff's approach to the network by meeting three times a year (once a term) to review the network's activities and plans for growth. Two of the eight members of this group will be governors, one will be a headteacher, one will be a member of the RSA Education team, one will be a media commentator, one will be a young person's representative and one will be a community or organisational expert. Finally, one place will be left as a "wild-card" for a relevant funder or other stakeholder.

Each member will be expected to commit to at least one event a term, and to play an active part in the ongoing discussions of the network throughout the year. A member of staff from the RSA will facilitate each face to face event and moderate the relevant online platform space and provide research support equivalent to two full days per week for the duration of the project.

### Outputs

1) Response to DCSF national review of governance; 2) Literature review of comparable studies of governance in voluntary sector organisations 3) Pamphlet on networks mapping of decision-making in Tipton Academy(?); 4) Possible joint production of materials; 5) Press round regional events (?); 6) Launch and pamphlet of provocation papers

## Timeline

In order to be in a strong position to deliver to its priorities, the network's priorities for its first year (academic year 2008-2009) must be to recruit a strong, self-sustaining membership of Fellows and associates. The network's activities will run parallel to the structure of the school year, so will have milestones and actions over three terms.

Term	Activities/ Research	Events	Infrastructure	Outputs	Members by end of term
Spring 2009	Response to National Governance Review?	3 regional "vision testing" events  National launch event – launch of "Change Your School for a Fiver"	Commission any adaptations to networks platform	Pamphlet / press coverage of launch – Governance, Education and the Future Citizen  Press following regional events?	60
Summer 2009	Governors journey mapping (SGOSS, Teach First)  Networks mapping of Govs network and civic health of schools and their communities	Three ideas exchanges	Network platform space goes live	Publication of Response to Nat. Review  Literature review of comparable governance studies in other voluntary groups	110

This will hopefully lay the basic infrastructure for the network to fully realise its ambitions in 2009-2010. A key part of this is creating a network that is populous and diverse enough to be self-sustaining and meaningful so a large part of the coming spring and summer term will be focussed on recruiting active members and building a “buzz” around the network’s values and mission.

### Draft Budget

Item	Details	Item Cost (£)
RSA staff time/ research support	2 days p/w @ £119.25 inc. on- costs x 45 weeks	10,755
Ideas Exchanges	Regional events x 6 over six months	3000
Launch Event	In a participating school, inc. travel, admin and refreshments	500
Launch Pamphlet	5x commissioned contributors @ £2000 each Design and printing costs	10, 000 810
Response to National Review of Governance	Design and printing costs	1765
Literature Review	Design and printing costs	810
Book, “Change Your School for a Fiver”	Design and printing costs	7100
<b>Total</b>		<b>34,740</b>