FURTHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE: THE ROLE OF GOVERNORS IN FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGE IMPROVEMENT

by

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Abstract

This research investigates Further Education (FE) governance and governors' role(s) in college improvement and related issues. Empirical data is derived from semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis of governors' meeting minutes. A total of 14 Standards committee (SC) governors and 6 principals from 6 FE colleges in the Midlands region of England agreed to be interviewed. Data from these individual interviews were supplemented by an analysis of SC governors' meeting minutes from each of the 6 colleges in order to obtain rich data on the role of governors in college improvement. Findings suggest that 'good' governors with a good skill base can contribute to college improvement through their monitoring and challenging role; their role in appointing the principal and senior management; setting the strategic direction of the college and by acting as a 'critical friend' to the principal. It emerged from this study that governors are a group of individuals with different family, educational and professional backgrounds who are seeking a new identity and they need help in their 'identity transformation'. This study, therefore, suggests the need for an induction and training programme for new governors, which includes 'coaching and mentoring' so that governors are continually supported in their 'governorship' journey.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FE – Further Education

GB – Governing Body

SC – Standards Committee

LEAs – Local Education Authorities

ERA - Education Reform Act

FHEA - Further and Higher Education Incorporation Act

FEFC - Further Education Funding Council

DfES – Department for Education and Skills

Ofsted – The office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills.

LSIS – Learning and Skills Improvement Service

AoC – Association of Colleges

UK – United Kingdom

LA – Local Authority

DfEE – Department for Education and Employment.

DIUS – Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills

LSC - Learning and Skills Council

GFECs – General Further Education Colleges

TEC – Training and Enterprise Council

NVO – National Voluntary Organisation

CEO – Chief Executive Officer

FSA – Financial Services Authority

HCER – House of Commons Education Committee Report

DES – Department for Education and Science

DCSF – Department for Children, Schools and families.

BIS – Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

DfE – Department for Education

BERA – British Educational Research Association

WTDCA – Word Text Documentary Content Analysis

SAR – Self Assessment Report

KPIs – Key Performance Indicators

CPD – Continuous Professional Development

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Recent years have seen a considerable international upsurge of studies in educational governance. This heightened interest in educational governance partly emanates from recent policy changes in England and elsewhere, such as the increased autonomy of educational institutions, reduced funding for schools and colleges, the continual emphasis on enhancing student attainment and achievement, and the emphasis on intra/inter-organisational collaboration. However, much of the literature on English education governance tends to focus on the Schools' and Higher Education sectors, with the Further Education (FE) sector largely unnoticed by the wider education community (Lumby, 2001; Gleeson et al., 2010). This is partly because of FE's historical invisibility and a lack of public understanding of what the sector stands for (Gleeson and Shain 1999). This trend has been gradually changing following from incorporation of FE colleges in 1993, as confirmed by Gleeson et al., (2010), until recently FE governance has been something of an afterthought but is now high on the research and policy agenda. Nevertheless, research on the work of FE governors and their role in college improvement presently remains sparse. Earley and Weindling (2004), shares this view in regard to the schools sector and point out that, in spite of the importance attached to governors and their role in school Improvement, there has been very little research in this area and very few official documents offer specific guidance to governors as to how they should fulfil their responsibility in this field. Similarly, Bush (2003:19) observed that, "there is no large-scale study of the role of governors in FE…yet governors and principals are two

corners of a leadership triangle which also may involve other senior and middle managers". Therefore, the intention of this thesis is to investigate this important but under-researched role of governors in college improvement.

This chapter introduces a study that seeks to explore the purpose of governance in English FE colleges; what influences individuals to become FE college governors; the experience and skills that governors need to have in order to be able to inform and shape the leadership of FE colleges; then examine the duties that governors do and how these compare with those of principals in practice; followed by discussing principal-governor relationship balance and how that impede or promote important decision-making in colleges and concludes by examining how the work of Standards (Quality) Committee/Teaching Learning Quality Committee governors contribute to college improvement. This research takes place at a time when FE colleges respond to calls from central government for great improvement and accountability in the sector (Gleeson et al., 2010).

The research aims to explore FE governance and investigates the extent to which SC governors' work contributes to FE college improvement. The intention is to find through governors' and principals' accounts the contribution role of governors in college improvement, with the view that an understanding of such a role will, in educational terms, help to inform the recruitment, training and developmental needs of governors; inform and help to develop good working relationships between FE governors and principals, and help governors to reflect on practice so they can succeed in their 'governorship' role. The aims build upon existing literature that

demonstrates a general lack of clarity between the roles and responsibilities of governors and principals in FE colleges, despite an acknowledgement of the importance attached to governors after incorporation (Gleeson and Shain, 1999). The lack of clarity between the work of governors and principals in practice may result in tensions because of crossing over into each other's work. In this light, it is envisaged that the research will contribute to the on-going need to clarify the roles and responsibilities of governors and principals and then examine the role of governors in college improvement, providing information that could inform aspiring governors, incumbent governors and principals.

Previous research in the area of organisational governance in FE has tended to be prescriptive, focussing on addressing the shortcomings of governing bodies (GBs) and presenting solutions that were difficult to implement in practice (Cornforth, 2003). Therefore, there is need for greater understanding of what FE governors do in practice and how their work contributes to college improvement in order to help improve practice.

The main focus of this study is FE governors who sit on Boards - called Corporations of Colleges. In particular, the research will investigate the work of "Standards" or "Quality" Committee governors and examines the extent to which their work helps colleges to improve. In order to explore this and related FE governance issues, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. Does one's early socialisation have an influence in their choice of becoming an FE governor in later life?

2. What purpose does governance serve in the FE sector?

3. What are the key skills and experience necessary for a governor to have in order to be able to shape and inform the leadership of a college?

4. What duties do Standards Committee governors do and how do these compare with those of principals?

5. To what extent is the principal-governor relationship balanced in FE colleges?

6. To what extent does SC governors' work contributes to college improvement?

The research questions were meant to broaden the investigation rather than limiting it and they emanate from literature and recent policy changes following incorporation which have further increased governors' level of responsibility (Education Act, 2008); made governors part of the leadership of colleges (Ofsted, 2012) and heightened their role in terms of accountability and increasing reporting to the Secretary of State (Education Act, 2011). Subsequently, Research Question (RQ) 1 was aimed at establishing why individuals chose to become FE governors–was it through their own social background or experiences and the significance of these experiences? This should enable a better understanding of why the informants chose to become FE governors, learned to govern and how they have made a successful transformation into their new role. Research Question (RQ) 2 was meant to establish broadly what purpose(s) governance serves in contemporary FE colleges. This is followed by RQ 3, which is meant to establish the experience and skills that are necessary for one to be able to help shape and influence the leadership of FE colleges. RQ 4 is meant to establish what specifically SC governors do and how these duties compare with what principals do in practice. This could help informants in distinguishing operational from strategic management in practice. This is followed by RQ 5, which is meant to establish governor-principal relationship balance in FE colleges with a view that an equilibrium balance of power promotes collaborative working between governors and

principals, which is good for effective governance practices necessary for college improvement. The final research question (RQ 6) is targeted specifically at SC governors in order to establish their role in college improvement.

The context of the research

In order to understand FE governance and the role of governors in FE college improvement, first, it is important to understand the historical context in which educational governance policy evolved since the 1944 Education Act. This historical context can generally be categorised into the following: Social Democracy and the Age of Professionalism (1945-55); Neo-liberal Democracy (1979-1997) and New Labour (1997-2007) and these are discussed below.

Social Democracy and the Age of Professionalism

This refers to the post-war period (1945-55) in which, education was seen as the key-stone of public policy making. Education was regarded as important in promoting economic growth, equality of opportunity, alleviating disadvantage, class division and social justice (Ranson, 2008). Emphasis during this period was much on "inclusivity" and schools and colleges were modelled to reflect this.

Consequently, the system of education governance constituted by the 1944 Education Act was modelled in a way that was meant to support the growth of service committed to the growth of opportunity. The Act established a national education

service, led by a strong central government. A minister of education with absolute

powers was created by this Act. According to Ranson (2008):

> The 1944 Act installed a minister who was to promote the education of the people of England and Wales and the progressive development of institutions devoted to that purpose and to secure the effective executive by local authorities under his control and direction of the national policy (:203).

However, the new minister had no power over curriculum matters, teachers and Local

Education Authorities (LEAs), although he controlled specific grants which provided

him with considerable influence over local education until 1958 (Ranson, 2008).

The newly formed LEAs were invested with wide responsibilities and powers to

provide education to their local communities, but had no absolute powers to direct

their schools and colleges. As argued by (Ranson, 2008), Institutions were provided

with a "quasi-autonomous" status under the general guidance of a governing or

managing body" (:204). The 1944 Education Act, therefore, as (Ranson, 2008) insists,

created a "complex web of interdependent relationships among the manifold

participants" (:204). Central government was to promote education, LEAs were to

plan and provide, and teachers were to nurture the learning process so as to meet

the needs of children and the wishes of parents. Dale (1989) calls this period a time

of apparent partnership or consensus between the state, local government and

educational professionals. The governance of education formed a complex,

"polycentred" division of power and responsibility, which was appropriate for the

differentiated tasks. Power was distributed among the partners and emphasis was

given to the value and spirit of partnership.

Subsequently, public goods were conceived as requiring collective choice and redistribution. Simkins (2012) calls this period the 'bureau-professional' era (a national system locally administered) dominated by values of social justice and shared responsibilities - thus, the significance of systems of administrative planning (the LEAs) and institutional organisation. Teachers' knowledge and professional judgement shaped the mode of accountability (Simkins, 2012). Public trust was invested in teachers/lecturers and schools/colleges were answerable to the LEA. Professional relationships, were formally expressed through partnerships, collegiality and trust between and within tiers of the service (Ranson, 2008). Alexiadou (1999) labels it a period of 'settlement' and 'consensus' on educational policies.

However, this framework of education governance has been criticised because it was heavily dependent on the expertise and professional judgement of the teachers, reinforced by the orderly controls of rational bureaucracy which were the defining conditions of the welfare and social democratic state (Ranson, 2008). The public had no voice and were clients of the 'universal knowledge' of professional bureaucracy (Ranson, 2008).

Neo-liberal Democracy (1979 – 1997)

In the period preceding the "neo-liberal democracy" the way how educational organisations were governed did not attract academic and public attention. What matters most was the way these organisations were managed (Cornforth, 2003). However, from the mid-1980s the situation began to change. This was mainly because of the structural reforms of the public sector which were carried out by

different conservative governments during the 1980s and early 1990s (Alexiadou, 1999; Ranson, 2003). One reason for these reforms was to respond to globalisation trends going on in different parts of the world (Cope et al., 2003), and the other was that these conservative governments did not have much trust in teachers (because of lack of accountability) and wanted to diminish the professional domination of the previous regime (Ranson, 2008).

Therefore, through the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA), the Conservative government proactively promoted a culture of market principles amongst schools and colleges in order to withdraw from the direct delivery of public services and programmes; new "public management" (Pollit, 1993:10) models adopted from the private sector were introduced in an attempt to improve efficiency; replacing elected board members by appointees (Often with business experience) and making greater use of performance indicators and multiple audits (Cornforth, 2003). Hannagan et al., (2007), characterise these changes, as changes that had an emphasis on efficiency, measurable performance, outputs and competition. This means market accountability was seen as an influence on improvement.

This shift towards a primarily economic agenda reflected in these policy developments in FE, was aimed at ensuring that the sector was more relevant and responsive to the needs of the economy. Burchill, (2000) associates this period with the rise of 'Thatcherism' in the 1980s with its ideals of a 'free market and strong state', which saw policies that restructured the governance of the public sector, including education introduced. Crucial to this were the following reforms: the creation by

government of an increasing number of quasi-autonomous government agencies (quangos) to deliver public services; the introduction of market mechanisms into the provision of public services through splitting the 'purchasers' of services from the 'providers' and introducing elements of competition through the contracting out of services to a mix of private companies, voluntary organisations and quangos (Cornforth, 2003). Contracts as argued by Ranson (2008) enforced clear accountability for public servants, ensuring they are answerable for the service levels delivered, the resources, targets set, and the outcomes achieved. Therefore, as Ranson (2008) asserts, the 'performance criteria' for accountability embody "clear technical, means-end rationality" (:205). Trust is secured in the increased specification of purpose, task and condition of service delivery.

At a local level, these changes marked a shift from relatively simple structure of local governance where services were largely provided by multi-functional local authorities working with central government, to a complex and often fragmented system of local governance (Stoker, 1999). This new system of governance has been criticised because it led to a decline in "democratic accountability", lack of transparency and allegations of political bias over many public appointments (Cornforth, 2003:3). At the same time, the rise in 'managerialism' in the public sector (Pollit, 1993) challenged the rather simplistic assumption that it is lay councillors or board members who make policy and officers who carry it out (Cornforth, 2003). Given all the above criticisms and developments that followed, such as the recent criticism and decline of the "Quango" culture, the implications of these changes to FE governance in practice have not received much attention from educational researchers.

One other purpose of the 1988 ERA for schools was to raise standards of attainment for pupils by specifying and defining what is taught and learnt in schools, believed to be necessary for enhancing quality and accountability and for securing the trust and confidence of the 'parent body' in what schools were offering (Ranson, 2008; Simkins 2013). The National Curriculum provided a framework for specifying what was being learnt and taught in schools and achievements were to be presented in League tables, thus informing parental choices, and being monitored by the national inspectorate, Ofsted (Ranson, 2003, 2008; Simkins, 2012).

However, while the 1988 ERA focussed primarily on schooling, it laid the framework for the incorporation of the FE sector, enshrined in the 1992 Further and Higher Education Incorporation Act (1992 FHEA), which was followed by the incorporation of colleges which took effect in April 1993 (Cornforth, 2003). Through the FHEA, FE colleges were taken out of LEA control and established as independent self-governing corporate institutions, with funding provided by a Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) for England. Consequently in 1996-1997, 3.1 million of the 3.9 students were centrally funded (Burchill, 2000). However, one inevitable result of incorporation is that it greatly increased the responsibilities of FE GBs, as Gleeson and Shain (1999) point out, after incorporation the whole responsibility for a college's future rested with the GB.

New Labour (1997 – 2007)

Following 17 years of Conservative Government, New Labour took office in 1997 with hopes for change as promised in Tony Blair's education mantra – 'Education,

Education and Education' (Blair, 2004). Despite many promises for reform, the new labour government did not do much in reforming the educational governance of the previous regime. In fact, as Ranson (2008:207) precisely puts it, "it accentuated the characteristics of neo-liberal education, increasingly constituting schooling as an independently governed corporate sector". A point shared by Simkins (2013) who adds that, even the current Conservative/Liberal coalition government has continued on the same trend of making schools and colleges more autonomous and independent of LEA control. Simkins (2013) cites the governance of academies and free schools to illustrate his point. However, it is important to point out here that, autonomy can be good if it leads to improvement.

