

Processes and Practices of Governing in FE Colleges

PROJECT NEWS



A belated Happy New Year!

We asked the researchers in the four nations to summarise their immediate actions (to April 2019) and, where appropriate, to highlight any emerging issues that are already attracting attention. Details are presented below.

In addition, you will find updates on general activity within the project team.

If you'd like to know more about any aspect of the details in this newsletter, do contact the Principle Investigator, Professor Cate Watson on cate.watson@stir.ac.uk.

Is there an aspect of the reported research focus in the coming months which needs more (or less) emphasis? Do get in touch with your ideas and suggestions.

For your information the next meeting of the full project team will be held on 20/21 March 2019.

Impact Group Dates

The next Impact Group newsletter will be issued in **May 2019** and, as you know, the next meeting of the Impact Group will be held on **25 September 2019**.

RESEARCH ACTIVITY

An update from Scotland and Northern Ireland



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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 Professor 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

Having undertaken some preliminary visits and recording tests in late 2018, the Research Fellow for Scotland and Northern Ireland (Dr Helen Young) has commenced a busy schedule of field research. The first board observation was undertaken at South West College, Northern Ireland, on 9 January 2019 and initial analysis of the data (led by Dr Gary Husband) has begun.

An exciting part of the project is using Transana, a qualitative data analysis software program, which allows you to bring everything together in one place – audio, video, field notes and documents – and draw links between the data being collected across the four nations.

Over the next few months, Helen will be observing a number of governing body meetings (either videoing or audio-recording them and taking field notes) as well as attending selected strategy events and committee meetings to get a sense of the bigger picture.

Between now and mid-April, recordings will be taken of three Board of Management meetings in Scotland and two Governing Body meetings in Northern Ireland. In addition, four committee meeting will be observed in the Scottish colleges. Other activities include seeking to understand how Further Education policy is formulated, understood and translated into practice, one-to-one interviews are being undertaken with various 'policy actors'

working in the sector. Participants include college leaders, senior sector body staff and government officials. Three interviews have already been conducted in Scotland, with another planned for February, and one has been lined up in Northern Ireland, with more to follow. Professor Cate Watson is leading on analysis of the Scottish interviews.

Emerging areas of interest

There are so many fascinating dimensions to this study, but three areas which have piqued our interest to date are:

- Technology – how different technologies are used (format and distribution of materials, videoconferencing, use of laptops/tablets/smartphones during meetings) and their pros and cons.
- Student governors – their recruitment and understanding of the role, how they are perceived/treated by other members and associated staff, and what contribution they make (both in terms of input and influence on action taken).
- ‘Constructive challenge’ – how this is done, who is doing it, and the devices employed (e.g. humour). Significance of position/character/prestige/demographics etc.

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 Professor Ann-Marie Bathmaker and Dr Jodie Pennacchia from the University of Birmingham.

Prior to the Christmas break the research team for England undertook pilot visits to both colleges in order to become acquainted with chairs, clerks and governors, and to test the video equipment. Based on these preliminary visits, they have identified a set of themes, which they plan to explore in more detail across the forthcoming year of data collection.

Some of these are key discussion themes that appear to occupy governor discussions in the English context. These are reflective of the wider social and political context in which governing is taking place. Thus, as one might imagine, both Brexit and GDPR compliance are significant topics of discussion. What can also be seen is the importance of the wider FE context in shaping the content of board meetings, including discussions of apprenticeship rules, a wider climate of financial investigations in colleges, and fairer funding for the FE sector.

Initial meetings have also sparked interest in the social dimensions of governing board meetings. In particular, it has been noted the varied ways that rapport is built amongst governors, including catching up over food and refreshments and creating atmospheres where it is possible to share a joke.

A third theme that will be tracked is the role of the clerk. It has been observed that the clerk's office is a hive of activity in advance of governing board meetings, and that clerks engage in a great detail of important governing activity 'behind the scenes'. Despite how busy they are, clerks manage to be very welcoming to all, including researchers. They are really attuned to the work of governing, including producing the materials to inform the governing board meeting and keeping everything moving, but also in creating the welcoming atmosphere in which governing takes place. The team look forward to exploring these aspects more closely, along with the other themes noted here, and other ideas that emerge across 2019.

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 Professor David James and Dr Steve Garner from the University of Cardiff.

Observation of governing body meetings

The Research Fellow for Wales (Dr Steve Garner) visited both colleges for preliminary meetings and recording tests in the last quarter of 2018. Fieldwork kicked off on January 15 2019 at Cardiff and Vale College's first governing board meeting of the year, followed by observing a governors' training session (on uses and abuses of social media). Between now and the end of April, Steve will be attending three more Cardiff and Vale governors' meetings and two at Grwp Llandrillo Menai (where the frequency of meetings is lower). The former will be video-recorded, and the latter audio only. He will also be attending and observing four committee meetings at Cardiff and Vale, and one at Grwp Llandrillio Menai. More of the latter's committee meetings are to be attended in May/June. The committees in each college are those responsible for finance, audit and curriculum. The extra one at Cardiff and Vale is a 'Community Board', with no equivalent at GLM, but is interesting because of its role, and the diversity of the board membership, reflecting the student body and the local area.

