

# **All Wales Centre for Governor Training and Research**



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## **IMPACT OF TRAINING**

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## IMPACT OF TRAINING

Before considering the impact of training on a governing body, it is important to differentiate between *intended outcomes* of training and *intended impact* of training. An *intended outcome* of training might be the acquisition of a particular skill or the increase in knowledge of a particular subject: an *intended impact* would be how the acquisition of this particular skill or piece of knowledge affects the workings and, ultimately, effectiveness of the person who attended the training or, more importantly, the governing body of which they are a member.

### MAXIMIZING THE CHANCES OF IMPACT

There is a very strong and clear correlation between the quality of the training received at a training session and the impact of that training on a governing body. It is highly unlikely, for instance, that poor training will result in positive impact. For this reason, we shall consider a number of issues relating to the delivery, receiving and reporting of training and how these affect impact. We shall then look at how we might try to measure impact at a later date.

Training for governors can take a number of forms but, no matter what type of training governors receive, in order to maximize its impact it is essential to pay close attention to the following:

- who attends the training session
- the quality of the training provided
- how a report of the training is made to the full governing body.

#### Who attends the training session

It is generally held that the impact of training on a governing body is minimized when only one member of the governors attends a training session. This is certainly the case if the governor concerned misses the next governing body meeting, if “governor training” does not appear as a discrete item on meeting agendas or if the governor who attended the training is, by nature, a retiring type or is unwilling to really promote something they have learned at a training session. It could also be argued that the relative infrequency of governing body meetings reduces the chances of new approaches and ideas becoming embedded in governing body practice.

To alleviate this problem, **governing bodies should be encouraged to send at least two people to a training session and if, in addition, the Head teacher is able to attend, the chances of the training having impact at governing body level is so much the greater.**

To achieve greatest impact whole governing body training might be considered the best model. However, this is expensive and does not facilitate networking between governors from different schools, so **it is worth considering training for clusters of governing bodies from neighbouring schools.** This certainly ensures that a number of governors from the same school are in attendance and also encourages networking between governors from different schools. Attendance is also likely to improve if one

of the cluster schools is used as a venue as governors will not have to travel far to attend.

### **The quality of training provided**

It is worth emphasizing that the quality of training is key to its impact. In the first instance, this means that **training must be relevant and geared to the needs of the audience**. If this criterion is not satisfied the training will have no impact at all.

Secondly, **training must be practical**. Of course, the way issues are approached needs a sound theoretical or philosophical rationale which governors may need to know and understand, but governors primarily need expertise in the ways they actually go about dealing with matters, and if training does not address such practical matters it is unlikely to have much impact.

**Training must also be accessible to governors.** To put it bluntly, if they don't understand it, how are they going to put it into operation? Education is becoming increasingly like Medicine in that it has its own language. This is needed to describe issues and structures which are peculiar to Education, but to the lay person it can be daunting and, in the worst cases, unintelligible. It is essential, therefore, that trainers, whilst not "dumbing down" their material, ensure that it is accessible to non-specialists.

Handouts at training sessions can often prove to be "false friends". If training is to have any measure of impact at governing body level then **handouts need to be understandable and useful for and usable by governors who did not attend the training session**. This means that simply providing delegates with copies of a power point presentation may not be adequate for use at a later date with non-delegates.

The majority of training provided for governors is typically a 1 – 3 hour session, usually in the evening of a week day. However, whole day conferences for governors are also organized by both national organizations and local authorities. As well as providing an opportunity for networking between governors from different schools and authorities, the primary purpose of such conferences is training, so the importance of quality is equally as relevant here as at the more common shorter training sessions. In addition, though, it is essential that **comprehensive, high quality conference reports be sent to delegates as soon as possible after the event and, if possible, posted on the internet**. There are two reasons for this. First, most conferences offer delegates a choice of different workshop sessions, and it is often the case that they are unable to attend all the workshops. If delegates are to receive the full benefit of attending a conference then they should be given information from all workshops, whether they attended them or not. Secondly, as has already been pointed out, the impact of training on a governing body is likely to be increased if more than one person from the same governing body attends the same training session. However, there is less likelihood of more than one governor from the same governing body attending a whole day conference than an evening training session. To increase the chances of impact of training received at a conference, therefore, it is essential that delegates be provided with a full conference report as soon as possible after the event.

If the impact of training is affected fundamentally by the quality of training then **rigorous evaluation of training is essential to help shape future training sessions.** The most common form of training evaluation is by evaluation sheets completed by course attendees, usually at the end of the course. It is vital, therefore, that the questions asked on evaluation sheets are clear, easily understood and focus on issues which relate unambiguously to the quality of the training given if training providers are to use them as a diagnostic tool. Evaluation sheets which ask only for overall good opinions and low opinions of a course are of value only in identifying those areas which might need improving. Of course, a good evaluation sheet will provide space for attendees to express their opinion about issues of their own choice but the following issues should be included as separate items on evaluation sheets:

- Venue
- Timing and length of course
- Relevance and helpfulness of course
- Quality of course content
- Quality of presentation
- Quality of handouts
- Whether the attendee would recommend the course to others
- Suggestions for improvements

The request for course attendees to complete evaluation sheets is often made in a half-hearted, apologetic manner and this is reflected in the equally often half-hearted, dashed-off responses. **If evaluation sheets are to be employed as useful diagnostic tools to improve the quality of training then course attendees should be told how important they are and that they need to be completed as fully, accurately and, most importantly, honestly as possible, and time should be built into the course for their completion.**

If evaluation sheets are regarded simply as “happy sheets” and are only scrutinized for the number of ticks in the “Excellent” or “Very good” boxes, then they will serve no purpose other than provide trainers with a warm glow. If they are to help improve the quality of training then **evaluation sheets must be analyzed carefully and the information they provide used to inform future training events.**

### **How a report of the training is made to the full governing body**

If training is to have any chance at all of making an impact, then the whole governing body must, at the very least, be aware of what was learned at the training session. Unfortunately far too often, governors who have attended a training session simply do not report what they have learned back to the full governing body. When this happens, the training is of very little value. Yet the remedy is simple. **Every governing body meeting should have “Training” as an item on its agenda.** As

well as providing an opportunity for governors to discuss their training needs, it is the time when governors who have attended training can report to the whole governing body what they have learned.

Once the reporting of training is an established item at governing body meetings the quality of the reporting can be addressed. If a brief, general description of what went on at a course is given to the governing body then it is not likely to have much impact. **The ideal report should focus on the main issues of the training, what was learned and how this knowledge might be used to help the governing body in its work of helping raise standards at the school.** It might be a good idea to provide governors who attend training sessions with a simple pro-forma covering these three areas mentioned above. It need not imply that a long report is expected but it would certainly focus the report on the key points – and also be a useful aide-memoire if the training event had taken place some time before the governors' meeting where the report was being made.

## **MEASURING IMPACT**

All commentators agree that measuring training impact is extremely difficult. The immediate reaction to a particular training session can be measured by the comprehensive analysis of effective evaluation sheets (see above). However, the longer term effect of that training on a governing body is much more difficult to assess, in fact, much more so than most organizations as governing bodies meet relatively rarely so opportunities to assess impact are limited.

Having acknowledged these difficulties, however, the following methods of measuring the impact of training might be worth pursuing:

### **Post-training surveys**

In order to assess how much (or little!) effect a particular training event has had on a governing body, a brief questionnaire might be sent to the governor(s) who attended the session some 3 to 6 months later i.e. after at least one full governing body meeting since the training took place. This time lapse allows governing bodies time to consider suggestions made and how they might be implemented.

Care needs to be taken, though, if this form of assessment is used. If training providers intend to use post-training surveys they need to inform governors who attend training sessions of their intentions and why they want to do it. Simply sending governors a post-training questionnaire without such an explanation might appear inconsiderate and, possibly, intimidating.

Similarly, care needs to be taken over the content of questionnaires. If the questionnaire is too long it might well deter people from completing it and if it is too detailed it might worry governors that they are being coerced into committing themselves to a course of action for which they might not yet be ready. It might be appropriate for a post-training questionnaire, therefore, to ask only a few broad questions. The following are suggestions:

- Has the training on \_\_\_\_\_(title of the training session) which took place on \_\_\_\_\_(date) and was attended by \_\_\_\_\_(name(s) of governor(s) who attended) had an influence on the working of your governing body?

YES – Please explain how the training has influenced the working of your governing body.

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NO – Please explain why the training has had no influence on the working of your governing body.

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- Are there any other comments you would like to make e.g. further training needs to support your work?

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Although, such a questionnaire does not cover any details, it is brief, unthreatening and as well as giving trainers and facilitators information on the impact of training, also encourages governors to reflect on the effect training has on their work.

**Observation of governing body in action by local authority officials**

If the local authority has a regular presence at governing body meetings and governing body committee meetings then observation of a governing body at work is relatively straightforward and if, for instance, local authorities provide a clerking

service to governing bodies there is no need to set up a special arrangement to facilitate this. However, it is important that such “observers” are aware of all the training which has been undertaken by governors if they are to make any meaningful judgement on its effect. (This is another reason for the inclusion of “training” as a discrete agenda item at governing body meetings where reports on sessions attended can be given). It is also important that “observers” are aware of how the governing body worked before training took place to enable them to gauge its impact.

### **Comments and observations made by the Head teacher and Chair**

Sometimes a Chair or Head teacher may comment informally on improvements in the way their governing body is working. When this happens, it is usually couched in general terms – “the governing body seems more on the ball”, “they seem much more up for things” etc. When this happens, it might be worth investigating if this changed behaviour is linked in any way with a training event which either one or a number of governors might have attended. Alternatively, a local authority official might ask a Head teacher or Chair directly whether they have seen any changes in the way their governing body has been working and whether or not this might be attributable to governor training.

### **CONCLUSION**

The potential for training to have a beneficial influence on governing bodies is immense but in order to ensure that such training is relevant and of high quality, close attention must be paid to its delivery, and meaningful evaluation must be made of its impact. The latter is, by far, the more difficult to undertake. However, if we do not carry out both tasks with equal rigour we will never really know whether training has been effective and whether or not our governing bodies are receiving the support they need to carry out their many roles.