The Education Act (2002) enables "deregulation and flexibility" in the construction of governing bodies (Ranson, 2008:206). Therefore, the 2004 "Strategy" followed by the "Education Act 2006" strives to reconfigure the governance of education with "new energies" and "smarter accountabilities". The business, private sector and the churches, are perceived not only as extending their increasing control and provision of state schooling, but also as playing an emergent role in a new system of local governance, offering "some local brokerage to make it work" as well as coordination to ensure joined-up provision. "This cannot just be a partnership of state providers – the voluntary and community sector, business and private enterprises need to be part of this partnership to provide joined up services" (Ranson, 2008:206).

Perhaps, as Ranson (2008) points out, this reconstitution of educational governance mediates a direction of change for the public sphere of education, indicating that

control of education is moving away slowly from the public to the corporate sector and that traditional forms of local governance are being steadily eroded. The growth of the corporate sector reflects two dimensions: first, a growing number of colleges are controlled by providers who bring outside interests to the public provision of education: defining the concern for college provision as is an "external" interest in business, or profit, or a denominational interest. Secondly, corporation of education provision is revealed in the rebuilding and renovation of colleges through the use of private capital. Such finance can enable corporate sponsors to gain a controlling influence over the practices of schools/colleges (McFadyean and Rowland, 2002). The corporate sector is therefore defined directly by outside interests and accountabilities that are brought to the public sphere. Ranson, (2008), vehemently criticises this corporate form of governance and its external imposed controls, forms of accountability, "performativity" and auditing. He argues that, such regimes cannot strengthen public trust because achievement grows out of the internal goods of motivation to improve rather than the external imposition of quantifiable targets.

The study is, therefore, intended as a contribution towards an understanding of the purpose of FE governance; governance practices in FE colleges, how the roles and responsibilities of FE governors and principals compare in practice; the relationship balance between governors and principals and then examine the role of governors in college improvement. With this in mind, issues such as "do governing bodies matter?" Does governors' work contribute to FE improvement? And have governors become "conscripted" to a state agenda of "performativity" rather than expressing as citizens,

the educational needs of the local community (Ranson et al., 2005a:358) will be explored.

Antecedents of this research

Although literature on FE governance is generally patchy, there are a number of researches that have helped me to frame this study.

The first key work influential in choosing the topic for investigation and initially helping to frame the study was the work of Khooiman, (2003), who in a book entitled *Governing as Governance* explored the concept of 'governance' and 'governing'. His work together with that of (Rhodes, 1997; Parnham, 1998; Gleeson and Shain, 1999; Cornforth, 2003) was quite useful in helping me to contextualise the concept of 'education governance' in this study. Cornforth (2003) for example use the term "governance" to refer to the system by which FE organisations are directed, controlled and made accountable.

The second key area of research that helped me to frame the study was literature on FE incorporation. There are a number of key texts, in particular Parnham (1998); Glesson and Shain (1999); Drljaca, (1999); Cornforth and Edwards, (1999); Bennett, (2002); Gleeson et al., (2010) and Hill, (2013). Work from these authors helped to establish that the responsibilities of governors and principals in FE colleges significantly increased following from incorporation, although very little research has looked into the impact of the increased function for which the GB is responsible

following Incorporation. The 'texts' also indicate that the working relationship between governors and principals also became polarised after incorporation, justifying the need to consider these in practice.

The third key area of research within FE that influenced the framing of this study was literature on the 'purpose of FE governance'. Key authors in this area included (Gleeson and Shain, 1999; Gleeson et al., 2010; LSIS, 2010). The authors agree that the purpose(s) of FE governance is not clearly defined. However, this is contrary to the compulsory education sector where the purpose of education governance is clearly defined as to ensure institutional legitimacy and effectiveness (James et al., 2010) and helping to provide the best possible education for the pupils in their schools (Scanlon et al., 1999; DfES, 2004).

In the same pipeline, the study also draws on literature pertaining to the roles and responsibilities of principals (Green, 2000; Sala, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004; Davis et al., 2005; Jameson and MacNay, 2007; Lambert, 2013) and FE governors (Cornforth and Edwards, 1999; Cornforth, 2003; Gleeson et al., 2010). According to these authors, there is a problem in distinguishing what governors and principals do in practice. However, according to (Cornforth and Edwards, 1999; Cornforth, 2003), the roles and responsibilities of FE college governors have been relatively under theorised. Very little has been written except in the form of guides and checklists (Parnham, 1998). In spite of this, (Cornforth and Edwards, 1999; Cornforth, 2003) give the following as functions (assigned roles) of corporate boards:

- being the point of final accountability for the actions of the agency;

- being the employer of staff;

- formulating policy;

- securing resources;

- acting as a boundary spanner.

Another way to look at the role of FE corporate boards is to consider Cornforth's (2003) models of governance. Drawing from the private sector, Cornforth (2003) proposes parallel models of governance that can help us to conceptualise the roles of corporate boards in the public sector such as FE colleges. These models are as follows:

- *Compliance model*: in which the role of the board is to control managers.

- *Partnership model*: the role of the board is to improve organisational performance.

- *Stakeholder model*: the role of the board is balancing stakeholders' needs.

- *Democratic mode:* the role of the board is to choose between the interests of different groups.

- The *co-option model*: the role of the board is to maintain good relations with key external stakeholders and

- The *"rubber stamp" model*: where the role of the board is to rubber-stamp managerial decisions.

Another key area of research that helped to frame this study is drawn from literature on 'early socialisation' and its influence to educational leadership in later life. Though literature on governors' early socialisation and influence to governorship is scarce, some writers (Gronn, 1999; Ribbins, 2003) have shown that early socialisation can play a very important role in shaping and paving the way for future leaders. These authors suggest that factors such as family background, social mobility, peer groups

and education play a very important role in shaping future leaders. Within research on 'early socialisation and influence to headship', researchers also identify the importance of managing the transformational process as being instrumental in successful role identity transformation (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Browne-Ferrigno and Muth, 2006; Rhodes and Fletcher, 2013). The study aims to draw from these studies to explore governors' early socialisation and influence to governorship and then consider governors' role identity transformation in FE colleges.

The research was also shaped by literature on FE governance that reveals that governors need particular experience and skills in order for them to be able to inform and shape the leadership of FE colleges. Key authors in this area are Cornforth and Edwards (1999) and Gleeson et al., (2010). The theme that emerged from these studies is that of "governors' calibre and chemistry", which focuses predominantly on governors personal attributes at the expense of the values and ethos needed for working in FE Colleges.

The study also draws on literature on governor-principal (G-P) relationship balance (French and Raven, 1959; Murray, 1996; Hill 2006, 2013; Gleeson et al., 2010). A key work by Murray (1996), on four common patterns of power, for example, was very important in shaping this study. Murray suggests four common patterns of power that are possible in FE colleges:

- 'Chief Executive Officer-dominant' pattern,
- The 'board-dominant' pattern,
- The 'staff-dominant' and

- *'Collective governance'.*

Basing on these G-P power relationships, this study proposed and uses Coleman's (2011) all-encompassing collaboration model as the best model for providing leadership that is needed in an internal collaboration such as an FE college. The study will add to Coleman's model in explaining the findings. Coleman's (2011) model has the following elements of collaborative leadership: *Authentic, relational, Distributed, Political and Constitutive leadership.* He argues that the effective practice of collaborative leadership depends on how leaders for instance governors and principals are able to skilfully combine all the above elements within their own context to maximise outcomes.

The final key area of research that helped to frame this study has been drawn from literature on the schools sector (Thody, 1994; Gray et al., 1996; Hopkins, 1996, 2001; Carter, 1998; Bush and Gamage, 2001; Bush and Heystek, 2003; Earley and Weindling 2004; Ranson et al., 2005b; Ranson and Jones, 2010; James et al., 2010). These writers summarise the formal responsibilities of governors in the schools' sector and concur that governors can play very important roles in school improvement. They portray a diverse role of governors with the following three cited as the main important ones: to provide a strategic view, to act as a critical friend and to ensure accountability. This way of conceptualising the governing body's role has since been enshrined in legislation (Education Act, 2002) and these 3 roles underpin the inspection framework when examining the leadership and management of schools. All the above key researches have greatly helped in framing this study.

Justification for the Research

This investigation is worth doing for a number of reasons. First, it will contribute knowledge and understanding to FE practitioners, prospective governors, incumbency governors and principals about the purpose of FE governance, the conceptualisation of the roles and responsibilities of governors and how they compare with those of principals in practice, the G-P relationship balance and then examine the extent to which the work of governors contribute to FE college improvement. While the main focus is on FE governors and their role in college improvement, it is important to acknowledge that college governance is complex and is not only confined to governors, but it also involves principals, professionals, senior managers, clerks, community, business and wider agencies, including external audit and inspection regimes (Gleeson et al., 2010). Therefore, in this broad context, knowledge and understanding of what FE governors do in practice is important in understanding their contributions to college improvement, partnership working and leadership in the FE sector. As commented by Jameson (2003) "...further research may be needed to look at the practical implications of shared governance and strategic leadership in Adult Community Learning providers…" (:21).

Furthermore, my experience as a governor in a local school has triggered interest in this topic. From that personal experience, I realised that the role is quite demanding, but astonishingly, many people, including governors themselves do not understand exactly what they are expected to do in schools and colleges, let alone on how their roles and responsibilities differ from those of principals. In this light, it is the researcher's conviction that an understanding of what governors do in practice can

help in demarcating the responsibilities of governors and senior professional staff and help governors to avoid drifting into what Cornforth and Edwards (1999:8) call a "confused involvement with operational matters…"

Finally, knowledge derived from recent Ofsted Inspection reports (2012) and personal knowledge gained in my studies in Leaders and Leadership in education have revealed that, much less attention has been given in academic and professional literature to the role of FE governance in college improvement. This is despite the fact that two Ofsted reports published in 2004 acknowledge the contribution of governance to both successful and failing FE colleges (Schofield, 2009). Consequently, in the current dominant discourse of "college improvement" by central government, it is arguably time that governors' role in college improvement is subjected to an in-depth study for the benefit of aspiring governors, incumbent governors and principals.

Research Methodology and Methods

In order to examine the role of governors in college improvement and related issues, the research adopted a case study approach. Specifically I studied governance in 6 colleges as individual cases, by interviewing the chair of SC governors, the principal and at least one SC governor. Data obtained through these individual interviews were supplemented by analysing at least one example of SC governors' meeting minutes report from each of the 6 colleges. The use of semi-structured interviews supplemented by documentary analysis was selected in order to get rich data that

focused specifically on the role of governance in college improvement. This is a small scale research project that has been designed to contribute understanding of the role of governance in college improvement and to address the assessment requirements of a Doctor of Education programme of study.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into 6 chapters. The first part, Chapter 1, introduces the subject area, presents the research questions, places the study into context by providing a justification for the research and then summarises the literature that has influenced the study. Chapter 2 is a critical literature review. It starts by indicating how I conducted my literature search, discusses the literature and conceptual frameworks which underpin this study, identifying gaps in knowledge and linking them to this study. The third part, Chapter 3, explains the research design of the study to locate and justify the research approach taken. It presents a rationale for the methodology and methods used in the study, including details of the sample, the method of data analysis and ends with discussing research management and the ethical issues underpinning the study. Chapter 4 presents the empirical findings of the study, broken down into themes relating to the research questions that underpin this study and are supported by tables and quotations from informants. Chapter 5 discusses the themes developed through the study. It examines the findings in relation to the substantive, theoretical and methodological issues, linking key findings to both the research questions and literature reviewed. Finally, Chapter 6 summarises the findings and outcomes of the research, drawing conclusions in the light of the

findings and linking with previous research. It also indicates the implications of the research and ends by suggesting further work that could be done to advance the research agenda in this area.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

International interest in educational governance has increased in recent years. However, few studies specifically focus on the role of governors in Further Education (FE) colleges and how their work contributes to college improvement. This is quite astonishing considering that the FE sector has undergone considerable changes following the 1992 Further and Higher Education Incorporation Act (FHEA), which granted FE colleges' autonomous status and remarkably increased the responsibilities of FE governing bodies (GBs). As noted by Gleeson and Shain (1999), after incorporation the whole responsibility for a college's future rested with the GB. Consequently, the role of FE college governors in college improvement has certainly to be considered in this context.

In order to investigate the role of FE governors in college improvement, the research reviewed different sorts of literature. Academic research publications, based on both empirical data and on scholarship as well as practitioner publications in professional journals based on accounts of personal and professional experience were reviewed. A review of Government policies and papers from organisations such as Ofsted, Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and Association of Colleges (AoC) was also carried out. The majority of authors are located in the United Kingdom (UK) and Europe, although the review also drew from writers in North America, South Africa and Australia to achieve a more diverse and balanced review. As there is under representation of FE governance

studies, literature is drawn from other sectors, particularly the compulsory education sector, where more extensive studies are available. However, this literature is not as extensive as in other aspects of the leadership and management of colleges.

The process of searching for relevant literature that underpins this research begins by searching Sources from the university library. This was done through Title/Author/key word/topic searches. The scope of the search was initially limited to FE governance, but problems eliciting enough results meant that this was extended to include the schools sector. The following key search terms were used to widen the number of hits: 'governing body', 'management committees', 'board of trustees', 'school governance', 'board member'(s) and 'corporation'. This yielded a number of useful sources such as Bennett, (2002); Khooiman (2003); Earley and Weindling (2004); Bush, (2003) and Cornforth, (2003). The date parameters were set from 1992 to 2013, because 1992 signalled the date when FE colleges became autonomous from local authority (LA) control. As a result, it was decided that 1992 would be the earliest date that would be included in the search, with 2013 being the most recent as this would give a view of what was being investigated in the areas directly covered by the study. Secondly, an electronic search of Practitioner publications in professional journals such as 'Management in Education' (MIE) and 'Educational Management, Administration and Leadership' (EMAL) was also carried out. These journals were considered important because they cover a range of topics on contemporary issues on educational leadership including education governance, management and administration and are based on accounts of personal and professional experiences.

This search helped me to locate recent articles specific to FE governance such as Gleeson and Shain, (1999); Ranson, (2008); Gleeson et al., (2010); Hill, 2013. Work by these authors was then reviewed, together with references and bibliographies, which provided further information of other relevant works. Thirdly, I examined Internet search engines, such as 'Google Scholar', to identify any pertinent articles which I may have missed through a 'key word' and 'key author' search within the education governance field. Finally, a web-based electronic search for websites that are dedicated specifically to FE colleges such as the Association of Colleges (AoC) www.aoc.co.uk which represent and promote the interests of colleges and provide members with professional support services, and LSIS (www.lsis.org.uk) particularly their 'Excellencegateway' website, which is dedicated for supporting skills and improving practice in the skills sector were also carried out. These studies are considered vital in providing both theoretical concepts and research approaches to underpin this research, and in suggesting key themes to understand FE governance in practice. This review is thematic, rather than historical.