Other activities

Like the researchers in the other nations, we are also looking to interview key people with expert knowledge of Further Education policy formulation and implementation. So far two have been arranged for February, with a senior Welsh Government civil servant, and the CEO of Colegau Cymru / Colleges Wales. Another interview is being arranged. Professor David James will be leading on the analysis of the Welsh interviews.

Emerging areas of interest

With so few meetings so far observed and recorded, this can only be speculative but three interesting themes so far are:

- College identity: the identity of the colleges in relation to: i) the Welsh government in terms of policy-making and power; ii) other colleges in Wales and beyond (there are 13 FE College groups in Wales); iii) the communities it serves and embodies in some way.
- The prominence of land / building assets; the consolidation; maintenance; and future of the existing ones, and the significance of developing further sites.
- Power dynamics around the table: who speaks; who doesn't; who can make jokes; what the jokes are about; what are the assumed 'important subjects' for discussion.
- The relative importance of Welsh language (far stronger in GLM, situated in a Welsh-speaking area – and likely to be impacted more (in a positive way) by Welsh government policy on expanding the Welsh language in post-16 education.

GENERAL ACTIVITY

Ron Hill invited to join the Strengthening College Governance Advisory Group



Ron has been invited to join the Strengthening College Governance Advisory Group (SCGAG). Established by the Department for Education (DfE), the SCGAG is a small group consisting of 6-8 members, it is formally constituted and will meet 3-4 times per year.

The Department for Education is responsible for children's services and education, including early years, schools, higher and further education policy, apprenticeships and wider skills in England.

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

Cate Watson and Ron Hill delivered address to the Governors at the Association of Colleges



Cate Watson and Ron Hill were invited to give a presentation to the Association of Colleges Governors' Council on 23 November 2018. Following the presentation there was a question and answer session which explored aspects of the proposed study. The AoC attendees present expressed their considerable interest in the study and a desire for an update in due course.

Association of Colleges is the national voice for further education, sixth form, tertiary and specialist colleges in England. They are a not-for-profit membership organisation established in 1996 by colleges, for colleges. Their members make up almost 95% of the sector - transforming 2.2 million lives each year.

Acting as the collective voice, they represent and promote the interests of colleges, and provide their members with high-quality professional support services, including training, events, and recruitment.

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

Helen Young attended a Board Induction Workshop run by the College Development Network



Helen attended a College Board Induction Workshop run by the College Development Network (CDN).

On behalf of the sector, CDN provides the National Induction Programme to support board members in their role. The programme is designed to reflect the requirements of the Code of Good Governance and to complement the induction offered by individual colleges and strategic bodies. The induction events offer attendees a chance to build their own networks and to meet the organisations and people shaping the future of the sector at a national level.

CDN assists in developing governance across Scotland's colleges through their board development programmes, supporting college board members by providing updates on latest developments in the sector and the information they need to fulfil their responsibilities.

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

Gary Husband appointed President of the Association for Research in Post Compulsory Education



Gary has been appointed as the President of the Association for Research in Post Compulsory Education (ARPCE).

The organisation focuses on the promotion of research activity in further education. A biannual international conference is held in Oxford University in addition to a series of seminar events around Britain aimed at FE colleagues. The organisation publishes a Taylor and Francis journal (The Journal of Research in Post Compulsory Education) and works closely with partners such as the Education and Training Foundation and the Edge Foundation.

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

Gary Husband invited to University of Tasmania



Gary has been invited to be a visiting scholar at the University of Tasmania. In February 2019, he will attend a week of discussions and exploration of research in Further Education in Australia. This visit will pave the way for an on-going partnership between the Association for Research in Post Compulsory Education (ARPCE), the University of Tasmania and the University of Stirling.

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

Gary Husband partnering with Scottish Government



Gary has been working with the Scottish Government on their College Improvement Project. In January and February 2019, Gary is due to deliver workshops and seminars in 5 Scottish Colleges with the aim of helping to restructure professional learning to improve attainment.

The College Improvement Project is the first national improvement programme to raise attainment and improve retention in Scotland's colleges. The project was launched by Further Education Minister Shirley-Anne Somerville. The new

improvement programme will explore what is already working well and what more the FE sector can do to ensure college students stay on and gain the full benefits of attending college. The overall aim is that over the academic years 17/18 and 18/19, we will learn what works for improved retention and attainment for students on FE courses in colleges.

To find out more about the Scottish Government's policies on colleges, please click [here](#).



UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM