

## Processes and Practices of Governing in FE Colleges

# PROJECT NEWS



Dear Impact Group Members

You may recall that 2019 is the data gathering period at our selected colleges across the U.K. At a project team meeting in March this year we began looking at the first set of data emerging from college board meetings and other college sources.

One of the reasons for collecting data over a whole session is to enable us to explore the cyclical nature of governing processes. For example, college governing bodies will now be reviewing their college performance for 2018/19 and looking to the next college year 2019/20, particularly in relation to student learning. This is one of the key aspects of governing we are interested in i.e. how does governing enable the organisation to realise its aims?

Part of data gathering in 2019 includes discussion with key agencies and organisations associated with further education. We have been interviewing key policy actors and are now analysing that data. We would like to get feedback and comment from the IG and hope to circulate a draft prior to the September meeting.

Our next project team meeting is in Cardiff in late June when we will be taking a second look at the data from across the UK and using this to think about the pathways to impact of the work. We look forward to sharing this with you at the meeting on **Wednesday 25 September 2019**. (Which will be held at the ICSA offices in London again. Emma is going on maternity leave from June, but her cover will be liaising with you over travel arrangements etc.)

As always, if you have any ideas or insight that you think we should look at to ensure maximum impact from our study, do get in touch.

Prof. Ron Hill

## RESEARCH ACTIVITY

### An update from Scotland and Northern Ireland



Principal Investigator  
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*Fieldwork in Scotland is taking place at two colleges:*

- *City of Glasgow College*
- *Dundee and Angus College*

*The research team for Scotland includes Prof. Cate Watson and Dr. Helen Young from the University of Stirling.*

*Fieldwork in Northern Ireland is taking place at two colleges:*

- *Southern Regional College*
- *South West College*

*The research team for Northern Ireland includes Dr. Gary Husband and Dr. Helen Young from the University of Stirling.*

### Observation of governing body meetings from February to April 2019

With the data collection period of the study now in full swing, it's been a busy few months for the Stirling research team who are covering both Northern Ireland and Scotland, and managing the project as a whole.

Helen has been on a number of research trips to Northern Ireland and has enjoyed getting to know the various campuses and personalities of the two participating colleges - South West and Southern Regional. Likewise, there have been numerous visits to the Scottish colleges – Dundee and Angus, and City of Glasgow – and a significant amount of audio-visual data has been collected. Getting to grips with the technical side of things has been key to this and a lot of time and effort has gone into ensuring ethical and effective data management from capture through to analysis. This part of the research process is often unseen, but is of crucial importance and we pride ourselves on delivering best practice.

Another interesting facet of the research to date has been building up a picture of the broader policy context in which colleges of Further and Higher Education operate. As well as reviewing a vast array of documents, the team has conducted one-to-one interviews with various

'policy actors' to gain an insight into how policy is understood, formed and translated into practice. Scotland has been the main focus for this so far, but more interviews are planned in Northern Ireland over the coming months.

While detailed analysis of the data will not be undertaken until next year, once the collection period (January-December 2019) has come to a close, preliminary observations are being made and numerous lines of enquiry are being explored.

In particular, we are focusing on what governing 'is'. It is important to distinguish aspects of governing board meetings that are common to other kinds of meetings (communication, relationships, meeting structures etc) and aspects which are specific to board meetings. Of course, there may not be any one thing we can point to in this regard. More likely, through examining patterns in the data, we will start to identify microprocesses that become progressively layered to produce specific enactments of governing. We hope to be able to demonstrate this at the next meeting of the Impact Group in September.

## An update from England



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*Fieldwork in England is taking place in two colleges:*

- *South and City College*
- *The TEC Partnership*

*The research team for England includes Prof. Ann-Marie Bathmaker and Dr. Jodie Pennacchia from the University of Birmingham.*

### Observation of governing body meetings from February to April 2019

Since fieldwork began at the beginning of 2019, each of the two colleges has been observed on two occasions. This includes observations of: three full corporation meetings, a two-day strategic planning event; a local board meeting; a search and governance committee meeting; and interviews with clerks. We have introduced a pre meeting with the chair, where we seek an overview of the key agenda items, and a post meeting reflection from the chair on how these items featured in, and were dealt with, during the meeting. This practice is proving invaluable for honing in on priority items, which can then be closely considered through an analysis of how the items are presented and dealt with during board meetings.

Alongside this fieldwork, 2 wider stakeholder interviews have been conducted with people who have a strategic role in the sector. The first of these was with a national policy and advocacy organisation, and the second was with a representative from a Local Enterprise Partnership for one of the college areas.

Analysis is currently being developed by the England team on the particular theme of the Office for Students, a new regulatory body for Higher Education that exists in England. Ann-Marie Bathmaker and Jodie Pennacchia are exploring the impact of the OfS on FE colleges that provide higher education, and how governing practices and processes have sought to understand and engage with the new regulatory environment and a new regulatory body.

New developments in the FE environment in England include the introduction of 12 Institutes of Technology, that will offer higher level vocational education and training. Both of the English colleges participating in the study have been selected to be part of these developments. The TEC Partnership will be one of the partners involved in the Lincolnshire Institute of Technology and

also the Yorkshire and Humber Institute of Technology. South and City College joins a number of partners in the Midlands region in an Institute of Technology, which is led by Solihull College and University Centre.