Based on the above activities, I identified 5 key areas that I thought would be essential to review as these underpin my research and provide theoretical frameworks upon which this thesis could be based and it is these that are reviewed in this chapter. Section 1 reviews literature on FE incorporation and its consequences. This was considered important because incorporation affected and shaped the current role of governors and principals in FE colleges. Section 2 reviews literature on models of corporate governance followed by a conceptualisation of the purpose (s) of college governance. Governors' early socialisation and influence to

governorship in later life; the skills and experience necessary for one to be an effective FE governor and the roles and responsibilities of principals and then governors are considered as sub-headings under Section 3: 'Governance practice in FE colleges'. In the penultimate section (Section 4) literature on governor-principal (G-P) relationship balance is reviewed, with a view of understanding how this impedes or supports important decision-making in FE colleges–emphasising the importance of collaborative working between governors and principals in order to achieve collaborative advantage necessary in promoting college improvement. The final section (Section 5) draws much from literature on the schools sector to consider the role of governors in college improvement. As pointed out earlier on, this is important since the 1992 Act invested them with greater powers, their role in FE improvement has to be considered. At the end of the chapter an overall summary is given.

What is Education Governance?

Policy literature is not clear on what education governance is or what it is to govern (James et al., 2013). In a recent study (Masunga, 2013) this author stressed that, although education governance is regarded as a 'sine qua non' of leadership in education, defining the concept of 'governance' is not easy as there are many competing theories about what governance actually means (*see Appendix, 7).* Reviewing the literature surrounding 'governance' was useful in order to place the concept of 'education governance' into context. The term governance is used in different ways in many disciplines such as Management, Public Administration, Public

policy and Politics (Khooiman, 2003). For Khooiman (2003), 'governance' is the totality of theoretical conceptions on governing. Rhodes (1997) prefers the term "narrative" and refers to governance as "self-organising, inter-organisational networks characterised by interdependence, resource exchange, rules of the game and significant autonomy from the state" (:15), whereas Gleeson and Shain (1999) use the term to refer to the transfer of powers in FE from locally elected to appointed governors, as part of a centrally controlled process of financial and management devolution at college level.

Indeed, it is evident from literature (Rhodes, 1997; Parnham, 1998; Pierre, 2000; Peters, 2000; Cornforth, 2003; Khooiman, 2003) that there is a lack of conceptual clarity on what 'governance' is. However, in this thesis, the main focus is on the organisational level, and the term is primarily used to refer to the arrangements for organisational and corporate governance-that is the system by which FE organisations are directed, controlled and made accountable (Cornforth, 2003). In other words, as Parnham (1998) puts it, FE governance involves "an oversight of the activities of a college" (:297). Central to this, is the organisation's governing body (GB) which carries formal responsibilities for the organisation. The review will now turn to incorporation and its consequences on FE governance.

Section 1: FE Incorporation

Incorporation heralded a new era in the governance of English FE colleges, whose ramifications are still being felt 20 years on. Arguably, much of current FE

governance practices have a bearing to the 1992 Act. This Act, which took effect on 1 April 1993, removed all FE colleges from Local Authority (LA) control and granted them corporate independent status (Gleeson and Shain, 1999), which subsequently, had some far-reaching consequences on the governance of FE colleges. Some of the consequences pertinent to this study are discussed below.

Composition of FE Governing Bodies

The first major consequence of the 1992 FHEA was that it determined the composition of GBs, with a requirement of a minimum of 50% business and industrial representation and a maximum 20% local authority representation, which excluded LEAs, but not Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) representation (Elliott, 1996; Gleeson and Shain, 1999).

Not surprisingly in Hill's (2013) perspective, the whole composition of FE GBs from April, 1993, was made up of essentially two types of governors – external business governors and the rest (principals, college staff and students, local authority, and co-opted governors). Hill (2013) believes that, business governors were put in control of GBs because the then Conservative government thought that such types of governors would be able to cut costs through breaking up previous LA agreements on contracts of employment and increase income through marketing. In consequence, FE governance research (Bargh et al., 1996; Gleeson and Shain, 1999; Cornforth and Edwards, 1998,1999; Bennett, 2002) agree that new legislation and regulation required colleges to recruit people with business experience to serve as governors and having a high number of governors with a business background in

their GBs was a source of pride for FE principals. For example, Cornforth and Edwards (1999:358) point out that "the principal wished his college to be seen as businesslike as possible by his peers and the presence of senior business executives on his board was a matter of some pride to him in FE circles".

Ostensibly, whilst the policy rationale for packing FE GBs with representatives from industry and business was to provide a clearer business steer for FE, this has succeeded more in terms of the way colleges are managed than in relation to their pedagogic functions (Gleeson and Shain, 1999). These newly appointed business governors did not have experience of public service and the ethos of working in FE Colleges. As noted in the Hodge Report (1998:18):

> Essentially inexperienced governors, with no knowledge of public service traditions and ethos, were let loose on an important section of the economy, FE, overseen by a government remote from the needs of typical students in this sector

Some writers (Gleeson and Shain, 1999; Bennett, 2002) also add that, in addition to forcing colleges to recruit people with business experience to serve as governors, colleges were also compelled to compete with other educational organisations and to face closure if student demand or satisfaction fell to unacceptable levels. As opined by Cornforth and Edwards, (1999), "these changes had helped to create a normative climate in which the idea of a college as a business and a more managerial view of governance, had gained increasing resonance at the expense of one that emphasised local political accountability" (:358). The selection policy of the board reflected and reinforced this climate.

However, as financial pressures mounted on colleges in the period 1993-1999 and major industrial action over reduced pay and poor working conditions, the sector has according to Unison (1998) "been slurred, by tales of sleaze, corruption and incompetence at the most senior levels" (Gleeson and Shain, 1999:549). With more than 50% of colleges defined as financially weak (FEFC, News, 1998), many colleges have been tempted to play the market entering into "extended franchising and commercial ventures which has nothing to do with the FE needs of their local communities" (Gleeson and Shain, 1999:549). There were also widespread financial irregularities – for example the earlier case of Wirral Metropolitan College when the FEFC took the unprecedented step of seeking to dismiss all members of the college's GB following a £9 million deficit.

Subsequently, this situation coupled with an absence of democratic governance and accountability, has coincided with the publication of 2 widely publicised reports (Kennedy, 1997; Hodge, 1998), both of which following Nolan (1996), have been highly critical of standards of probity and management in the FE sector (FEFC, 1998; DfEE, 1998). Prior to the Nolan Report on Standards in Public life (1996) governor recruitment was largely informal and prospective governors would be recommended by the Chair or the Principal (Parnham, 1998). Research published ensuing the year of the Nolan Report (1996) found that board membership was largely of white middle-class men, most of whom had no personal experience of FE (Drljaca 1999). The Nolan Report recommended new systems of openness and Search Committees to be established to oversee, recommending, advertising and interviewing people for the board (Drljaca, 1999). The Hodge Report (1998) for example, made more general

recommendations to re-introduce democratic access and transparency. Crucially, it required that college governors be "truly representative of the college's local community" (Parnham 1998:302). As a result, college governors were being encouraged to move away from a business approach to governance to a stakeholder approach focused more on the local community and educational matters (Davies, 2002).

Following from the above reports, GB membership began to change gradually to include more LA and community governors. A change that in Hill's (2013) terms reflects the introduction of a more diversified approach to college GB membership by the New Labour government in 1997, through an equalisation of membership status and the type of governors to feature in the formation of an FE GB, for example business governors, LA nominated governors, community nominated governors, co-opted governors, parent governors, student governors, staff governors and the principal. It is believed that this broadening of the membership base was mainly a reaction to some high profile financial and governance collapses of colleges such as Derby, Wilmorton, Cricklade, Bilston, Stoke-on-Trent, Wirral, Halton and Gwent (Gleeson et al., 2010; Hill, 2013). The New Labour government also made it clear in 1999 that, each college GB had to focus on the quality of education within the college. As Horsfall (2001:1) affirms "the need to consider how corporation organised itself to meet challenges of the 'Standards Agenda' became a dominant feature in 1999 and was formally notified to the FE sector in FEFC Circular 99/30". This was a shift from the previous trend where finance had driven GB priorities (Hill and Sharp, 2003).

More recently, a college-determined governor skills and diversity matrix evolved as the guide to each college GB membership within the framework of the Instruments of Government. The Articles of Government were amended in 2007 to confirm the GB's responsibility for the quality of learner performance, confirming the progress of the previous years as the new student success benchmark data showed the relative performance of learners and their colleges (DIUS, 2007). Such policy changes have prompted writers like Gleeson et al., (2010) to comment of a paradigm shift where the locus of FE governance is moving from colleges to the diverse communities that they serve. Indeed, as succinctly said by Gleeson et al., (2010:14):

> In this context, the process of encouraging FE colleges to engage with their communities is perhaps more important than requiring them to respond to market rhetoric…that appears distant from the main issue of improving the quality of FE provision…

Despite the proposed shift in GBs priorities from business to community and educational matters, a number of writers (Gleeson and Shain, 1999; Davies, 2002; Gleeson et al., 2010; Ofsted, 2012; Rogers 2012) seem adamant to agree on the confidence of FE GB in dealing with educational matters and also acknowledge limited research into this area of an FE GB's work.

However, in a survey of 447 FE colleges in England and Wales, Davies (2002), suggests that, changes in the composition of GBs have been gradual in line with expectations, but also commented that GB workloads had significantly increased. The author goes on to suggest that most GBs had additional work to do before feeling fully and justifiably confident in their ability to oversee their colleges' core educational role. A point also echoed earlier by Cornforth and Edwards, (1999).

Following from Davies (2002), Gleeson et al., (2010) observe that the membership of GBs is currently short of educationists and this is hindering GBs' role in the core business of teaching, learning and the student experience. Educational matters also represented an area in which many governors felt least "expert", and where they were least confident about observing the demarcation between the roles of governor, manager and teacher (Davies, 2002). He proceeds to point out that, the problems in getting to grips with educational performance issues are compounded by difficulties in defining and then obtaining the type of "information that would enable governors to agree appropriate targets and to monitor performance against them" (Davies (2002:13). More recently governors were challenged to focus more on educational rather than business matters (Davies, 2002; Ofsted, 2012; Rogers, 2012). Despite these repeated calls, it is not clear to what extent individual FE GBs have responded to the "Standards Agenda" and its consequences on the composition of GBs in general. A lacuna this thesis aims to address by considering the contribution role of SC governors to college improvement.

On the contrary, a more recent study by Hill (2013) observes that GBs can now approve quality of teaching and learning strategies; offer observer opportunities to students at GB meetings and that many governors can now engage informally with students at learners' success events, end of year shows, curriculum visits and student parliament. However, Hill's (2013) conclusions are based on a very limited number of publications into the practice of FE governance.

Hence, despite initial euphoria which met incorporation in 1993, the financial and management implications of a "more or less" funding model soon became a major cause of concern for governors, principals and senior managers with little experience of running "privatised" public corporations. The changed atmosphere also affected relations between managers and lecturers, resulting in protracted industrial disputes over contracts, pay and working conditions. As remarked by Avis et al. (2002), one result of incorporation was a mass exodus of 20.000 managers and lecturers from the FE sector because of the restructuring that followed incorporation.

From the foregoing review, it is clear that incorporation saw a period of momentous changes of far-reaching consequences in FE colleges (Gronn, 1999). While earlier literature provide us with some descriptive details of the consequences of incorporation, it fails short to provide us with a complete answer on the impact of increased functions for which the GB was responsible following Incorporation. It is also clear that, although colleges were backed out of LA control, made independent entities with charitable status, were given governance requirement by stature and then told to be free, independent and to create their own future, there were no clear rules or policies given on how these institutions were going to be governed and also no one has re-examined that basic decision to see if what was created in 1992 was or is fit for purpose today.

This section has therefore shaped and influenced this thesis by highlighting the need to reconsider the purpose of FE governance; examine the roles and responsibilities of FE governors and principles; governor's early socialisation and influence to FE

governorship; governor skills and experience; relationship balance between governors and principals and to explore the contribution role of governance to college improvement in light of the overall college environment following from incorporation. These topics will be reviewed one after the other in sections below. However, the review will first consider corporate models of governance that are possible in FE colleges and then go straight on to theorise the purpose that FE governance serves.

Section 2: Models of Governance

In order to understand the contribution role of governors in FE college improvement in practice, it is necessary, first to conceptualise their roles. However, the governance of public and non-profit organisations such as FE colleges is relatively under-theorised in comparison with governance of business corporations (Cornforth and Edwards, 1999; Cornforth, 2003). Drawing upon the roles of GBs in the private sector, Cornforth (2003) proposes parallel models of governance that can help us to conceptualise the roles of corporate boards in FE colleges. Below is an outline of these models.

The Principal-agency model: It assumes that the owners of an enterprise and those that manage it have different interests. From this perspective, the main function of the board is to control managers (managerial compliance). The board receives reports from managers, and establish systems of accountability and reporting in order that the board can control the operational management.

Although many aspects of this perspective have relevance in most public organisations, one difficult in applying this model to FE colleges is that there is an ambiguity over who owns these institutions. Is it the general public, tax payers or the government itself? As Parnham (1998) opines, governing bodies in FE colleges in England are in an ambiguous position because colleges are institutions which are both public and private – they are independently financially managed as 'businesses', yet at the same time they are public institutions which were formed as "non-profit organisations to serve the community" (:307).

The Partnership model: It assumes that managers want to do a good job and will act as effective stewards of an organisation's resources. As a result, managers and owners of an organisation are seen as partners. Hence, the main function of the board is to improve organisational performance rather than conformance or compliance. The role of the board is primarily strategic, to work with management to improve strategic and to add value to top decisions. From this perspective, board members should be selected on the basis of their expertise and contacts so that they are in a position to add value to the organisation's decisions.

Stakeholder model: This notion is based on the assumption that certain groups or individuals have an interest, or a "stake" in the activities of an institution (Bush and Heystek, 2003). By incorporating different stakeholders on the board, it is expected that organisations will be more likely to respond to broader social interests than the narrow interests of one group. The stakeholder "representatives" are elected or nominated by the existing board (James et al., 2010).

The stakeholder model has been widely applied in education governance in the UK, where government reforms have specified the involvement of various stakeholders on GBs. For example, when FE colleges were taken out of LEA control, the government specified that at least half of the governors should have a business background. Due to concerns about lack of balance and accountability the composition was broadened by the government in 1999 to include representatives of "staff, students, the local authority and community" (Cornforth, 2003:10). According to Jones and Ranson (2010), the principal underlying the constitution of such stakeholder governing bodies in the schools sector has been that schools will only work well when the different constituencies which have an interest in the success of the school are provided with a space to express their voice and reach agreement about the purpose and practices that will shape the education of children in the school. Similarly, college governors have been encouraged to move away from a business approach to governance to a stakeholder approach focused more on the local community and educational matters (Davies 2002).

