

Becta leading
next generation
learning

In partnership with



In conversation with Becta and LSIS Governors



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Foreword



Jane Williams

Welcome to the third issue of *In conversation*. The series promotes opinion-forming discussion and debate at every level. The first issue focused on the application of new technologies; the second addressed key questions of leadership. This edition focuses on the issues facing governing bodies in meeting the challenges of self-regulation and improvement. We have interviewed governors and clerks and drawn on the 6 February 2009 Strategic Leadership of Technology and Governance conference.

Becta and the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) are publishing this edition of *In conversation* jointly at a time when the challenges of self-improvement and self-regulation are likely to bring about a fundamental shift in the way the further education and skills sector is governed. We believe the principles and priorities spelled out in the New National Improvement Strategy (New NIS) lay a clear path to greater responsibility, where effective governance will enhance accountability to learners, employers and communities. This means governing bodies have a duty to know what is going on in their college and to hold it to account for the public good.

Becta has long championed the development of technology in teaching and learning but this technology is also a powerful tool in support of good governance and leadership. Accurate and timely information is essential and technology is ideally suited to obtain and manage it. Indeed, effective use of technology can help colleges in pursuit of the basic principles of good governance spelled out by the National Improvement Partnership Board in its New NIS.



Roger McClure



We believe effective governing bodies know how well their college is performing and use intelligent and rigorous self-assessment in approving improvement plans. They set the strategic direction and priorities and the tone for senior managers to take the lead in developing a culture of continuous improvement. They make sure there are clear benchmarks to monitor performance and encourage leaders and managers to foster effective partnerships with employers, other providers and schools. They encourage good relations with stakeholders. They assess their own performance, setting an example in self-critical learning and ensuring their college is always open to innovation.

Becta and its national partners, including LSIS, have done a great deal to assist governing bodies, including the development of Generator¹ which was launched by the FE Minister Siôn Simon at the Next Generation Learning conference for FE on 5 March. Generator is a free online improvement tool that helps leaders and managers to monitor progress in using technology and clearly identify areas where it is effectively used and where there are opportunities for improvement.

Working in partnership, Becta and LSIS will assist governing bodies in their efforts to raise the profile and effectiveness of governance in the sector and help them to create the 'mature quality culture' that the New NIS seeks to engender.

If you would like to join us in our ongoing conversation and/or give us feedback on this publication, please visit our collaboration site [<http://collaboration.becta.org.uk>] or email us [feskills@becta.org.uk].

Jane Williams and Roger McClure

¹ www.generatorfeandskills.com

Introduction

The pivotal role played by college governors in ensuring all learners, staff and managers gain the greatest possible benefits from technology cannot be overstated, as this publication illustrates. In this, the third in the series of *In conversation with Becta*, LSIS joins the debate as governors are asked to address the key principles and priorities behind measures to improve the effectiveness of leadership and management and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

The first edition opened up debates on the *Technology strategy for further education skills and regeneration: Implementation plan* and how developments such as web 2.0, mobile technology and podcasting were often replacing traditional teaching. The second edition addressed key concerns of those who lead the way to effective management and implementation. In this edition, we look at the crucial interaction between technology supporting governance and governors supporting the development of technology for teaching, learning and business efficiency.

A constant theme echoed by contributors to this edition is the need for governors to spend more time thinking strategically about how technology serves the whole college, rather than regarding it as an add-on or a job for technicians. Then comes the issue of how technology supports governance. For John Bingham, Chair of Governors at Thomas Rotherham Sixth Form College and Chair of the Association of Colleges (AoC), this begins with gaining oversight of the college's performance: "Governors need to become more knowledgeable about how their college performs and they can do this, once they realise how easy it is to ask for information and that, with technology, it won't put undue pressure on staff time."



Robust knowledge of performance is the basis of an accurate self-assessment report. This is not just some bureaucratic device around self-regulation but a way of making sure improvement helps the business, says Graham Swetman, Chair of Governors at Brockenhurst College: "In terms of adding value to the business programme, a big driver of success is the self-assessment report looking at progress and problems in every nook and cranny of the college."

For Joanne Jayarajah, Student Governor at Brockenhurst College, governors should be taking every opportunity to ensure the college is open to new ways of doing things better using technology. On the college development plans, for example, she says: "There's a real opportunity for us to have influence. I spoke to numerous students and spoke to the governors about having dedicated computer places, plug points etc., places where you can have a 15-minute slot to access emails from laptops and build on the current success of the IT systems."

Learners will increasingly expect to use technology and technology may even change the way people learn, says Bob Harrison, a governor at Northern College. Referring to neuroscientist Susan Greenfield's research, he says: "She draws a distinction between 'people of the book' and the younger 'people of the screen' and alludes to the real digital divide between teachers and learners which could have profound effects on preparing young people for the next generation learning they rightfully expect and increasingly demand."

This puts an onus on governors to keep up to date in their knowledge, says Seb Schmoller, a governor of The Sheffield College and head of the Association for Learning Technology (ALT): "If fluent application of learning technologies is expected of the college, is it not reasonable to expect governors themselves to be fluent in their own use of ICT?"

Some argue for technology experts on the governing bodies. Ian Taylor, Chair of Governors at Alton College, says: "It's important to have somebody on the governors who knows about ICT. I think that in looking at the strategic role of ICT, it's been essential to organisations for many years now... both in business and in education and training."

When measuring performance against other colleges and provider organisations, and judging your own college against national and local priorities, technology is increasingly seen as an essential tool, says John Brydon, Clerk of City College Norwich. But this requires a single source of data which is easy to use – and IT can provide this: “We can see in these (tracking) systems how issues of MIS, learner support, equality of access and accountability are all linked and dependent on the same data.” Kamilla Spark, a governor at Long Road Sixth Form College, says that technology can also help with providing interpretation rather than “lengthy, factual and dry” accounts of data. “There should be more time spent analysing and less churning out papers.”

New technologies are coming down in price but they still do not come cheap; governors need to realise this, says Rodger McCracken, Clerk to the Governors, Grimsby College. But “as the governors became wiser about their own use of technology they see why the need is there across the whole college and recognise that the bottom line can mean a very high level of spending”.

Above all, we need to remember that governors are trustees of a public resource (the college) from which high standards of conduct and performance are expected and therefore technological innovation is valuable in so far as it promotes the best qualities in all facets of college life.





While the use of ICT has traditionally been led, provided and taught by experts at the centre of an organisation, we now have a young generation that has grown up using computers, game consoles and mobile technology, all connected to the internet, so they are already savvy in capturing, analysing and sharing information anytime, anywhere, in the hand of the user; 98 per cent of Alton College students have internet access at home, higher than the national average. So in looking ahead, we are exploring how we engage with such technologically adept young people in ways they are familiar with, such as increasing use of mobile technology, and more advanced video technologies in teaching and learning. For example, in music courses information and useful sites on composers and music genres is captured and compositions are created electronically, while e-portfolios containing what a student has produced on vocational courses can be made available remotely to external verifiers as well as being transferable between institutions.



While technology has great virtues, there are of course aspects that one has to be careful about. Privacy, security and safeguards are paramount. Face-to-face discussion still has an important role – not everything can be communicated effectively through emails or texting, as many parents will know! And of course protecting against inappropriate use of technology is particularly important, whether it be excessive use, accessing inappropriate internet sites or cyberbullying for which Alton College has strict rules of conduct and zero tolerance disciplinary processes.

As governors, we also use technology in our involvement with the College. In addition to email and internet sites relevant to the College, we can also use the College's Sharepoint facility provided via the College website. This contains current and past Board and committee papers and meeting minutes, and has a forum facility to brainstorm and develop topics.

Our student governors use the College ICT infrastructure to communicate with students, identify concerns and opportunities, and conduct surveys on particular subjects, with the use of blogs increasing. We're very open with our students; they are intelligent people so we take every chance to involve them – ultimately, the College is there to serve them.

In terms of the governors' role in ICT, we are conscious of its strategic importance to the College. We try to ensure that sufficient and appropriate investments are made by the College and that these investments are fully exploited. It is therefore advantageous to have some governors on the board who have experience in ICT.

Graham Swetman

Chair of Governors at Brockenhurst College



Graham Swetman



Strategic leadership is greatly assisted by good IT systems.

We are a large and complex college of almost 11,000 students in the world of further education which is moving unrelentingly fast – not least in technology and its use by students as an increasingly pivotal part of their lives. And so strategic leadership of technology is essential. Barely six months go by without a new paper on government initiatives. To keep on top of this, it is good that we have got a system in place well tailored to meet need.

If we as governors have any problem at all with technology, it is keeping up with it. Governors tend to be mature individuals whose experience of technology is mainly emails, occasional presentations and not much besides that. Nevertheless, the college took a decision six years ago to take an integrated approach to create a system that worked for learners, staff, managers and governors, with the necessary awareness training and continuous updating to match.

Two developments have proved particularly beneficial. First, the my.brock portal is a college-wide communications channel for corporate documents; everything can be found there from papers for governors' meetings to notes of the Principal's daily meetings with staff. I travel quite a lot, as do many governors, and it is essential we keep up to date on the move. This provides support for governance, access to information, news dissemination and the rest, even when physically remote.

Also, the year's governance papers create piles two to three feet high, so it helps us get on top of this load with the use of a memory stick to plug into the computer. Needing to make technology work, we have frequent governor training. Most of them have a laptop with them when they are in different parts of the world to access the range of resources and training and e-learning support. The my.brock also gives course materials, teaching materials and progress checks.

Another development that has proved beneficial is Emily, an internal managed learning environment giving total support for performance monitoring, individual learning plans, timetables, attendance and messaging. It is a record-keeping programme written by the College and very much tailored around the College and its style. It is a system in use for all 2,700 16–19 year-old students.

Like my.brock, Emily is a Brockenhurst College creation and both are designed to add value to learning and teaching, the business process and the whole MIS. It also improves the effectiveness of governance, though I will not exaggerate our success here; we are at the start of our journey and while we have come a long way, we still have a long way to go.



In terms of adding value to the business programme, a big driver of success is the self-assessment report looking at progress and problems in every nook and cranny of the college. Effectively organised, it helps us manage our improvement programme and includes a customer relationship system for maintaining quality and identifying customer needs in areas such as work-based learning and Train to Gain. It's a very active system and a prime example of where technology is adding to the business process.

We are one of the first ten colleges in the Technology Exemplar Network and are now part of a mini network of other providers which provides opportunities to exchange ideas and practices for both teaching and administrative functions. This is spilling over into governance as we share experiences of good e-governance.



Moving to the next stage, we have to consider much more interactive systems. The amount of paperwork has gone down in the six years since we started but it is still voluminous as we have to measure everything under the sun. Some people are happy to look at things on screen. For most of us though, there is still the need to have hard copy to refer back to. I'm not sure how much we can do it the new way but this again raises the question of e-learning for governors – we have training sessions on the internet which we can access.

Robin Gadd, our Head of Information Services, developed a lot of the systems around Brockenhurst's needs and all the things seem to work well – news would reach me quickly if things went wrong and so far they have not.

But there is no room for complacency. We are looking towards a major rebuild of the College. Many of the current facilities date from the 1930s, and are becoming inconsistent with the quality teaching and learning experience we are committed to offer future generations of New Forest students. The changes will inevitably raise some challenges. I am confident that we have an extremely capable management team, supported by well-proven systems, and we are well prepared to address whatever issues arise.