We were delighted to learn that the Principal and CEO of South and City College, Mike Hopkins, has received an award for his contributions to addressing equality and diversity in the college. His award is particularly pertinent in the light of the latest State of the Nation Report published by the Social Mobility Commission on 30 April 2019. The report highlights stagnating upward social mobility and raises major concerns about the challenges facing the FE sector, which is the subject of two chapters in the report: one on Further Education and Apprenticeships and a separate chapter on Working Lives, which discusses adult education. The report makes clear that reduced and insufficient funding, a reduction in the number of level 2 and level 3 apprenticeship starts since the introduction of the apprenticeship levy, and declining participation in adult learning, all create significant problems for the work of FE colleges.

## An update from Wales



Co-Investigator  
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*Fieldwork in Wales is taking place in two colleges:*

- *Cardiff and Vale College*
- *Grwp Llandrillo Menai*

*The research team for Wales includes Prof. David James and Dr. Steve Garner from the University of Cardiff.*

### Observation of governing body meetings from February to April 2019

Since the end of January, the Research Fellow for Wales (Dr. Steve Garner) has carried out fieldwork at both colleges, attending three governor's board meetings and three committee meetings (Finance; Curriculum, Quality and Student Affairs; and Community) at Cardiff and Vale College, and two (the AGM and a Governors' Board) at Grwp Llandrillo Menai. All the CAVC Governing Boards are filmed and the GLM ones are audio recorded. In addition, three key actors in Welsh FE have been interviewed.

### ***Plans for the summer***

In the next few months, Steve will be attending three more Cardiff and Vale governors' meetings (May, June and July) and one at Grwp Llandrillo Menai (where the frequency of meetings is lower). He will also be attending and observing some more committee meetings at both colleges in the Autumn. The committees in each college are those responsible for finance, audit and curriculum.

This summer will see the publication of a special issue of the *Journal of Education and Work*, which contains a series of articles on FE and Skills Policy in the four countries of the UK. The papers reflect and build upon a 2018 seminar series led by UCL, funded by City and Guilds, the Department for Education in Westminster, and the Edge Foundation. The seminars brought together researchers, policymakers and practitioners to consider the incidence and scope for policy learning across the four countries. [A recent booklet](#) summarises some of the outcomes.

David James's article in the forthcoming special issue is entitled 'Learning in and learning from FE and Skills Policy in Wales', and he is also giving a paper based on this work at the *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* conference in Oxford in June.

We are also preparing for the next team meeting, to be held in Cardiff on June 24-25.

## GENERAL ACTIVITY

### Association of Colleges National Governance Professionals Special Interest group



Cate Watson has been invited to speak to the AoC National Governance Professionals Special Interest group in June to update them about the project. Now that we are engaged in data gathering this will be an excellent opportunity to start to disseminate some of the preliminary findings of the research and to receive feedback. We see such engagement with the further education governing community as vital to the success of the project and are always happy to accede to such requests.

To find out more about the AoC, please click [here](#).

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### Reflective Practice for Clerks & Secretaries to Governing Bodies



Ron Hill and Joss Kang (of Touch Consulting Ltd) have submitted a paper for publication on the use of reflective practice journals by clerks/secretaries to college governing bodies. The paper is based on two studies of reflective practice by clerks to college governing bodies in England. The paper is expected to be published in the Journal of Research in Post Compulsory Education.

A third study of reflective practice for secretaries to college governing bodies is underway in Scotland, funded by the College Development Network. It is currently reaching a successful conclusion and will be the subject of a further paper to be published later in 2019.

To find out more about the College Development Network, please click [here](#).

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### Localism and Colleges

Ron Hill, who has previously undertaken work for the Association of Colleges on college stakeholders and responsiveness by colleges (including the publication 'Thinking Outside the College'), is contributing to a presentation to the forthcoming BELMAS annual conference in July 2019 on ways in which some colleges are now acting in a closer, more integrated way with local and regional social and economic influences and agencies. There will also be recognition that there are ways in which colleges have moved beyond the simply local to a broader, bigger education and training agenda. Particular consideration will be given to localism and the governing of colleges.

To find out more about BELMAS, please click [here](#).

## The Remuneration of College Governors in Northern Ireland and Scotland : A Review of Policy, Practice and Experience

Ron Hill has been working with Colin Forrest (Leeds Trinity University) and Chris James (University of Bath) studying the implementation of the remuneration of college governors in Northern Ireland and Scotland. A paper has been produced for publication which draws upon observations from governors, college secretaries and relevant agencies and bodies. It is, of course, tempting to make comparisons between remunerated college governing bodies and volunteer college governing bodies. Whilst the study paper doesn't go this far, readers may find themselves easily drifting into this territory.

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Don't forget to keep up to date with our website. The FE news updates curated by Dr. Helen Young may be of particular interest.

<https://fe-governing.stir.ac.uk/>

If you are not doing so already, follow us on Twitter (@FE\_Governing) for updates on any new content appearing on our website.

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