The Co-optional model: It views organisations as interdependent with their environment. So, the main function of the board is to maintain good relations with key external stake-holders. From this perspective, the role of the board is one of 'boundary spanning'. Board members are selected for the important external and knowledge they can bring to the organisation, and to try to co-opt external influences

A Democratic model: Sees the job of the board as to represent the interests of one or more constituencies or groups the organisation serves. The role of the board is to choose between the interests of different groups and set the overall policy of the organisation, which can then be implemented by staff. Central to this view is that any member of the electorate or membership can put himself forward for election as a board member. Expertise is not a central requirement.

Managerial hegemony theory: a "rubber stamp" model assumes that although "owners" may legally own and control large corporations, they no longer effectively control them, control having being ceded to a new professional management class. From this perspective the board ends up as a "rubber stamp" for managerial decisions. Its function is mainly symbolic to give legitimacy to management decisions.

The main features of these different perspectives are summarised in Table 1 overleaf:

Theory	Interests	Board members	Board role	Model
Agency Theory	Owners and managers have different interests	Owners' perspectives	Compliance/conformance: safeguard owners' interests Oversee management Check compliance	Compliance model
Stewardship theory	Owners and managers share interests	Experts	Improve performance: Add value to top decisions/strategy partner/support management	Partnership model
Democratic perspective	Members/the public contain different interests	Lay representatives	Political: represent constituents/members reconcile conflicts Make policy Control executive	Democratic model
Stakeholder theory	Stakeholders have different interests	Stakeholders representatives: elected or appointed by stakeholder groups	Balancing stakeholders' needs make policy/strategy Control management	Stakeholder model
Resource dependency theory	Stakeholders and organisation have different interests	Chosen for influence with key stakeholders	Boundary spanning: secure resources Maintain stakeholder relations, being external perspective	Co-option model
Managerial hegemony theory	Owners and managers have different interests	Owners' representatives	Largely symbolic: ratify decisions, give legitimacy, managers have real power	"Rubber-stamp" model

Table1. A comparison of theoretical perspectives on organisational governance (adapted from Cornforth, 2003:12)

While these corporate models of governance provide us with useful theoretical conceptions of the roles of GBs in public organisations such as FE colleges, they have been broadly branded unsuitable for FE colleges (Bennett, 2002). This is partly because, taken individually, these models are one-dimensional and have been criticised for illuminating only one particular aspect of the GB's work. Subsequently, there has been growing calls of an all-encompassing conceptual framework suitable for FE governance. Such a perspective could integrate insights from all the above

models. This study will draw from these corporate models of governance to conceptualise the purpose of FE governance in contemporary FE colleges.

What is the Purpose of FE Governance?

Literature on FE governance (Gleeson and Shain, 1999; Shoffield; 2009; Gleeson et al., 2010) concur that the purpose of FE governance is not clearly defined. While the Articles of Government clearly expressed 6 major responsibilities for GBs and maintain that GBs are accountable to funders, staff and students, academic literature seem to indicate that the purpose that governance serves in FE is ambiguous.

Earlier research by Gleeson and Shain (1999) indicate that FE governance serves the dual purpose of transferring business values into the corporate culture of FE and at the same time, injecting greater market and managerial realism into an area of public sector education 'seen to be carrying excess fat and suffering from dogged sloth' (:556). In a later study, that focuses on the purpose of college governance at a time when the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) commissioning era was ending and new government bodies responsible for FE and training arriving, Gleeson et al., (2010) affirm that the purpose of FE governance is not predefined, and is left to each college GB to address for themselves. A point also echoed by Shoffield (2009). This seems contrary to the schools sector where the 1998 School Standards and Framework Act, sees the purpose of a GB as helping to provide the best possible education for the pupils in their schools (Scanlon et al., 1999). A perspective that resonates strongly with James et al., (2010) study that sees school governance as

predominantly serving two purposes: to ensure institutional legitimacy and effectiveness. A recent LSIS, (2010) study also reveals 3 different primary purposes of education governance across different types of organisations that make up the skills sector including FE colleges as shown in Figure 1.
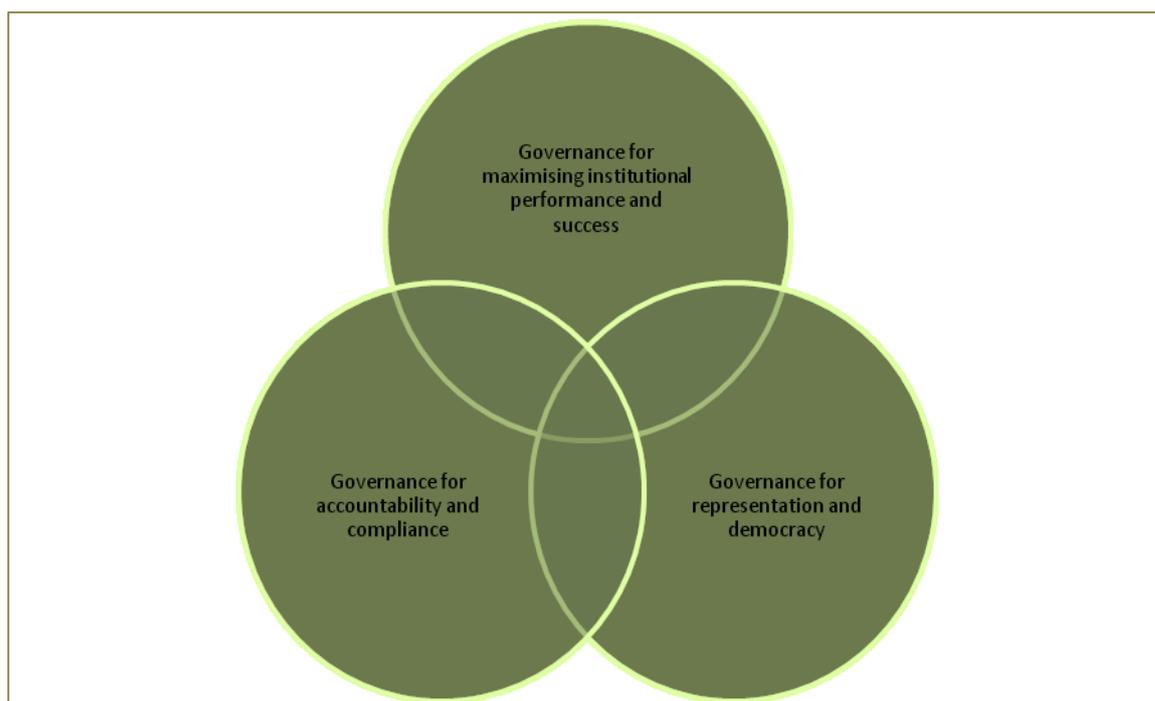
Figure 1: Different Primary Purposes for Governance in the Skills Sector (adapted from LSIS, 2010)

Governance for maximising institutional performance and success: is regarded as one main purpose of FE governance. According to this perspective, governance should add value to organisational outcomes. This perspective is similar to the partnership model of governance described above. Hence, the main function of the GB is to improve organisational performance and success rather than conformance or compliance. From this perspective, GB members should be selected on the basis on their expertise and contacts so that they are in a position to add value to

organisational decisions-which suits very well with the purpose of governance in universities and many charities.

Governance for accountabilities and compliance: is also seen as another purpose of governance in this regard, and this has been largely seen as the dominant purpose of governance in the public sector. In the FE sector this is primarily the domain of the LSC (LSIS, 2010). Here the focus is on FE colleges implementing agreed policy (which may not be their own) meeting defined performance targets, avoiding perceived risks and assuming compliance with the legal and regulatory requirements. However, there are clear tensions between this purpose and that of maximising institutional performance and success.

Finally *governance for representation and democracy:* is also seen as another major purpose of governance in many educational institutions. Much of the focus on this is on engagement, participation and democracy. The focus of effective governance in this regard is on how decisions are made not on how sound they are. Colleges that have strong links with the local community see this as their main purpose of governance and this is particularly the case where collaboration rather than competition is exercised. Staff and parents participation may work best within this approach (LSIS, 2010). Presumably, this purpose seems the most fit with the work of FE governors in this study. In this light, the study will use this conceptual framework to explain empirical findings from FE governors and principals on the purpose(s) of FE governance. Having reviewed the purpose of FE governance, the review will now move to Section 3 'Governance practice in the FE Sector' which is divided into 3 sub-

sections: governors' early socialisation and influence to FE governorship; the experience and 'skills' necessary for one to be an effective FE governor and the roles and responsibilities of FE principals and then governors.

Section 3: Governance Practice in the FE Sector

FE English colleges are similar to Institute of Technology and FE in Australia and Community Colleges in America (Gleeson et al., 2010). They mainly provide post-school, predominantly vocational education and are sometimes referred to as General Further Education Colleges (GFECs) (Burchill, 2000). These FE colleges are managed by principals and other senior managers such as associate principals (deputies), faculty deans and other site managers and they carter for both young people and adults (Fosters, 2005). In light of their traditionally strong vocational focus, "FE Colleges are more influenced by the nature of the local community, and its industry and commerce than most other educational institutions" (Guide for FE governors, 2008:10). Governance provisions in these colleges are underpinned by law. The FHEA 1992 enabled the Secretary of State to form "FE corporations" as exempt charities with principal powers to provide further, higher and secondary education and to supply goods and services in connection with the provision of education (Hill, 2013). The name GB (the enactment entity) occasionally is used interchangeably with corporation (the FE legal entity) in FE literature. Governance players in FE colleges include the chair of the corporation, governors, principals, senior staff and the clerk to the corporation (Hill, 2013).

Broadly, there are 2 types of governance systems that are used in English FE colleges. The first is based upon the formation of, typically, 5 committees, with a remit for scrutiny and detailed overviews of a corporate theme, for example the finance, learner performance and estates (Hill, 2013). This approach is sometimes referred to as the 'traditional' model. The second approach places emphasis on the GB meeting as a whole, with minimal committee activity beyond the basic requirements of Search and Audit committees. This system is popularly known as 'policy governance' (Carver, 1997; Oliver, 2009) or simply dubbed as the "Carver approach" (Shoffield, 2009:15). However, this study focuses on the 'traditional approach' to FE governance because all 6 college GBs studied are modelled on this approach to governance.

Literature on the "traditional approach" to FE college governance indicates that the size of an FE GB varies from 14 to 24 members (Bennett, 2002; Davies, 2002). More specifically, Cornforth and Edward's (1999) observed that a 'corporation' consisted of 16 members, of whom 8 were independent, 3 were co-opted,1 was nominated by the Local TEC, 2 were elected from the staff, and 1 from the student and 1 was the principal. The clerk to the corporation was accountable to the board, had office facilities, and attended all meetings. Senior managers attended and reported to both full board and relevant sub-committees. A typical example of a "traditional GB" structure is illustrated in Figure 2.
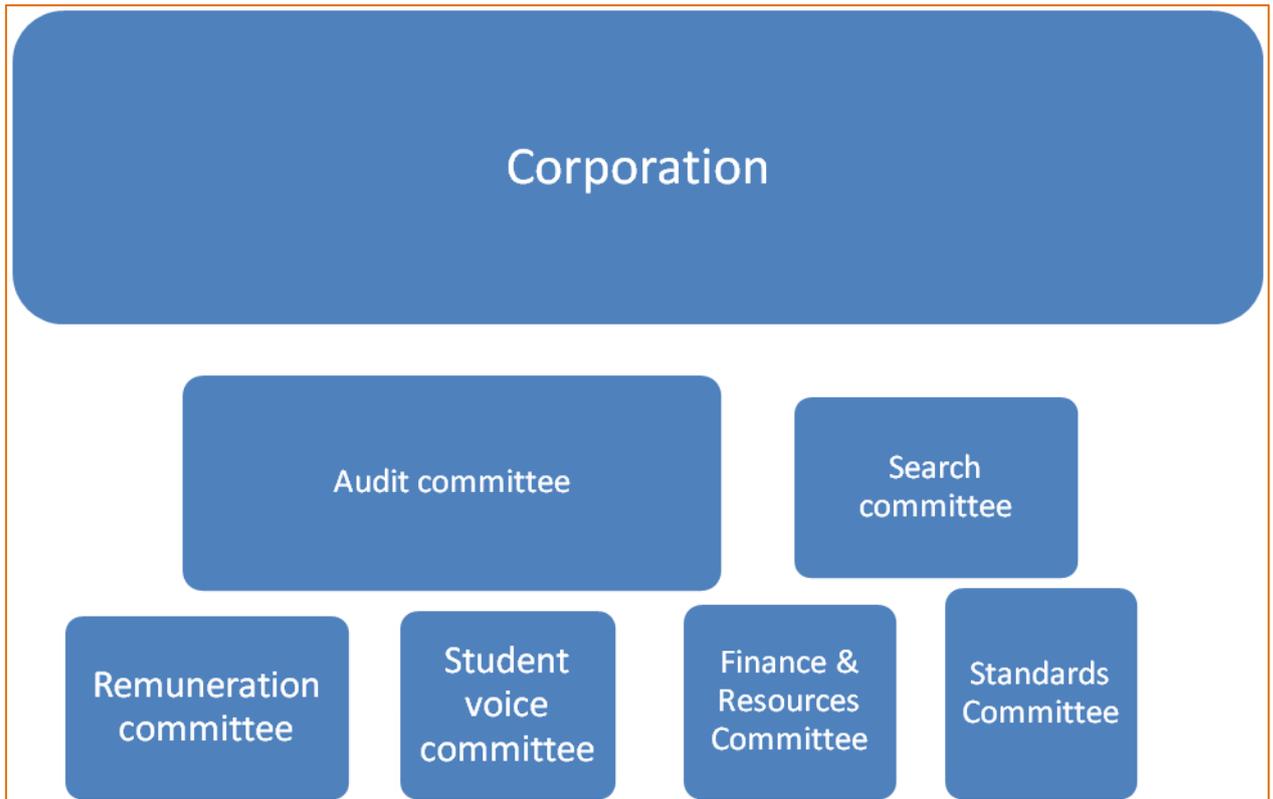
Figure 2: Structure of a 'Traditional' FE Governing Body (adapted from Cornforth and Edwards, 1999:358)

Committees are normally chaired by governors who have expertise in the particular area for instance Finance, Education, Estates etc. The Audit and Search Committees are the only compulsory ones under the Instrument and Articles of government. However, it is Standards Committee (SC) governors who are tasked by FE GBs with the responsibility of monitoring students' performance, teaching and learning, quality assurance processes, and the overall educational character of the college. As stated in the Guide for FE governors, (2008:10) the education committee (SC), where one exists, have an important role to play in examining and advising the GB about the college' overall academic provision. Therefore, the focus on SC governors in this study is well made considering their perceived role in FE college improvement. The

next sub-section considers governors' early socialisation and its influence to FE governorship in later life.

Governors' Early Socialisation and Influence to Governorship

There is a dearth of literature on governors' early socialisation and what influences individuals to be FE college governors in later life, despite acknowledgements from literature (Gleeson and Shain, 1999; Davies, 2002; Gleeson et al., 2010; Hill, 2013) that the responsibilities expected from governors increased significantly after 1993. However, studies of educational leadership have shown that early socialisation can play a very important role in shaping and paving the way for future leaders (Gronn, 1999; Ribbins, 2003; Inman, 2011). These authors inform us that factors such as family background, social mobility, peer groups and education play a very important role in shaping future leaders. These "agencies", especially those that exert their influence during the early years shape the personality of a future head teacher by generating what Ribbins, (2003:23) calls a "conception of self along with the rudiments of a work style, attitude and outlook." Apparently, little is known from academic literature on the relationship between governors' early socialisation and its influence on governorship in the FE sector - a gap this study aims to address.

Nonetheless, literature on what motivates individuals to become governors in FE colleges offers a useful road map on understanding why individuals choose to become FE governors. A study by Davies, (2002) for example, suggest that individuals may decide to be governors in FE colleges because they want to

contribute with their expertise; to do their bits to support further education; to help ensure that the college was responsive to the local community and to ensure that the college is responsive to local employers. The study aims to tap from Davies's (2002) findings to explain why individuals became FE governors in contemporary colleges.

From the foregoing literature review, it is clear that, while limited literature provides us with a road map on what motivates individuals to be FE governors, very little is known about governors' early socialisation and its influence on governorship in later life. In a similar way, reviewed literature on the composition of FE GBs provides us with useful recommendations on the type of governors to be recruited for each particular FE College GB, for example business, community and LA governors, but very limited research has specifically considered how these newly recruited FE college governors make a successful transition into governorship.

However, a growing number of studies of educational leadership (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Browne-Ferrigno and Muth, 2006; Smith and Boyd, 2012; Page, 2013; Rhodes and Fletcher, 2013; Rhodes, 2013) have begun to show the importance of the management of successful transition to leadership. For example, Browne-Ferrigno, (2003), in work on the transition to leadership in USA outlines 4 key elements which she regards as essential in the transformational process to headship:

- Role conceptualisation which is related to participants' understanding about the roles and responsibilities of a school principal.

- Initial socialisation into a new community of practice where transformation is related to understanding the need for changed professional behaviour appropriate to the role of principal.

- Role-identity transformation where professional growth is indicated by the mind-set shift of participants to that of an educational leader.

- Purposeful engagement based on career aspirations where professional growth is indicated by desire to gain knowledge, confidence, support and the skill set required to achieve the transition to the role of principal.

Browne-Ferrigno (2003) emphasises socialisation and role identity transformation in her framework for transition to headship. Socialisation here is taken to mean a process by which individuals, from early age, learn to behave and act in particular ways in order to belong to a given group or society (Marsh and Keating, 2006). Elsewhere, Rhodes (2013), in a more recent study of the 'Transformation of Educational Practitioners into Educational Researchers', which draws on literature pertaining to identity change (Beijaard et al., 2004; Hooge et al., 2011), self-conception (Kelchtermans, 1993), transformational learning theory (Mezirow, 1996, 1997, 2000) and constructive developmental theory, emphasises that successful transformation requires a change in an individual's specific capabilities and world view, which involves a re-understanding of the self and one's beliefs and is reflected in a change in behaviour. Likewise Smith and Boyd, (2012) in a study of recently appointed nurses and midwifery lecturers found a supportive culture underpinning the admittedly challenging transition-a view I posit with regard to governors' transition to governorship in this study. The review now turns to the experience and skills necessary for one to be an effective FE governor.

Governors' Experience and Skills

Academic literature acknowledges important skills and particular experience for governors to have, in order to be able to effectively contribute to FE governance (Cornforth and Edwards 1999; Bennett, 2002; Gleeson et al., 2010). According to Cornforth and Edwards (1998), key factors in the relatively powerful strategic contribution of a College GB seem to have been the selection of GB members for their expertise and experience in contributing to the strategic leadership of FE colleges. Subsequently, governors with a business background dominated FE GBs following incorporation because most principals felt that bringing in governors from a business community would strengthen the ability of the GB to carry out its role (Bennet, 2002). In support of this view, Cornforth and Edwards (1999) point out that, the GB was now more questioning of what management did and was able to bring in experience from elsewhere. These writers believe that business governors were experienced and skilled that they knew how and when to intervene and expose management proposals to critical scrutiny. Conversely, citing governors in their 'school' case study sample, these authors state that: few knew how to analyse and pick out important points from the information they received; or when and how to ask the right questions; or how to be both supportive and constructively critical of management proposals; or how to prioritise strategic issues for discussion and how to balance formal meeting attendance with informal counsel outside meetings. They attribute these issues to lack of experience among GB members; lack of appropriate training; and that board members do not spent enough time considering and reflecting on their role.

These authors conclude by reiterating that most of the problems experienced by governors stem mainly from the lack of clarity on the role of the GB. Once roles are clarified, they continued, boards will be in a better position to assess whether they have the right balance of expertise and skills. In a different line of argument, though also interesting, Cornforth and Edwards (1999) identified that lack of comparable information about performance of the college in comparison with similar organisations and the sheer weight of rules and directives from the FEFC about its operations and processes hampered the work of FE GBs. However, while Cornforth and Edwards's (1999) findings seem dated and based on evidence drawn from the work of one college GB, a School, a National Voluntary Organisation (NVO) and a Local Voluntary Organisation (LVO) their findings are very relevant in providing background information on the skills and experience required from governors in contemporary FE colleges. The current practice of using the 'skills matrix' and expertise to recruit new FE governors certainly resonates with these findings.

In a more recent publication, Gleeson et al., (2010) report that personal issues to do with "calibre and chemistry" make a difference in the way the GB performed and contributed to the leadership of colleges. According to these authors an ideal governor is described as someone who:

- has a sense of responsibility;
- possesses a good intellect;
- has personal confidence;
- has excellent communication skills;
- provides emotional commitment; and

- has a strong value position on people, education and community.

And that the role of being a governor involves "checks and balances that challenge college leadership" (:11). While the above authors provide us with useful information that informs us about the experience and skills that are necessary for a governor to have in order to be able to inform and shape an FE college, they do not consider in much detail the context in which FE governors work. Specifically 'how', apart from their experiences and skills, would these individuals fit and cope with the ethos and culture of working in FE College environments? (Southworth, 1998). Building on the work of these authors, this study aims to review and extend the 'calibre and chemistry' typology by including values and ethos of working in FE colleges. The review will now move to consider the roles and responsibilities of principals and governors in FE colleges, with a view of understanding how these compare in practice.

The Roles and Responsibilities of a Principal

Earlier literature on the roles and responsibilities of principals is awash with studies that perceive principals as disciplinarians (Hightower, 1979; Bird, 1989). This orthodox view of principals is succinctly described by Hightower (1979):"the principals' greatest assets were high tempers and low tolerances for students who disagreed with them..." (:8). However, this perception of the role of being a college principal has changed significantly after incorporation. This is partly because principals who survived the pressures of re-structuring after 1993 saw themselves elevated to the status of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and the role invested them with powers of

management, finance, governance, employment including responsibilities of estates and their maintenance and development (Cantor et al., 1995).

A survey carried out by KPMG in 2009 found out that principals had evolved to be on a par with chief executives of multi-million pound business with some colleges operating a series of subsidiary companies too. Clearly therefore, one result of incorporation was an increase in the responsibilities of being a principal. Principals were now expected to be managers as well as leaders of their colleges and were also made accountable for the overall performance of FE colleges.

A systematic review of literature on the roles and responsibilities of FE college principals after incorporation clearly indicates that the role of a principal encompasses many elements (Green, 2000; Sala, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004; Davis et al., 2005; Jameson and MacNay, 2007). For example, Green, (2000) suggests that all the activities undertaken by a principal can be categorised under the following 3 elements to the role – academic leader, manager, and administrator, while Sala (2003) sees the role fitting the heading that of being a professional adviser to the corporation, a manager, an accounting officer and a public relations officer. Likewise, Jameson and MacNay (2007), in a recent study, refer to the role of the principal as both a manager and a leader. According to these authors, it is 'where the buck stops' – that is, no matter how much leadership and management are distributed to other people in the hierarchy of a college, ultimately it is the principal and the GB who carry the final responsibility for the overall performance of the college. Thus, literature clearly shows that the role of being an FE principal has

significantly expanded, become more complex and it now involves fulfilling many duties. A view shared by Lumby and Morrison (2009:77) who refer to 'principalship' as the "wearing of many masks".

Consequently, in a more recent study of the evolving role of a Principal in English FE colleges, Lambert (2013) suggests a useful theoretical conceptualisation of the role of the Principal. He argues that the role encompasses 3 theoretical dimensions: the public, an internal-public and an internal-private. He sees the 'public aspect' as a result of the autonomy created after incorporation, in which as figure-leaders of institutions, principals found themselves representing the interests of colleges to local community and business; while internal-public concerns the principal's internal leadership role, in which they are expected to be visible to staff and students who see them as academic leaders and the internal-private element as the private role that the principal has, where they are the strategic thinkers working closely with their deputies and governors to develop the vision and mission of the organisation jointly, but also where they synthesise government policy and translate it into strategic plans for the college. Lambert (2013) concludes by pointing out that, a challenge for principals is ensuring that there is a balance between these elements.

The foregoing literature review indicates that, despite empowering GBs, one of the major consequences of devolution has been to reinforce the pivotal position of heads and principals as organisational leaders (Simkins, 2000). In FE, the pressures created by incorporation for principals of colleges have been enormous, many as already pointed out resigned early from their posts because of the increasing

pressure from the job but the position of those who survived seems to have been significantly enhanced by their typical designation as 'chief executives' of corporations. However, despite the increasing pressure that the job of being an FE principal now entails, very little research has considered this changing role in the newly created FE environment after incorporation and how the role and its associated responsibilities compare with those of their new employers–FE governors in practice. It is the intention of this study to address this lacuna. The review now turns to the roles and responsibilities of FE governors.

The Roles and Responsibilities of FE Governors

An international review of school governance literature carried out by OECD Indicators, (2008) in England and Netherlands, reveals that the majority of decision-making is devolved to school level in contrast to other countries across Europe. The review states that the roles and responsibilities of GBs are statutory, and among other duties, governors are responsible for training, recruitment, salary setting, performance review and dismissal of ineffective head teachers and senior leadership staff (Balarin et al., 2008; James et al., 2010).

Likewise, Gleeson et al., (2010), argue that the responsibilities and practices of FE governors are defined by Instruments and Articles of Government. Specifically, the Articles of Government (DIUS, 2007) for FE corporations in England state that: The Corporation shall be responsible for the following functions:

- the determination and periodic review of the educational character and mission of the institution and oversight of its activities;

- approving the quality strategy of the institution;

- the effective and efficient use of resources, the solvency of the institution and the corporation and safeguarding their assets;

- approving annual estimates of income and expenditure;

- the appointment, grading, suspension, dismissal and determination of the pay and conditions of service of the holders of senior posts and the Clerk;

- setting a framework for the pay and conditions of service of all other staff.

Similarly, earlier on, Mintzberg (1983), drawing on a range of research and policy literature, sets out seven responsibilities (duties) of governing bodies as follows.

- Selecting the chief executive officer.

- Exercising direct control during periods of crisis.

- Reviewing managerial decisions and performance.

- Co-opting external influences.

- Establishing contacts (and raising funds) for the organisation.

- Enhancing the organisation's reputation.

- Giving advice to the organisation.

The UK's Combined Code of Corporate Governance (FSA, 2003) is often taken as an exemplar for the responsibility of corporate boards as follows:

> To set the company's strategic aims, ensure that the necessary financial and human resources are in place for the company to meet its objectives and review management performance. The board should set the company's values and standards and ensure that its obligations to its shareholders and others are understood and met (FSA, 2003:9).

Mapping the above responsibilities to roles, Cornforth (2003) gives the following as functions (assigned roles) of corporate boards:

- Being the point of final accountability for the actions of the agency.

- Being the employer of staff.

- Formulating policy.

- Securing resources.

- Acting as a 'boundary spanner'.

From this review it is evident that the roles and responsibilities of governors are laid down in statutory guidelines. However, much of academic literature that discuss the roles and responsibilities of governors and principals in schools and colleges (Carter, 1998; Cornforth and Edwards, 1999; Bennett, 2002; Davies, 2002; Bush, 2003; James et al., 2010; Griggs, 2012; HCER, 2013) laments the difficulties of distinguishing these in practice. For example, the House of Commons Education Committee Report (HCER 2013) states that "absolute clarity about the different roles and responsibilities of the head teacher and governors underpins the most effective governance" (:104). The report goes on to point increasing difficulties for schools in separating the strategic and operational functions of school leadership. Likewise Griggs, (2012) argues that the FE sector has some of the best non-executives across the public sector, but some of the least understanding in governance terms of what they are there to do, and of their responsibilities… in any consistent form.

Increasingly so, it seems evident from literature that there is a lack of clarity on the roles and responsibilities of governors and principals in FE colleges or at least that the boundary between the two is blurred, which according to Cornforth and Edwards (1999:8) may lead to a "confused involvement with operational matters" by governors. The study aims to address this problem by considering based on empirical findings,

the tasks that FE governors and principals do in practice. The next section focuses on governor-principal relationship balance in FE colleges as a prelude of theorising a collaborative working framework of leadership necessary for college improvement.

Section 4: Governor-Principal Relationship Balance

Having discussed the roles and responsibilities of governors and principals, it is now pertinent to review G-P relationship balance in FE colleges. As expounded in preceding sections, incorporation greatly transformed the role of GBs and invested FE college governors with many powers. Unlike in the United States where the system of trusteeship is essentially a locally devised system, with different practices being adopted across the 50 states, with no national piece of legislation or statutory instrument which determines their powers, FE governance in England is conducted within a national framework approved by the Department for Education and Employment (Parnham, 1998).

GBs in England have acquired their present powers in stages over a lengthy period of time. Locke (1976) traces the history of FE college governance back to the Department for Education and Science (DES) Circular No 7/70, which required LAs to establish GBs for their FE colleges with properly constituted instruments and articles of government. The Circular suggested that GBs should be given powers on matters of expenditure, appointment of staff, student discipline and the 'general direction' of the college (Parnham, 1998).

ERA (1988), also gave the newly constituted GBs greater powers to financially manage and develop their colleges, but within a local framework of FE provision devised by the LEA. As already discussed above, much of the current powers of FE corporations are a result of changes that happened after incorporation. Prior to incorporation in 1992, governors were selected by the FE sub-committee of the LEA and had powers to financially manage and develop the college. The 1992 FHEA, moved funding to a national system under a new agency, the FEFC, and gave GBs responsibility for the financial, educational and strategic development of the college and for the appointment, grading, suspension, dismissal and determination of the pay and conditions of the holders of senior posts, (including the principal) and the Clerk (Parnham, 1998).