Joanne Jayerajah

Student Governor and President of the Students' Union at
Brockenhurst College



Joanne Jayerajah



Information technology is central to good communications between learners and governors.

Since coming to Brockenhurst I have gained a completely different perspective on the relationship between the teacher and the student. I believe also that the way IT is used helps build this relationship and the success of the college – and we are consulted on this as student governors and through the Students' Union.

For example, there is an internal IT system through which each student has an email address from Brockenhurst. They can email teachers and vice versa. What it achieves is a miracle and it works wonders for me, as I can email teachers with questions, to warn of absences if I'll miss a lesson and to pick up work. The response is very rapid, we are never kept waiting. It is my job as a student governor to give the college the necessary student feedback on such issues.

There was a recent pilot in which a selection of students were given mobile phones and could send, read texts and talk to teachers. For students who may be constantly on the move, this gives them the chance to access emails more effectively. There's a sense of comfort that they can email teachers. But there is more than that – it helps ensure greater equality of access for students. If you are not able to get email at home, it gives you that extra communication channel and is a time-saving device. Other IT developments include classrooms with computers linked to overhead screens.

It is important for me to make sure the college gets good feedback from students on such developments. At the moment, the college is planning a big development programme and we plan to link college IT systems. That's a real opportunity for us to have influence. I spoke to numerous students and to the governors about having dedicated computer places, plug points, etc., places where you can have a 15 minute slot to access emails from laptops and build on the current success of the IT systems.

As President of the Students' Union I also spoke to the Chair of Governors and said the Union would love to meet the governors regularly, to see what's going on behind the scenes and what it is that makes this college a great place to be. We expect to meet initially twice a year to voice our opinions straight to the governors.



Governors play such an essential role in the college, and to have links with them is invaluable – face-to-face in one of the conference rooms. A lot of the students don't understand the role of governors and how far they are in control of the college; whereas they know the Students' Union very well within colleges and we pass information on; when we have the voice of the students, we go to them. This opportunity for contact is being extended through the use of IT. The Students' Union has a page on the College's my.brock portal site which is being developed to inform students of the future practices of the College that have been influenced by students and their views on the site.



The use of IT is central to good communications with governors. The channels of communication I use as a student governor are rooted in the technology we use for learning – the emails, texts and computers. Through continuous feedback we are helping make sure that further use of technology, such as the plug points, are of genuine benefit to the students. This also helps keep the governing body as a whole in touch and aware of the training they need in order to cope with the new generation of technologies which are emerging.

As a governor I receive all minutes of previous meetings, reports and notice of future meetings by email. And when I reply to the Secretary of Governors to say whether I can attend a meeting I do so by email. Without that sort of system things would not be as efficient as they are. But things could be taken a lot further. If there was a dedicated laptop for each governor this would be a lot greener and better for the environment. There would also be no fumbling through lots of papers.

Younger governors would find it better to work this way. More mature students may find it more difficult but I don't really think they should. With age comes experience and with that greater understanding of the need to move on, to have the training to gain the awareness. And if the training doesn't work out, at least they know and are testing the water; there is nothing lost. And also they will understand what it is the next generation needs.

John Brydon

Clerk of City College Norwich



John Brydon



The essence of good governance is knowing where to go for information and assimilating it rapidly.

Within fifteen minutes of the electronic registers being completed, the Promoting Achievement Learning (PAL) team will be checking for absences. They have access to a student's records and, after checking all relevant circumstances, will be in a position to take action. This is not about rapping their knuckles or penalising them; this is a support issue. There may be domestic problems or transport difficulties. In the short time since this system was introduced, as part of a College-wide and increasingly integrated approach to technology, attendance rates have risen by 8 or 9 percentage points and we as governors find it is improving our effectiveness. The improvement is hopefully going to be reflected in retention rates.

Knowing where to go for information and being able to rapidly assimilate it is important for good governance. We can see in this system how issues of MIS, learner support, equality of access and accountability are all linked and dependent on the same data, which needs to be reliable. A whole raft of things is happening to pull the information systems together, so they are integrated rather than stand alone.

Several initiatives have assisted us along this path. First, with Tribal Group, we pioneered a guidance programme for FE colleges based on a school programme but adapted for colleges. It is particularly relevant to clerks because you can put details of governors onto the system, which then builds a whole programme and profile of governance. Prior to that, I had to manually enrol and record them, put them on the committee, do my list and keep referring back to it. It's a huge amount of work for us because if you take a governor on, you have to put their profile in the system, carry out checks such as CRB, when they attend training sessions, corporation meetings and all that sort of manual work.

It's useful because you can build into it trigger points which automatically alert us when issues need checking, such as a committee size and structure, or if your actions cut across the Instrument and Articles of Governance. It helps to make the system easier to understand and follow. We are now in a position where we are writing our own programme for an in house college system.



Then we have Blackboard. This is like an intranet system but much more sophisticated. Within this, lecturers can post their notes and assignments. And if a student misses a lecture, he or she can call up all the notes. It's useful for the students and the staff. It's also useful for governors because I can post any relevant papers, for example, the audit procedures and risk management. Governors can access documents or store slide presentations and don't have to keep a library at home. It also includes a regular newsletter for governors and a weekly circular of what's on in and around the College. Staff and students can post bulletins and put links on so that all can see them.



The third thing, which is just coming in, is the Quality Framework Database. It's not directly aimed at governors but gives us assurance that certain things are happening. This is an academic reporting system that tracks what is happening in different parts of the College. It helps monitor quality and performance and, like the guidance programme, automatically generates an alert if by a certain date necessary functions have not been performed. It is a very good system for ensuring that large volumes of required actions actually happen. It is the sort of tracking system that particularly comes into its own after, for example, an Ofsted report when all sorts of things are required to happen over time. Once something is on the system, it is tracked and provides a spot check at any time on progress and works as a reporting system right to the top – to the Principal.

We are now in the process of looking at the Strategic Plan 2009–14 and here we see exactly where IT is essential in the development of the College, as the plan uses phrases such as: "technology infrastructure integration"..."seamlessly talk to one another"..."store (data) once, use many times". We are moving in all sorts of ways towards that. For example, we have a National Skills Academy at St Andrew's House which is a business school with a range of technical innovations to facilitate meetings. If you hold a meeting, a record is automatically generated for anyone unable to get there. We like to think we are almost at the cutting edge with St Andrews House which was recently opened by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Alastair Darling.

Looking to the redevelopment of the College, we will build in a whole host of technological improvements. A lot of classrooms, as such, will disappear and we will have learning areas built around computers. A lot of stuff can be accessed from home and anyone can have access from the College library and the University of East Anglia, which is our degree-accrediting body.

The range of IT developments not only adds to the effective strategic leadership of governors but it adds value and it adds to business procedure, particularly when we can depend on robust tracking and monitoring systems rather than rely on individual diaries.

Rodger McCracken

Clerk to the Governors at The Grimsby Institute



Rodger McCracken



THE GRIMSBY INSTITUTE
of Further & Higher Education

Our aim is to make the college governance 90 per cent electronic.

It is our ambition to create the paperless governing board. We are about half way there but it takes time since, in any group, different people are at varying degrees of IT readiness. Everyone can see sense in migrating towards having as much as possible in electronic form. Minutes and papers go to all the members by email, regardless of whether they are on the particular committees. They see the value in staying widely informed. Nevertheless, about half ask for hard copies, as they like to mark the scripts with comments and issues to raise at meetings.

As we embark on our new build programme, Daniel Khan (the Chief Executive) and I would like to reach the point where we have IT meeting rooms with screens on every desk displaying attachments. We will give everyone a laptop on which they can prepare their comments on screen for meetings, to deter hard copies, so they can scroll up and down automatically as they need to.

This is not IT for its own sake; there are good reasons for this approach. First, it cuts costs and improves immensely the working efficiency of the corporation. Second, it increases awareness among members of the need to invest substantially in IT for the staff, learners and management.

The cost of giving 20 governors laptops at £400 a time would be recouped within the first year and by years two and three we would have clear savings. For example, when preparing papers for the finance committee – with 10 meetings a year and each, with say, 100 pages on different coloured paper and £5 a time to post – costs are considerable. It is also more efficient if we do not have to depend on the post and the time needed to ensure delivery. So, we receive payback pretty quickly.

But much more than this, as the governors became wiser about their own use of technology they see why the need is there across the whole college and recognise that the bottom line can mean a very high level of spending. IT is now the second biggest area of expenditure next to staffing – which takes up to two thirds of our £45m annual spend. It makes governors realise that IT is key and so, when approving capital projects, they are not surprised when they see what's on IT purchase lists.



Reliance upon the IT system is absolutely fundamental to virtually everything the college does – the management information systems, record keeping, examinations, learner attendance, quality assurance systems, etc. It is high on the list of issues for the risk management committee, as a subgroup of the audit committee. It goes into the audit committee because it is an area of high exposure that needs close scrutiny. We have to ensure that if and when the IT systems go down there is no loss of key data, no threat to security or personal files. IT systems are now used to run everything – personal, educational, financial. There are issues around the use of IT in learning systems. We have a virtual learning environment (VLE) which all students have access to. They need to know they can access what they need with security even when they are not actually able to attend the college premises.



So, risk is part of our audit process – governors accept you cannot run the business without it. If the system is down for even half a day it is a potential catastrophe and we have to spend on systems to minimise the risk in that situation.

Given what governors are expected to deal with, an awareness programme was essential. We had awareness courses on IT and software use, to help them appreciate the key roles it plays in all college life and that the purchase has a big impact on the bottom line. And, of course, the demands on them will grow with IT systems coming in to help them benchmark the performance of the college and the increased need for college leadership to promote and enhance new technologies in all areas.

But this is not entirely new to them all. Governors also bring their own experiences from their own businesses and from other organisations. There is a two-way process and the college benefits from the wider experience they can bring to bear.

Our aim is to make the college governance 90 per cent electronic. At the moment I would say we are 60 to 70 per cent there. Of course, there will always be some documents you cannot do – transferring architect's plans onto A4-size pages, for example, whether in paper form or on screen.

The average age of the governing body is a bit pre-IT. Not that anyone lacks basics such as email. They may not be the 20s generation, for whom IT almost runs their lives, but they are a generation where it can support them – and they can see that.

Kamilla Spark

Governor at Long Road Sixth Form College



Kamilla Spark



Governors should spend more time analysing and less dealing with paper mountains.

As governors we need to pay more attention to IT within the college. IT rarely appears as a specific issue on our agenda because too often governors assume there is an IT department to work out how many computers there should be in the college, whether the online systems are working well and whether the IT networks are acceptable. This is not enough.

We need a strategic, less ad hoc, approach to IT locally and a governor support service nationally. First, nationally, through agencies such as Becta and the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), there should be a comprehensive support service – a one-stop shop – for governors seeking information advice and guidance. Then, at the local level, there are a number of clear steps to take:

- review our strategic approach to IT
- learn what we need in order to win the independence, self-governance and greater empowerment we seek
- raise the IT awareness of all governors through proper induction and support programmes, and
- recruit people to governing bodies who are knowledgeable about and comfortable with IT.

I will concentrate on these points and leave others to comment on issues such as the IT vision in new capital projects and online access to the benchmarking system which is being developed to help us assess progress.