As part of government policy of encouraging increasing levels of participation in FE colleges, governors now had to financially manage the institution's development of courses and increase student numbers – which put pressure on governors to achieve funding targets (Drljaca 1999). In a later publication, Gleeson et al., (2010) points out that, the Learning and Skills Act, 2000, building upon the FHEA 1992, provides the powers of an FE corporation. These powers include the running of an educational institution for the provision of secondary, further and higher education. These writers conclude by providing a useful cursory glance at 'periodisation shifts' in college governance since 1993, highlighting the degree to which audit and policy conditioning has affected the internal operations of colleges. These power shifts are categorically simplified as follows:

- *1993–1997—de-regulation*, whereby business governors dominated the culture of GBs and operated boards on business lines, moving away from LA control to marketplace freedoms;

- *1997–2000—re-regulation*, when community dominated governors and stakeholders returned to the boards of colleges;

- *2000–2008—centralised-regulation and marginalisation*, whereby the planning role of the board was replaced by the LSC;

- 2008+—*self-regulation* and *single voice*, whereby boards are encouraged to operate in a multi-agency framework (competencies for all staff) (sector- and employer-led) involving stakeholder partners/competitors represented on the board (Gleeson et al., 2010).

As a result, Gleeson et al., (2010) point out that, as colleges make the transition to new forms of stakeholder–market governance, the effects of continuous policy reform, involving tensions between creativity and compliance, will continue for some time. A view earlier shared by Simmons (2008). Thus, as Gleeson et al., (2010) insist, this point to policy having much influence on the operations of colleges and raises the question of the balance of power between governing bodies and principals.

Increasingly so, it is not surprising that much of the literature suggests a problem of the balance of power between FE governors and principals after incorporation (Murray, 1996; Cornforth and Edwards 1998, 1999). Cornforth and Edwards (1999) for example state that, one of the contradictions facing board members is that, while they have formal responsibility for the organisation and are the ultimate authority within it, they are often dependent on management for information, to formulate proposals and to carry them out. This dependence on management means that managers may be able to exercise considerable power.

However, empirical studies suggest that the balance of power between GBs and management can vary considerably. Murray (1996) suggests four common patterns of power as follows:

1. *CEO-dominant'* pattern, where the CEO gathers information and formulates decisions to be ratified by the board as a whole.

2. The *'board-dominant'* pattern, often found in smaller organisations, where a core group on the board plays the main role in formulating policies and proposals for the board, and the CEO is just one player in this process.

3. The *'staff-dominant'*, often found in professional bureaucracies, such as universities and hospitals, where senior professional staff often has the power to devise strategy and the CEO and board feel constrained to go along with it.

4. *'Collective governance'* where there is an active coalition between different stakeholders and a commitment to consensual decision-making.

Murray's (1996) research was undertaken after incorporation when FE colleges were going through a process of changing power relations. At college level, there was a shift in power from the management to the board, from a CEO dominated to a partnership pattern. Thus Murray (1996) concludes that, neither the board nor senior management dominated. Each was recognised to have a distinctive and influential role, which he calls a partnership pattern. This study aims to consider governor-principal relationship balance in relation to how it promotes/inhibits important decision-making in FE colleges. In order to do this, the study proposes a collaborative model of mutual support between FE governors and principals and it is this that the review turns to.

Collaborative Working Between Governors and Principals

A national study by Ranson et al.,(2005b), that investigates the role of governance in school improvement in Wales, found that a "partnership of mutual support" between the head teacher and governors is "a practice of good governance" that is associated with school improvement. In the same pipeline, Carter, (1998) believes that, 'partnership working' implies governors taking a very active role especially in school development planning and in monitoring and evaluation, and with a "judicious blend of support and challenge" (:47).

In an organisational context, the term 'collaboration' describes a way of working where two or more people combine their resources to achieve specific goals over a period of time (Hall and Wallace, 1993). In the English education system, the term is frequently used interchangeably with partnership (Morrrison and Glenny, 2011), and as succinctly said by Hammick et al., (2009:205) "collaboration is an active and on-going partnership, often between people of diverse backgrounds, who work together to solve problems or provide services and share experiences" – a definition that seems to auger well with a working relationship expected from FE governors and principals.

As professional practice, collaboration is not only confined to education but may also be used in other professional settings, for example, nursing (James and Jule, 2005). Ostensibly, collaborative working in colleges may be between individuals and small groups – intra-organisational collaboration or it can be between two colleges or more-inter-organisational collaboration. In an FE college for example, governors may work

collaboratively with senior managers, principals, teachers, with each other and with the wider community. However, in this study the focus is on collaborative work between governors and principals.

Frequently, individuals engage in a 'mutually supportive working relationship' because they value this way of working highly enough to commit themselves to it. As Hall and Oldroyd (1992) observed, they choose to engage in joint work to achieve joint goals. Some writers (Lumby and Morrisons, 2006; Higham and Yeomans, 2010), concur that individuals and educational institutions will engage in collaboration and partnership because this will benefit clients, learners and practitioners. For example, in a 14-19 partnership they studied, Lumby and Morrisons (2006) identify altruistic, superordinate values such as putting the learner rather than the institution first as central to the rhetoric of the 14-19 partnership. Subsequently, in all of the UK, particularly in England, joint working is seen as central to government policy (Glatter, 2003). However, for collaboration to be successful, individuals in the collaboration should be prepared to sacrifice their autonomy in pursuit of joint work in exchange for greater influence over the actions of other partners.

Policy context

In England, the focus on collaborative working to improve outcomes for students (DfES, 2003) has been a central focus of government school policy over the last decades as Hopkins (2009:1) observed:

> Even a dozen years ago, few would have predicted the amount of collaboration and mutual support in the school system today. The shift from

competition to collaboration, from top down control to organisational autonomy has been quite remarkable.

In fact, the notion of 'collaboration' was formally adopted by the Labour government in 1997, with the view that working together would help promote student outcomes. It is for this reason why 'partnership working' represents the defining theme in the 2008 Education white paper (DCSF, 2009b), which identified collaboration as critical in promoting student well-being in all educational institutions. However, Higham and Yeomans, (2010) believe that collaborative working in schools and colleges has been hampered by institutional competition introduced by previous Conservative governments, which made collaborative practices in colleges highly complex.

Earlier on, Hall and Oldroyd (1992) developed a typology that can help us to conceptualise possible ways of working in an internal collaboration (such as an FE college) and the skills needed to manage collaboration within an organisation or inter-organisation. Drawing on Hall and Oldroyd's (1992) typology, Hall and Wallace (1993:105) suggested that, "collaboration is to a significant degree a voluntary partnership, distinguishable from a relationship of domination and compliance." These authors have put forward a notion of a continuum from conflict to collaboration reflecting two dimensions as shown in Figure 3.
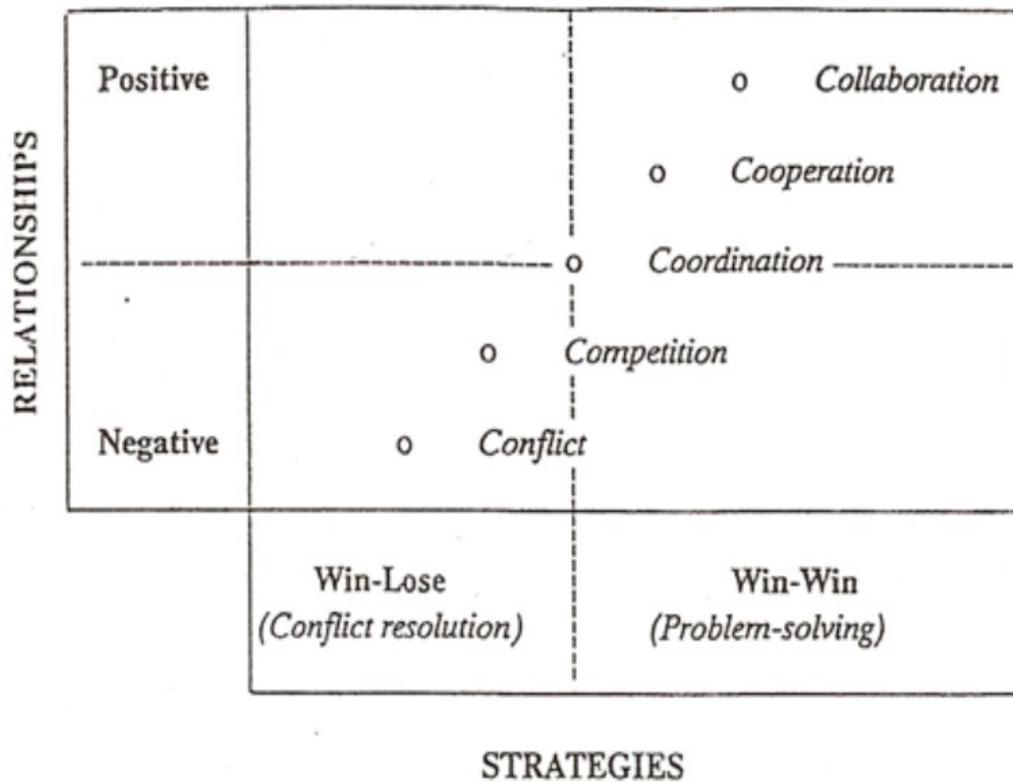
Figure 3: A continuum of ways of working (adapted from Hall and Wallace, 1993:105).

The first covers the degree to which strategies comprehensively include the aim of achieving success for all those engaged in interaction (a win-win situation) or for one individual or group to the detriment of another (a win-lose scenario). The second dimension addresses how far relationships are positive and mutually supportive, or negative, where one individual or group achieves goals at the expense of others' feelings. Hall and Wallace (1993) believe that the amount of shared effort, pooling of resources and commitment distinguishes collaboration from cooperation and coordination, both of which also involves working together but with less commitment to joint goals. Competition implies one individual or group striving to achieve goals at the expense of another, but within acknowledged parameters. Within this continuum as Hall and Wallace (1993) warn, we should be mindful that collaboration among

individuals or groups may serve the purpose of competing or engaging in open hostilities against others.

However, despite a growing interest of collaborative working in schools and colleges in recent years, very little research has looked into how collaborative leadership manifest itself in FE colleges. Consequently as Coleman (2011) argues, although the growth of partnership working within schools and colleges meant collaborative leadership increasingly became an area of interest, the evidence base on the nature of leadership demanded in such contexts remains patchy. This study aims to draw from Coleman's (2011) collaborative model to establish the nature of collaborative leadership between FE governors and principals necessary to effect improvement in FE Colleges. The remainder of this section focuses on Coleman's (2011) all-encompassing model of collaboration, outlining its elements of collaborative leadership and highlighting how these may be skilfully used by FE governors and principals to realise the potential of collaborative advantage associated with partnership working.

In a recent study looking at the leadership of school based collaborations, Coleman (2011) suggests a range of leadership styles and behaviours that are necessary for effective leadership of collaborative working (see Figure 4) which seemed to represent a more encompassing approach. This study will seek to identify from the findings any further developments to this model.

Coleman (2011) believes that, much of the traditional models of leadership, which view the school as a single hierarchical structure and where one person is in control of others (e.g. the headmaster/Baron) are not suitable for collaborative leadership. He argues that leadership demands in schools and colleges today closely mirrors post-heroic leadership styles and behaviours whose elements reflect distributed, authentic, relational, political and constitutive leadership as shown in Figure 4 below.
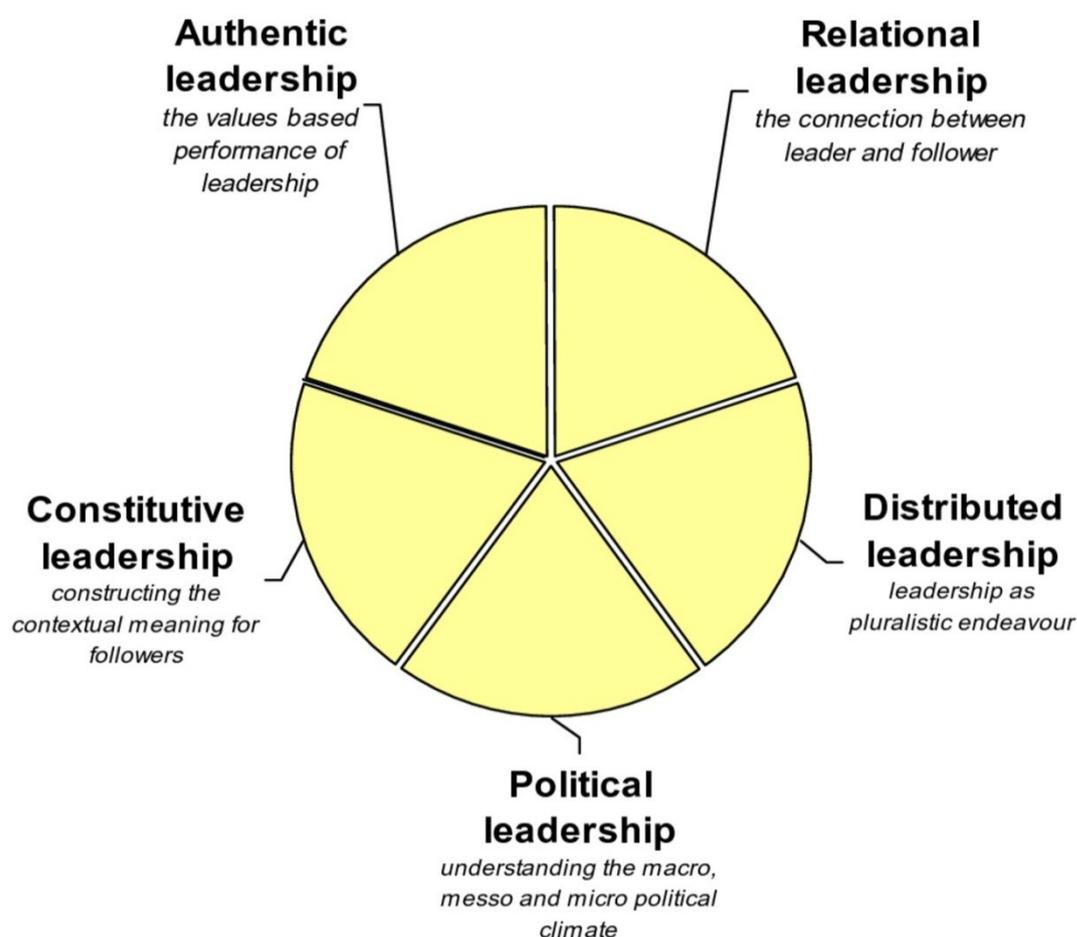
Figure 4: Elements of collaborative Leadership (adapted from Coleman, 2011:303)

As illustrated in Figure 4, the effective practice of collaborative leadership involves the skilful combination of these elements, to suit the specific context within which they are to manifest.