Recent research into well-performing colleges showed that the best governance was found where essential information was delivered to governors in the form of a comprehensive yet concise single report. Remember that as volunteers, governors have very limited time to spare. Information we need about the sector is spread around the agencies and departments such as DCSF and DIUS. What we need is a one-stop shop linking governors to essential data. We need a specific governors' service online, with comprehensive content which records industry sector changes, tracks those changes as they happen, with links to e-learning and workshops to support us from initial governor induction and beyond.

We also need to review within our colleges the nature and the format of the information sent to governors. The detailed and lengthy reports and dry factual accounts we receive regularly should be supplemented with analytical executive summaries – the sort of analysis that managers should produce anyway in order to do their job effectively. There is a big role for information technology in producing such products.



There should be more time spent analysing and less churning out papers. IT gives us the opportunity to review how we communicate. The technology itself cannot trigger the change; change comes from the people who want to change and improve with the use of technology. First we create and capture the demand for improvement; then we think how IT can help us do things we are not yet doing.

Technology saves time and we need to change our practices accordingly, putting technology at the core of effective management and leadership. This means we must acquire the necessary skills through effective awareness programmes and recruitment of the right calibre of personnel.



Improving governors' awareness comes down in part to recruiting people with IT skills onto the board and engaging governors in e-learning support within the college. If we recruit people who are open to technology and who have used it in the past, the task is much easier. If governors come in and they hardly use email the task is so much more difficult. This is not just a question of age but of someone's willingness to use technology and not be intimidated by it.

Of course, young people are more responsive to IT developments, so it is very important for governors to engage students and get them into their meetings. We have student governors on the board and we see them come into meetings and write notes straight to the computer. Students themselves see the way we work as very bureaucratic with lots of paperwork, ticking boxes and the rest. When it comes to styles of communication there is a generation gap, but the presence of younger people on governing bodies makes the process of engaging students in governance easier. But it is visible that these learners operate in ways different to us and communicate more freely. They would love to see more internet links and social networking as they get involved in conversation with governors. They want to open up and eliminate barriers that still exist because of our hierarchical approach.

At the end of the day we are obligated to hear the learners' voice. So, maybe we need to change, to open up the system and create more communication channels with governors online, to create links between student unions and governing bodies by which learners can get items on our agenda. They are the people who will be managing and governing the colleges of tomorrow.

These are my personal views and do not necessarily represent the views of Long Road Sixth Form College.

Bob Harrison

Governor at Northern College



Bob Harrison



Bridge the chasm between the technology learners use in their everyday lives and what goes on in the college.

As governors of large institutions in a time of radical technological change, we need to address several key challenges if learners, staff and leaders are to get the best out of the buildings and wider environments where learning takes place.

- What more do leaders need to know about the relationship between how people learn and the use of digital technologies to enable us to design, plan, prepare and construct learning environments that will enable learners to be prepared for 21st century life?
- How do leaders create a climate for the FE and skills workforce to innovate and be creative and bridge the digital divide between teachers and learners?
- How do we as governors create the capacity for thinking within the complex, target driven and pressurised processes of the FE and skills system?
- How do we ensure we spend the investment wisely and that it will support learning transformation?
- What do leaders at all levels within the FE and skills system need to know and do to ensure we can support next generation learning?

These are issues we are addressing at Northern College. Indeed, in all colleges, governors and leadership teams have inevitable difficulties predicting the future requirements for learning spaces in FE and skills and the need to create flexible approaches to learning and teaching which reflect the business and technological requirements of the communities and society at the time.

However, there are some indicators which might help us. Susan Greenfield, in her book *Tomorrow's People*² suggests that the education system is in crisis as it struggles to respond to the ways in which people learn. She draws a distinction between 'people of the book' and the younger 'people of the screen' and alludes to the real digital divide between teachers and learners which could have profound effects on preparing young people for the next generation learning they rightfully expect and increasingly demand. These differences clearly illustrate that it is not what young people need or do not need to learn but, rather, how they think and interact with the world that needs to be considered in the design of new learning spaces in the FE and skills system.

Moreover, she suggests that as education becomes an ongoing experience, and therefore less differentiated from everyday life, and as that experience is increasingly screen derived, perhaps not just the notion of 'learning' but even the traditional concepts of 'school', 'college' and 'university' will start to become meaningless.

² *Tomorrow's People: How 21st Century Technology is Changing the Way We Think and Feel*, by Susan Greenfield, Penguin ISBN: 9780141008882



Whilst there is a danger in jumping to conclusions, it is clear that we are not witnessing any significant departure in the way buildings and learning are organised and constructed. At the very least, we need to address the chasm that is emerging between what learners use in their everyday lives and what goes on in classrooms, lecture theatres and workshops in the FE and skills system.

This theme is developed further by the recent MacArthur Foundation report *Living and Learning with New Media*³, which summarises the results of a three-year ethnographic study examining young people's participation in the new media ecology. Whilst the study illuminated a number of issues and the implications for society in general, it was the emergence of self-directed and peer learning and the social and recreational use of new media as a site for learning which could have profound implications for the education system. The report says: 'Participation in this networked world suggests new ways of thinking about the role of education.'



Professor Diana Laurillard, Chair of Digital Technologies at London Knowledge Lab, exploring the role of digital technologies in achieving our educational ambitions, noted that the majority of learning theories emphasise the importance of the learner being the 'active agent' in the learning process. But has the investment in ICT in the FE and skills system taken this into consideration? An inherent danger is that this trend will reinforce 'learning by attention' and pedagogical models not suited to collaboration, co-construction and personalised learning.

Translating research findings into new buildings, and to capital investment in existing buildings, is not easy and more needs to be done. There is activity in this area from JISC and RIBA, but the current design guidance does not allow for sufficient consideration of the transformative potential of new and emerging technologies. The JISC Infonet work on Learning Spaces is a useful resource but it is unclear how widely this has been used within the planning process. In addition, the RIBA forum is attempting to address this issue but ICT is only considered at the latter stage of the process and this merely reinforces existing practices and pedagogies.

And whilst there is much persuasive research about new learning environments – which has influenced the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme – we must not forget that the critical factor in the success of all the colleges is not the buildings but the creative and innovative approach of the teachers and their ability to inspire learning within the community, irrespective of the location and spaces they worked in.

³ *Living and Learning with New Media*, MacArthur Foundation, <http://digitalyouth.ischool.berkeley.edu/files/report/digitalyouth-WhitePaper.pdf>

Seb Schmoller

Heads the Association for Learning Technology (ALT), and is a Governor of The Sheffield College



Seb Schmoller



Effective use of technology in teaching and learning requires cultural change for the whole college.

There is no shortage of important issues in every college demanding the attention of the college's leadership team – not least technology both in teaching and learning, and more generally.

Colleges have to attend first to the big issues: specifically funding, audit, inspection and awards/accreditation – because they'll be judged to have failed if they do not get these right. So the tendency to fit everything else round the edges as time and resources permit is a natural one. Also, some colleges have yet to acquire the habit of making systematic and sustained provision for ICT because there has been a history of earmarked or bid-for funding, either nationally or under various EU funding programmes.

Government and agencies like Becta rightly push for colleges to up their game with learning technology, but until the funding, audit, inspection and awards/accreditation regimes (which colleges do not control) have themselves been adjusted to take account of technology in teaching and learning, progress will remain uneven and fitful.

But there is plenty that can and should be done now. What are the learning technology challenges for college leadership and for governors?

First, on issues of funding, within the overall scheme of things ICT costs are a small proportion of a college's budget. Moore's Law⁴ is ensuring that the costs are falling and will continue to fall, and open source software can provide high-quality and cost-effective alternatives to proprietary software. No longer can colleges say of new developments "we do it when and if there is a budget we can tap into".

Second, with MIS, colleges come unstuck if they cannot give evidence of their performance. So effective data collection, analysis and reporting are essential, with well implemented internal systems to enable teachers, managers, and learners easily to access data about the 'stuff' for which they themselves are responsible. The same approach should be taken by governors, who should not be dependent only on formal reports at governing body meetings; instead they need timely online access to succinct data about college performance.

Third, effective use of technology in teaching and learning requires cultural change; and cultural change, as Becta's own evidence shows, is slow. It is better, therefore, to plan to bring change about over a period of years, than to expect really rapid transformations.

⁴ Moore's Law states that computer memory will halve in cost and double in size every 18 months. This observation was made in 1965 by Gordon Moore, co-founder of Intel. This has held for the last few decades and is expected to hold for the foreseeable future.



Likewise leaders need to understand better the conditions for the spread of innovation within and between institutions. It certainly requires much more than 'leadership'. It needs the right frameworks in place inside institutions, with the right encouragements given, and the right focus on research, dissemination, sharing and collaboration. Recent Ofsted evidence on the use of VLEs supports this view. Appropriate opportunities for governors to provide challenge and support will help here too: and perhaps governors need to take a close look at their own practices with technology – whilst they need not be role models, if fluent application of learning technologies is expected of the college, is it not reasonable to expect governors to themselves be fluent in their own use of ICT?



Fourth, there are the interfaces between formal provision and the learners' and teachers' own informal domains and the vast array of free learning resources and networks that are 'out there' on the internet. Are you as a leader making sure that your provision and methods take advantage of and run with the grain of learners' and teachers' everyday uses of ICT?

And fifth, colleges need to guard against relying too much on technology enthusiasts, and on 'going it alone'. Obviously, enthusiasts can inspire and motivate. But the real irrevocable successes in the use of technology in teaching and learning are taking place in the colleges where all teachers and managers are getting to grips with implementation and change. Here, continuing professional development programmes such as the LSIS eCPD programme⁵, have an important role. In relation to 'going it alone', many individual colleges are on the small side to handle ICT well on their own: if they do not outsource (and outsourcing activities which are core to every college's work brings its own risks) then collaborations may be needed to reach critical mass.

Finally, technology in teaching and learning is not something to deal with in sector-based silos, with reinvention of the same wheels taking place in the schools, FE, HE, and work-based learning sectors. The learners are moving between the silos even if the teachers and managers are staying put. So, much more needs doing to get things done on a genuinely cross-sector basis.

⁵<http://ecpd.bdplearning.com>

John Bingham

Chair of Governors at Thomas Rotherham Sixth Form College and
Chair of the Association of Colleges



John Bingham



Information Technology is a utility, like water and lighting and must underpin everything else.

IT is part of strategic leadership, which is what governing is about.

For governance of colleges, governors need access to information regarding college performance and they need to be aware of the systems the college is using. IT makes this easier. For example, now we can use IT to show all the different elements of funding, and that can make it less confusing.

Governors need to become more knowledgeable about how their college performs and they can do this, once they realise how easy it is to ask for information and that, with IT, it won't put undue pressure on staff time. We still get paper-based annual reports on exam performance and added value, and we also get a set of reports on some aspect of the College at each meeting, but IT can certainly help with ease of use and saving time.

Governors also ought to be aware of what's available in respect of learning and teaching. That's what we're here for – the students. We often have a briefing session on new methods and ways of delivering knowledge that won't replace people but are complementary to teaching. For example, you can use 3D images to show the insides of engines or for use in biology, where you wouldn't normally get much chance to see inside a body. Young people expect to see more use of this kind of technology now. Technology extends the learning experience outside the classroom because of what you can access via the internet.

We need to look at how technology is improving teaching and learning, but how do you measure that? We can look at results and at findings of lesson observations – that's how we get reports back – but I'm not sure that there are any particular performance indicators, though I'd be very interested to see if anyone has any ideas on this. It's relevant to how you measure the effectiveness of governance, for example, by how you access statistics to see if there are any problems and how you intervene.

It's also important for governors to understand the new regulations on qualifications and unitisation. There's a lot of confusion about qualifications, and technology could help in understanding the information requirements. For example, QCA has a database, but that's not sufficiently widely appreciated.



If you're undertaking new build, you have to realise that IT underpins everything else. It's a utility, like water and lighting. Your building mustn't inhibit what you can do through IT. This needs to be looked at strategically, but that's the same as any utility. It's an enabler; just as you wouldn't think of not putting a 13-amp socket in every room, so it's the same with the internet.

In the past at Thomas Rotherham Sixth Form College, provision of IT has been done as and when, but just recently we've had a complete revision and put a complete new system in. We're all on one campus, but we have a number of separate buildings and some of them are listed, which creates problems in itself. Adapting buildings may be complicated, but the concept was very easily accepted by the governors that this was very necessary for teaching and learning, and for MIS. Many organisations now accept that the strategic delivery of IT is an enabler.



The effectiveness of governance will improve by having access to statistics in a timely way. We need to get to the position where governors have remote access and provision of services to their homes. But the paperless governing board might not be around just yet. People like to turn up to a meeting having read a paper rather than seen it on a screen, and we won't see a paperless board in total at the moment.

Our governors are all computer literate. If anybody does need training, it's made available, but it's not something we've identified as a need. As part of our own training we often get a presentation at the beginning of a meeting, and we never get that on paper, it's always done electronically, say by PowerPoint or by a video on a DVD. This enables teachers and lecturers to show their abilities and we also have students giving presentations, which might be from the Student Council, for example.

FE hasn't got as far with this technology as the HE sector, which has used IT to add prestige to the enterprise. I think FE should have its own suffix – .fe.uk – because it gives visibility and recognition that it's an important sector in its own right.

Conversation points

Recruitment and training

- How important is it to stress the need for technology skills and knowledge when recruiting college governors?
- Is it necessary to recruit governors who are knowledgeable of and skilled in the use of technology?
- Should governors be as conversant with and able to use the technology as they expect managers, staff and learners to be?
- How much of the governors' training and induction could or should be carried out via e-learning? What are the advantages and disadvantages?
- Can governors' awareness of technology be improved through the ways they receive information about the college, for example, through presentations to the governing body?

Governing body business

- How can technology be used to make governors more effective in their work?
- Is it possible, or even desirable, to have a paperless governing body?
- How important is paperless working by the governing body to developing the ways in which governors perceive the wider technology needs of the college?
- Do governors need remote access?
- Should the clerk lead in promoting the application of technology in governing body presentations and governor communications or should this be delegated to an expert in IT?
- As technology, e-learning and virtual learning environments allow governors to observe and process performance and other data directly, is there a need to ensure governors do not stray into management's territory?
- Whose role is it to distinguish between issues of governance and management? Is it the clerk, principal or an independent third party? In what ways does technology alter such distinctions?

Governor responsibilities

- How important is it to have the technology strategy in place before submitting applications for capital projects?
- It is said too few colleges prepare a clear IT vision in advance of new build and other capital projects. Why is such vision necessary?
- How could an objective and user-friendly online system of benchmarking help colleges implement their strategy of continuous improvement? Is it better to have the LSC and Ofsted develop such systems or should they be 'home grown'?

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- How can governors keep up to date with the technology available for teaching and learning?
 - Is there any way to measure the improvements technology can make to teaching and learning?
 - What are the advantages and disadvantages to designing software or buying from the shelf?
 - Does pursuing good inspection grades encourage or hinder technological innovation?
 - Are developments such as web 2.0 a threat or an opportunity?
 - Does the move from paper-based to IT record-keeping increase or decrease the threat to security and loss of personal files?
 - How can governors with a commercial technology background help the college develop its own IT system, and how can colleges help businesses, especially SMEs, make better use of technology?
 - How does your governing body calculate the costs and benefits of investment in technology?
 - Many learners are now using their own technology in conjunction with that of the college. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this? What kinds of policies does the college need in these circumstances?
 - Does your college outsource any of its IT functions? What are the advantages and disadvantages of outsourcing?
 - Does the proliferation of technology assist social inclusion or make it more difficult?
 - Does the proliferation of technology assist or undermine social cohesion?
 - What are the risks in making the college more dependent on technology and what is the governors' role in managing these risks?

Learners

- How important, or desirable, is it for staff and learners to have direct access to the governors through technology?
- How can technology help governors get closer to the learner voice?

Key messages

1. Investment and planning

In discussing the essential technology requirements of the colleges, governors stressed the importance of scrupulous planning and the need to:

- review the college's strategic approach to technology and learn what is needed in order to win independence, self-governance and greater empowerment
- recognise that technology facilities must run through the infrastructure of the college as a standard utility – like water or electricity
- make sure technology needs are considered at the initial stages of planning capital projects such as new build
- pursue a policy of technology systems integration, since issues of MIS, learner support, equality of access and accountability are all linked and dependent on the same data
- give priority to investment in systems that help managers monitor quality and performance of individuals, departments and the whole college
- understand that major changes in the use of technology in colleges need planning, time and investment
- invest in a high standard of IT facilities in order to compete for students.

2. Actions to ensure efficient implementation

Governors pointed to the constant need for the effectiveness of the IT strategy and suggested:

- when it comes to data collection for any purpose remember the dictum: "store once, use many times"
- IT can make governors more efficient by linking and rapidly updating all the information needed for monitoring
- before acting on any technology decision, ask yourselves: does it add to the business, improve teaching and learning and make management more effective?
- technology systems have to be part of risk management to ensure there is no loss of data if systems go down and no threat to security or personal files.