Authentic leadership: concerns self-awareness among leaders of who they are and what they believe in (Gardner et al., 2005). In this regard, leaders are expected to pursue transparent practices and to link their values to actions. In other words they should lead by example on their day in and day out actions. Presumably, authentic leaders promote a range of positive emotions from their followers, including respect, empowerment, mutual identification and trust, each of which is critical within the context of collaborative working (Coleman, 2006).

A leader cannot be a leader without followers, therefore leadership must be *relational.* In this regard, more attention should be put to promote followers' wellbeing, both personally and professionally. As precisely affirmed by Grint (2005:2), "leadership is necessarily a relational not a possessive phenomenon, for the individual 'leader' without followers is demonstrably not a leader at all".

As a little earlier shown by Hall and Oldroyd (1992) in their model of collaboration, relationships form a very important part to the overall success of the collaboration. Negative relationships may lead to frictions; while positive ones find solutions to problems. Creating strong relationships with others and the ability to nurture such relationships as the collaboration develops is an important aspect of leadership in this context. Relational leadership supports a shift from hierarchical, autocratic organisational structures towards more democratic, inclusive and open ones, a trend

highlighted by Forde et al., (2008) as a feature of modern times and synonymous with partnership working in schools and colleges (Coleman, 2011).

Distributed leadership: places leadership within professional capacity not a hierarchical position. Distributed leadership is therefore a special requirement in a collaborative setting, as authority is shared across professional groups and organisational boundaries (Coleman, 2011). Distributed leadership practices are normally underpinned by a willingness to trust others and a satisfaction that they are able to deliver the aspect they have been assigned with competence and expertise. This trust in individuals helps to generate trust within the group as a whole.

Political Leadership: involves leaders using politics as a means to pursue their aims. It is the ability to be aware of a broad range of policy agendas at national, local and immediate levels and to be able to manipulate that knowledge in order to achieve the aims of the collaborative. Huxham and Vangen (2005) in their proposed 'concept of collaborative thuggery' pay particular attention to the importance of leaders displaying expertise in the two distinctly political areas of relationship management and agenda setting. In practice, such activities may conflict with some of the values and ethics which most principals hold dear and can therefore be problematic for leaders to use.

Constitutive leadership: concerns the ways in which the context for collaborative working is defined (Coleman, 2011). It can be described as the way the professionalism of the group is articulated. It involves giving a clear message to staff,

students, parents and others as to what is expected of them. It involves explicitly saying in detail the values, rights and responsibilities which apply in a particular college context. It requires strong communication skills to ensure that others understand what values, rights and responsibilities operate in their context and also highly developed listening skills so that the leader is very clear how other members are reacting to the message (Connolly and James, 2006). However, although constitutive leadership is important in pointing the ways in which leaders create a climate for collaboration and expectations as the behaviour of those involved in it, as a relatively new concept, the means through which this occurs have been largely unexplored.

The foregoing review shows that Coleman's (2011) model of collaborative leadership is a complex one, as he asserts, needs to continue to be tested through other research studies, but its level of complexity is why it is relevant to this study. However, the effective practice of collaborative leadership depends on how governors and principals are able to skilfully combine all the above elements within their own context to maximise outcomes. The last Section is: FE governance and College Improvement.

Section 6: FE Governance and College Improvement

"It is your responsibility and your duty to ensure that learning is improved all around. And it is you who day-in day-out, month-in month-out, ensure that leadership is effective and strong. Effective leadership and governance is essential in ensuring that further education colleges continue to improve" (Hancock, 2013).

This section considers the contribution role of FE governors in college improvement. It is increasingly acknowledged in policy literature (Ofsted, 2008) that effective leadership and governance is essential in ensuring that FE colleges continue to improve and that there is a growing body of research which shows that leadership in schools has an indirect, yet powerful effect on students outcomes (Wallace, 2002; Harris, 2004; Angelle and Anfara, 2006; Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe 2008). However, literature that focuses on the vital role of FE governors in college improvement is generally sparse.

Before considering the role of governors in FE college improvement, it is necessary first, to point out that the meanings of the concept 'improvement' like concepts such as 'learning' and 'leadership' are fluid. In past writings, Hopkins (1996) indicates that the phrase 'school improvement' is generally used in two senses: the first is common-sense meaning which relates to general effort to make schools better for pupils and students to learn and the second is a more technical definition which refer to school improvement as a strategy for educational change that enhances student outcomes, as well as strengthening the school's capacity for managing change. It is the latter sense that the concept is used in this study. Hopkins (2001) reiterates that for authentic school improvement to take place there should be focus on the learning experiences, achievement and progress of pupils. A view echoed by a number of earlier writers on school improvement (Hopkins, 1996; Gray et al., 1996; Carter, 1998) and also that seems to have some resonance with the work of SC governors in this study. However, 'improvement' here will be taken to denote an on-going phenomenon – that is 'continuous improvement'.

Continuous improvement, as the name implies, adopts an approach to improving performance which assumes many small incremental improvement steps (Johnson and Slake, 2009). Outcomes for improvement can be measured by performance indicators for example, "test and examination results, attendance, parental involvement and post 16 staying on rates" (Barber, 1994:24).

While research seems patchy on how FE governance contributes to college improvement (Schofield, 2009), research in the schools sector has indicated that good governance contributes to school improvement (Ranson et al., 2005b). Drawing on recent research and inspection findings, Earley and Weindling (2004) suggest that governors play a very important role in school improvement. The role of governors in school improvement was first highlighted in improving schools (Ofsted, 1994). The 1998 ERA states clearly that the purpose of GBs is to help to provide the best possible education for the pupils in their schools. To do this effectively, the GB should have a strategic view of its main function – which is to help raise standards as well as clear arrangements for monitoring against targets (Earley and Weindling, 2004).

However, there is at present little empirical evidence of how GBs contribute to school improvement in practice (Earley and Weindling, 2004). In his earlier study, Early (1994) found out that governors had a limited view of their role in school improvement, tending to concentrate instead on the part played by teachers. However, as with studies of school effectiveness, the school improvement literature

usually makes only a passing reference to governors, if indeed they are mentioned at all (Earley and Weindling, 2004).

According to the first official publication on governors and their role in school improvement published in the mid-1990s, entitled *Governing bodies and Effective Schools (*DfE/BIS, 1995) GBs have 3 main roles: to provide a strategic view, to act as a critical friend and to ensure accountability (Barber et al.,1994; Carter, 1998). This way of conceptualising the GB's role has since been enshrined in legislation (Education Act, 2002) and these 3 roles underpin the inspection framework when examining the leadership and management of schools. Training materials produced by the DfES, which was available for LEAs to use with newly appointed governors, have also centred explicitly on the above three key roles (DfES, 2001).

More recently, 'The Guide to the Law for School Governors' sets out the powers and duties of GBs – 9 in total. The first of these is "conducting the school with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement" (Earley and Weindling 2004). The guide goes on to state that "a good governing body will take mainly a strategic view" through setting suitable aims and objectives, agreeing policies, priorities, plans and targets and monitoring and evaluating results' adding that "the School Development Plan, Ofsted action plan or school improvement plan will generally provide the main mechanism for the strategic planning process" (Earley and Weindling, 2004:140). The guidance document, 'Roles of GB and Head Teachers', also argues for a strategic role for governors but as identified by Earley and Weindling, (2004:140) uses the word "progress" rather than "improvement".

Similarly, a national study by Creese and Earley, (1999) earlier on, also found that governors were able to contribute to school improvement in many ways:

- Quality of education offered by their schools, for example by using their specialist expertise in classroom, to broaden the curriculum.

- They might be able to work on the enhancement of the pupils' environment or to use their contacts within the community to enrich, for example, the school's work-experience programme.

- Involvement in policy-making and such policies can be an important aspect of accountability within the school, and

- Financial management. Governors can for example use their financial experience and expertise to assist the head and staff in budget setting; monitoring and tracking of expenditure and can advise on more sophisticated aspects of financial management based on their experience outside the world of education.

However, governors' contribution to raising standards in their schools has been made difficult by their unfamiliarity with the curriculum and teaching methods. Many GBs have set up curriculum committees (SC) and often governors are linked to specific subject areas or departments. This seems particularly helpful in secondary schools with a complex curriculum and large numbers of teachers. Individual governors then need to pool their knowledge in order to obtain an overview by reporting to their colleagues either orally or in writing.

Another area where governors' contribution may not be always immediately obvious is the school's ethos. Their contribution in this area can range from discussions with pupils when they visit the school through addressing school assemblies to helping to develop school policies. Where there is some form of student forum or School Council, it can be very helpful if governors either occasionally attend its meetings or invite representatives to meet with them. Extra-curricular activities such as plays and

concerts contribute significantly to the ethos of the school and governors should be keen to support these, recognising the importance of these in the pupils' overall education.

In addition to the above roles, governors can also contribute to leadership improvement by:

- enabling strategy;

- providing scrutiny of direction;

- policy and practice;

- offering guidance and support, and

- ensuring accountability (Ranson et al., 2005b).

These qualities, secure the authority and trust of schools as public institutions. This study will draw from literature on the schools sector to explain findings on the contribution role of FE governors in college improvement.

Overall summary

This review has shaped this thesis by providing a platform on which to reflect on the role of FE governance in college improvement. It has helped to establish that, the demands expected from governors significantly increased following from incorporation and the need, therefore, to consider investigating their vital role in college improvement. The literature review has enabled the development of my research questions by establishing that the purpose (s) that 'governance' serves in

FE colleges is not clearly defined, therefore, the need to draw from 'corporate models' of governance to conceptualise the purpose of governance in the FE sector. It was also established that, very little is known from literature on the relationship between early socialisation and influence to FE 'governorship' in later life, and that FE environments are very complex and therefore, apart from having experience and skills, governors may also need to have values and ethos of working in FE colleges in order for them to be able to effectively contribute to FE governance. Similarly, it also emerged from this review that, although the roles and responsibilities of FE governors are defined by the Instruments and Articles of Government, they tend to invariably cross-over into each other in practice. While some academic writers and practitioners have looked into this area, it remains a common claim that the roles and responsibilities of FE governors and principals are blurred in practice, therefore the need to reconsider these for greater clarification. The theme of the problem of FE governor-principal relationship balance has also been explored and acknowledged and this research will use Hall and Wallace's (1993) collaborative model as well as Coleman's (2011) all-encompassing collaborative model to help explain the findings. Finally, it has been established in this review that, although the contribution of FE governance to school improvement is acknowledged, there is very limited research that has considered how the work of governors contribute to FE college improvement. In this light, the exploration of the role of school governors in school improvement has enabled a greater understanding of the role governors can play in helping schools to improve. This study will therefore draw on the role of school governors to examine the contributions of FE governors in college improvement.

The next chapter will consider the methodological issues and methods that underpin this study, allowing a critical review of their appropriateness for this study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

In this chapter, the research design which underpins this study will be critically evaluated and justified. To begin with, the research will be located within a wider framework in order to add clarification and then my own philosophical approach to knowledge will be clarified by placing it within an ontological and epistemological context. This will be followed by the research strategy employed in this study and the justification for choosing such a strategy. Finally, the research methodology and methods will be explained before clarifying the management of this project taking into account issues such as access, sampling, ethics, validity and reliability.

Wider Frameworks

This research could be placed in the typology of the 'five knowledge domains' conceptualised by Ribbins and Gunter (2002) as summarised overleaf in Table 2.

Knowledge domain	Meaning
Conceptual	Concerned with issues of ontology and epistemology and with conceptual clarification.
Humanistic	Seeks to gather and theorise from the experiences and biographies of those who are leaders and those who are led. Collecting human experience to develop practice.
Critical	Concerned to reveal and emancipate practitioners (both leaders and followers) from the various forms of social injustice
Evaluative	Seeks to abstract and measure the impact of leadership effectiveness on organisational outcomes.
Instrumental	Seeks to provide leaders with effective leadership strategies and tactics to deliver organisational outcomes/goals.

Table 2: The Five Knowledge Domains (adapted from Ribbins and Gunter, 2002:378).

This research can be positioned in the second 'knowledge domain' of Table 2, which is the humanistic domain. This is because the research seeks to gather and theorise from the experiences and accounts of FE governors and principals to gain a deeper understanding role of the contribution of 'governance' to college improvement.

Wallace and Poulson (2003) have also identified research within a theoretical framework. Their model suggests five different 'intellectual projects': *knowledge for*

understanding, knowledge for critical evaluation, knowledge for action, instrumentalism and reflective action (Wallace and Poulson, 2003:18). In attempting to place this research within their framework, it became obvious that the research closely fits into the knowledge-for-action domain. Wallace and Poulson's (2003) definition of the knowledge-for-action suggests a reasonably good fit in that:

> It attempts to develop theoretical and research knowledge with practical application from a positive standpoint towards practice and policy, in order to inform improvement efforts within the prevailing ideology (:18).

This sits very well with the aim(s) and purpose of this study for understanding the contribution role of governors in college improvement, with a view to gain knowledge that may be used to help inform governors training and developmental needs. This could result in this research being considered as an "intellectual project" and used as a basis to enable "knowledge-for-action" (:18). Overall, the research should provide greater understanding of the contribution role of governors in college improvement and to the on-going wider educational debate on education governance.

Philosophical Approach

In order to understand the chosen design for this research in terms of methodology and methods, it is necessary to explain the researcher's ontological and epistemological stance. Basically, two major conceptions of social reality are important for the purpose of clarifying the philosophical view in this research. First are assumptions of ontological kind – assumptions which concern the very nature or essence of the social phenomena being investigated? Questions to ask are: is social reality external to individuals or is it the product of individual consciousness? Is reality

of an objective nature, or the result of individual cognition? Is it given, or is it created by one's own mind? (Cohen et al., 2000). These questions spring directly from what is known in philosophy as the *nominalist-realist* debate. The former view holds that objects of thought are merely words and that there is no independently accessible thing constituting the meaning of the word. Hence, nominalist views reality as being of the individual's own making (Cohen et al., 2000). The realist position is that reality is external to the individual and is imposed on them, for example, the Articles and Instrument of government that governors and principles abide by. However, my own conception of social reality is that the truth about FE governance can only be obtained by asking people who are directly involved in FE governance itself. Therefore, reality and truths are the products of individual perception.

The second assumption is of an epistemological kind. This concerns the very basis of knowledge – its nature and forms, how it can be acquired and communicated to other human beings (Cohen et al., 2000). Epistemological questions are important because they help the researcher to generate knowledge and explanations about the ontological components of the social world (Mason, 1996). This underpins two research paradigms-scientific and interpretive approaches. To subscribe to the former is to be "positivist; and to the latter, anti-positivist" (Cohen et al., 2000:6).