3. The learners' needs

In the interviews, governors spoke of the need to pay close attention to the needs of learners and said governors should:

- recognise the power of technology in building good communications with learners
- consult the learners on the IT applications they need for their studies
- encourage investment in remote devices, e-learning and other technologies to promote equality of access for all learners
- recognise that technology offers tremendous potential to include disabled students.

4. Meeting governors' needs

Many respondents spoke of specific ways in which technology could help e-governance and they said organisations should:

- aim towards having a paperless governing body since it is greener and more cost effective
- attract younger and IT literate governors when seeking to recruit governors
- recruit people to governing bodies who are knowledgeable about and comfortable with IT
- review within our colleges the nature and the format of the information sent to governors.

5. Governor training

However, in order to meet specific needs, it was essential to:

- raise the IT awareness of all governors through proper induction and support programmes
- make training available for all your governors to become technology literate
- nurture greater awareness among governors of how technology can reduce costs and improve immensely the working efficiency of the corporation
- increase awareness among members of the need to invest substantially in IT for the staff, learners and management.

6. Governors' communications

Several interviewees spoke of the opportunities technology gave to improve communications. In particular, use technology:

- to improve communications between governors
- to increase communications between the college management, staff and governors
- to create more communication channels with governors online
- to create links between student unions and governing bodies.

7. What Becta, LSIS and other partners can provide

Governors stressed the need for good support from agencies such as Becta and LSIS in creating:

- a one-stop shop linking governors to essential data and giving them a support service online
- benchmarking systems to manage and monitor performance and improvement
- co-operation among the multiple agencies and government departments to eliminate unnecessary duplication of tasks and data collection.



Biographies

Ian Taylor

Chair of Governors at Alton College
www.altoncollege.ac.uk

Recently retired as a main Board Director of Logica CMG, a FTSE 150 Company, Ian Taylor has 35 years' experience in the Information Technology and Communications Industry. He was Director and Vice-President of Intellect (until 2008), the trade association for the ICT and Electronics Industry, and a mentor to company directors. Describing himself as "semi-retired" he lists as his main interests "leadership and management of companies".

Graham Swetman

Chair of Governors Brockenhurst College
www.brock.ac.uk

Before retirement, Graham Swetman was Group Finance Director of The Morgan Crucible Company plc – an industrial holding company with subsidiaries throughout the world – for many years. Prior to Morgan Crucible, he worked for BOC Group, BLMC, and the Ford Motor Company. He has a degree in Chemical Engineering from Imperial College, an MBA from the University of Illinois, and is a Certified Accountant.

Joanne Jayerajah

Student governor, Brockenhurst College
www.brock.ac.uk

Joanne is currently studying for her A levels in Maths, Chemistry, Biology and French. As president of the Students' Union at Brockenhurst College, she has helped create new channels of communication between students, staff and governors. Already a prominent speaker on public platforms, she is described as an "excellent ambassador, makes an outstanding contribution and brings a very good learner perspective, when the Governors are making decisions".

Biographies (continued)

John Brydon

Clerk of the Corporation, City College Norwich

www.ccn.ac.uk

John Brydon's main career was in corporate banking but following a period working for a nursing care group, was appointed to City College, Norwich on a part-time basis as Clerk to the Corporation. His role involves organising the business and meetings of the Corporation which has overall responsibility for College, as well as advising it or individual governors and ensuring they comply with the relevant legislation.

Rodger McCracken

Clerk to the Corporation, Grimsby Institute

www.grimsby.ac.uk

Rodger McCracken has been a solicitor since 1970. He has served on Humberside County Council, been director of various private companies and an independent trustee of company Pension Schemes. A governor of Grimsby Institute since 1992, he was Chair of Governors, then Chair of Finance Committee before being appointed Clerk to the Governors in 2008. In January 2009 he became a part-time lecturer (Diploma in Law) at the college where in April 2009 he went full time as Director of Legal Services and Corporate Governance.

Kamilla Spark

Governor, Long Road Sixth Form College

www.longroad.ac.uk

Kamilla Spark comes from the private equity investment sector, has been a banker with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and was also independently contracted on several investment consultancy projects. She has served as a non-executive director of several private and publicly listed companies including Kety Group, the largest aluminium processing business in Central Europe. She received her MBA degree in Finance from Columbia Business School in New York as well as an MA degree in English Philology from the University of Warsaw.

Bob Harrison

Governor, Northern College

www.northern.ac.uk

Bob Harrison has extensive experience in schools and colleges as a teacher, senior manager, Principal and consultant and has worked with headteachers and senior leaders in the National College for School Leadership. He has worked for the DIUS as a consultant to their Improvement Group, is one of Becta's expert consultants, has been Toshiba's Education Adviser for 10 years, is a writer and researcher on mobile learning and next generation learning and is currently busy with the Building Schools for the Future programme.

Seb Schmoller

Governor, Sheffield College

www.sheffcol.ac.uk

www.alt.ac.uk

Seb Schmoller combines independent consultancy with part-time employment as Chief Executive of the Association for Learning Technology (ALT), a membership charity for people and organisations with an interest in the use of learning technology. From 1996 to 2003 Seb was Learning Technology Development Manager at the Sheffield College, where he led several influential and award-winning developments in online learning. He is a member of Becta's Harnessing Technology Expert Advisory Group, and represents ALT on the JISC Learning and Teaching Committee.

John Bingham

Chair of the Corporation, Thomas Rotherham College

www.thomroth.ac.uk

John Bingham's career has developed from Telecommunications Engineering through Senior Management to setting up and running a successful Technical and Managerial Consultancy practice, specialising in telecommunications and IT. Having worked in a professional capacity in the telecommunications environment for some 38 years he became Chairman of Thomas Rotherham Sixth Form College at its incorporation. He was elected to the AoC Board in 2001, having been a founder member of AoC Yorkshire & Humberside during the mid-nineties, and was elected Chairman of the AoC Board in January 2007.

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