Positivists believe that, there is knowledge that exists outside the individual; it can be discovered, or invented, analysed and passed on to others in concrete form. On this basis, knowledge is objective, universal and generalisable (Alexander, 2006) and can normally be researched using quantitative methods. The researcher's values,

interpretations, feelings and musings have no place in the positivist's view of scientific enquiry. The researcher must be as objective as possible (Dalanty, 1997). However, the epistemological position of positivism that views the world as objective, measurable, value free, generalisable and replicable has been criticised (Kelly, 2004) as not suitable in educational contexts. This is because positivism is not able to capture multiple realities and the complexity of the 'life world' of individuals in entirety.

The interpretive view is the opposite of the positivist view, which accepts that the observer makes a difference to the observed and that reality is a human construct. As a result, interpretivists believe that we construct the world through our own perceptions and understandings, that we all experience the world differently and that these differences are all important. In other words knowledge is contextual, subjective, particular and unique and imposes on researchers an involvement with their subjects (Cohen et al., 2000; Alexander, 2006), and is based on experience and insight (Denscombe, 2003).

The interpretive paradigm advocates a move towards treating what counts as 'knowledge' as "problematic" so as to facilitate research into the ways in which knowledge is socially organised, transmitted and assessed in schools and colleges (Carr and Kemmis, 1986:85). The task of the researcher in this regard is to 'understand' the taken for granted realities held by those in colleges, and the extent to which they comprise social patterns. As argued by Habermas, (1971), it is to make clear these taken-for-granted meanings so that they can inform professional

judgement, it is not to seek truth, nor to prescribe.

Thus, this study subscribes to the interpretive conceptions of knowledge, because it seeks to generate qualitative data by asking people and reading documents. Unlike the scientific paradigm that aims to discover and explain relations between dependent and independent variables; the research aims to understand human experiences, norms and purposes (Cronbach, 1975).

Research Methodology

The methodological approach used for this research is a case study. Governance in 6 FE colleges was studied each as individual cases. In each case, the Chair of the SC committee, the principal and at least one SC governor(s) were interviewed. The interviews explored a range of matters relevant to FE governance and college improvement. In total, 6 FE principals and 14 governors were interviewed. These numbers were regarded sufficient to enable the collection of data that would allow the creation of plausible interpretations to the findings (Bush, 2002).

According to Yin (2003), a case study is an empirical enquiry that:

- Investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when
- The boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

The case study methodology was suitable for this study because it allowed the researcher to cover the contextual conditions in which FE governance is practised. As succinctly described by Robson (2002:178):

> Case study is a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence.

In this study 'college governance' is the phenomenon being studied and all interviews were carried out at colleges, which mean FE governance was investigated within its real life context. It is the researcher's conviction that these FE colleges' contexts are pertinent to governance players in focus because it is where governing activities takes place.

The case study approach was also chosen because it allowed the researcher to study FE governance in detail. For example the use of '6 different colleges', means the researcher was able to get potentially a wider variety of data from informants. According to Denscombe (2003), the focus on a few instances allows the researcher to deal with subtleties and intricacies of complex situations. A case study enquiry can also allow one to use different methods of data collection, for example the use of semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis in this study, which is good for methodological triangulation (Yin, 2003).

Finally, this methodology was adopted for the study with the focus on identifying recurrent themes of governance in different FE colleges and to help in establishing patterns across the sample. Effort was devoted to the selection of colleges that would provide a range of examples reflecting the wide range of governance present in FE

colleges in the Midlands of England. In order to arrive at a list of potential FE colleges for this research, the Ofsted database was consulted to choose colleges that were geographically located in the Midlands region and encompassed the variables: General Further Education College (GFEC) and had satisfactory to excellent with respect to leadership and management grading. The Association of Colleges (AoC) was then contacted for advice on the best way to access governors from the chosen colleges. Through this channel, advice was given to write to clerk(s) of corporations (gatekeepers) via principals seeking permission to interview governors.

Research Strategy

My research focuses mainly on individual stories – individual realities-each set in their own unique context, and seek to learn from these in their detail and richness. For this reason, this research will use the phenomenological strategy because it is suitable for small-scale research that relies on in-depth interviews. Denscombe (2003) defines phenomenology as simply an alternative to positivism. According to him, as opposed to positivism, the phenomenological approach emphasises:

- Subjectivity (rather than objectivity).
- Description (more than analysis).
- Interpretation (rather than measurement).
- Agency (rather than structure).

In contrast to positivism, phenomenological research deals with people's:

- Perceptions or meanings.
- Attitudes and beliefs.

- Feelings and emotions (:75).

The phenomenology strategy is the best for seeking the stories and lived experiences (humanistic approach) using qualitative methodologies (Denscombe, 2003). Good phenomenological research involves a detailed description of the experience that is being investigated. This study aims to find answers to questions such as: what purpose (s) does FE governance serve? Roles and responsibilities of governors and principals and the role of governors in college improvement from the perspectives of those who are directly involved in FE governance itself (governors and principals), which correlates well with the phenomenological strategy.

Research Methods

In investigating FE governance and its contributions to college improvement the research employs semi-structured interviews as the main method of data collection and this is supplemented by data from documentary analysis (non-reactive). Other methods of data collection were considered before deciding upon these two methods. These included non-participant observation and questionnaires. These considerations are briefly discussed below.

The non-participant observation method was considered for gathering data from principals and governors because it was seen as a direct way of collecting data. This method could have been suitable for this research because, unlike interviews and questionnaires, observations do not rely on what people say they do, or what they

say they think (Denscombe, 2003) and also it would have enabled the researcher to observe real GB meetings in a real boardroom. This contextual framework would have enabled the researcher to get what Robson (2002) calls real life in the 'real world.'

However, this method was deemed not suitable for this research because of the following disadvantages:

- Its focus on overt behaviour to describe what happens. It does not deal with the intentions that motivated that behaviour.

- It assumes that overt behaviours can be measured in terms of categories that are fairly straight forward and unproblematic, but in reality this is not always the case.

- The observer also affects the situation under observation. Certainly this was likely to be the case in this situation.

In addition to these disadvantages, both participant and non-participant observations are not reliable in qualitative research. This is because qualitative research entails a 'closeness' between the researcher and participants and the data exist in verbal descriptions, which presents high numerical magnitude of errors of measurement (Bush, 2002). As Bush (2002:64) wraps it up, "…any observation of whatever type contains errors of measurement". Therefore, while this method would have provided valuable data to understand the role of governors in college improvement, because of its many disadvantages that outweigh advantages in this particular situation, it was felt that face-to-face interviews would offer a considerable greater amount of rich, in depth quality data on which to base the researcher's findings.

Similarly the questionnaire method was also considered for gathering data for this study. While questionnaires would have been advantageous in this research because of easiness of data coding and in that the attitudes of governors and principals could have been captured by using a 'Likert' scale, however, this method was deemed not suitable for gathering data because of the limited data it would produce in terms of participants' perceptions on various aspects of FE governance. This makes it unsuitable for a qualitative research project such as this one. Having briefly discussed other prospective methods that were considered for this research, it is now pertinent to turn to the two methods that were ultimately used in this investigation: the semi-structured interview and documentary analysis.

Semi-structured Interviews

The interview method is one of the most popular methods used in qualitative methodology. Face-to-face interviews may take the form of structured, semi-structured or unstructured interviews (Robson, 2002). A semi-structured interview generally falls somewhere in between the structured and unstructured interviews and relies on the researcher gauging the balance between the openness of the questions and the focus and order of the topics to be explored (Denscombe, 2003; Hannan, 2007). In other words, semi-structured interviews are interviews that have their 'shopping list' of topics and want to get responses to them, but they have considerable freedom in the sequencing of questions, in their exact wording and in the amount of time and attention given to different topics (Robson (2002). Individual semi-structured interviews were chosen as the main method of data gathering for this research because they provide a reliable data gathering method from individuals in

an informal and unobtrusive environment with an assurance of confidentiality. This method would also provide data based on experiences, perceptions, feelings and data based on privileged information (Denscombe, 2003). In this research, data was derived from interviewees on their experiences of knowledge of FE governance and they were regarded as privileged informants for they were the practicing FE governors and principals, the 'knower' of the phenomenon being investigated. Before the interviews, questions were carefully designed to ensure that all the major emergent themes from the literature are adequately accommodated. However, during the actual interview process, questions did not follow a specific order as out-lined in the schedule (Bryman, 2008).

A total of 20 Interviews was completed, 14 with SC governors and 6 with principals from 6 FE colleges. The actual interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour and the researcher recorded them using a tape recorder and then transcribed them as soon as possible after the interviews. As Robson (1993:384) suggests, researchers should write up notes and transcribe recorded information as soon as possible after data collection. However, it is important to note as Robson (1993) warns, although transcription of audio recording is a common source of qualitative data, it provides an interesting example of the difficulties of defining a dataset. This is because; even though a "full transcription" (word for word) appears an attractive option for capturing the full content of an interview, the subtle nuances of the spoken word (e.g. emphasis, pauses, stammers, volumes) are not captured. There are techniques to capture some of these nuances, but as Mason (2002:77) points out: "For some verbal utterances,

there are simply no written translations! Therefore, do not assume that transcriptions provide an 'objective record' of your interviews.

The Interview Instrument

There are a number of reasons why the semi-structured interview method was selected for this study. First, this method was chosen because it is a flexible and adaptable way of finding things out. Robson (2002) asserts that face-to-face interviews gives the flexibility of modifying one's line of inquiry, follow up responses and investigating underlying motives in a way that questionnaires cannot. In the same vein Bryman (2008) points out that, "questions that are not included in the guide may be asked as the interviewer picks up on things said by interviewees" (:438). This was the case in this enquiry. Non- verbal cues for instance gave the researcher messages which helped in understanding responses.

Secondly, this method suited the researcher's own ontological position, which suggests that people's "knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences and interactions are meaningful properties of social reality" (Mason, 2002:63), which my research questions were designed to explore. For this reason, semi-structured interviews seemed the most appropriate method to yield the answers required to the questions posed in this enquiry.

Closely linked to the above was the researcher's epistemological position. The researcher believes that a meaningful way to generate qualitative data on the above ontological properties is to talk interactively with people, to ask them questions, to

listen to them …or to analyse their use of language and construction of discourse (Mason, 2002). Therefore, interviewing governors and principals was necessary in helping the researcher to investigate their experiences and understandings of FE governance in their daily lives, which can only be constructed or reconstructed in interviews (Mason, 2002).

Similarly, the researcher also believes that knowledge and evidence are contextual, situational and interactional; therefore, qualitative interviewing allows the researcher to "conjures up", as fully as possible, the social experiences or processes of FE governance (Mason, 2002). This is because; all interviews took place at colleges, which provided a rich context for FE governance practice.

Another reason for using this method was that; asking people directly about what is going on is an obvious direct route in seeking answers to my research questions (Robson, 2002). My emphasis was on how the interviewees frame and understand issues of governance.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are good for case study research because it "ensures cross-case comparability" (Bryman, 2008:440). This is because pre-determined questions/topics were used from interviewee to interviewee, although the order was modified based upon the "interviewer's perception of what seems most appropriate" (Robson, 2002:273). For example, all 14 governors across the 6 selected colleges were asked on more or less the same pre-determined topics and this helped to enable comparability.

In addition to the above, this method is good in producing data which deals with topics in depth and in detail. This correlates with this enquiry because, unlike with survey questionnaires, subjects were probed, issues pursued and lines of investigation followed over a relatively lengthy period (45 minutes to 1 hour).

Finally, one-to-one interviews are relatively easy to control. Interviews were done one at time and this is arguably easier to control than focus group interviews. This is because as Denscombe (2003) argues, the researcher only has one person's ideas to grasp and interrogate and one person to guide through the interview agenda.

Despite all the above advantages of 'semi-structured interviews' the researcher was also aware of the disadvantages of this method of data collection. One of which is bias. Bias in qualitative interviews can be a result of one's accent and lack of standardisation in interview questions, which inevitably raises concerns about reliability (Denscombe, 2003). As argued by Denscombe (2003), as interviewers, we bring to interviews certain personal attributes which are givens and which cannot be altered on a whim to suit the needs of the research interview. From this point of view, we cannot separate the interview from the social interaction in which it is produced (Mason, 2002), but we should acknowledge it and try to understand the complexities of interaction.

Furthermore, interviewing is time-consuming. As already mentioned above all interview sessions lasted from 45 minutes to 1 hour. Anything under half an hour is unlikely to be valuable; anything going much over an hour may be making

unreasonable demands on busy interviewees (Robson, 2002). In this light, it was the researcher's responsibility to terminate the interview on schedule and this needed "closure" skills which are not easy for novice researchers.

Moreover, this method of data gathering is sometimes associated with unpredictability. For instance, interviewees may take control of the interview and change the subject, guide the tempo, or indicate they are being asked the wrong questions or become emotionally volatile. Sands and Krumer-Nevo (2006) discuss similar issues which they call 'interview shocks and shockwaves'. The researcher was aware of the probability of this happening in interviews, and was cautious to respond quickly to all unexpected situations.

The interview questions were based on issues identified from literature review and from the researcher's observations in FE colleges and were formulated around the following:

1. Is there anything in your background, that you think inspired you to be a governor?

2. What made you think (your motivation) that you can make a difference in this college?

3. As a governor who sits in the "Standards Committee" of your college, can you please describe briefly what you do in practice;

   I.   What is the remit of your role?

   II.   Can you describe the responsibilities that are commensurate with this role?

   III.   What is your view of your role and responsibilities?

(Probe 'can you elaborate on............)

4. In your experience as a governor so far, what have you found to be the key skills necessary to perform your role?

5. In your view, what do you think is the purpose of college governance

Copies of the proposed full interview schedules can be found in *Appendices 3 (for governors) and 4 (for principals).*

Conducting Interviews

All Interviews were carried out at colleges. The times for the interviews and all the logistics were agreed in advance through the gatekeepers, who acted as mediators between the researcher and the participants. The researcher travelled to (interview venues/colleges) conduct interviews on mutually agreed days and times. Being interviewed at their place of work also provided safe environment for and enabled a more open understanding of their 'professional world'. Likewise, it was easier for them to explain their context of work in relation to the research questions. The researcher also managed to have a chance of observing informants' work environment which was important for putting the topic into context-particularly the perceived complexity of an FE environment.

The majority of interviewees were quite happy to be recorded during the interview, except one principal who declined to be recorded. In this particular case, I made field notes and then wrote a summary report after the interview. Many governors said they were very happy to participate in this study because they felt much of what they do in colleges is 'hidden' from the public eye, as one of them succinctly remarked, "they don't know what the 17 or so governors who come to college do" (G2 CE T6). As a

result, very rich, thoughtful and interesting accounts were yielded from these interviews.

Documentary Instrument

The word 'documents' is used in this enquiry to refer primarily to written documents. Documents are treated as 'texts' where the focus is on what is said, how it is said, and what that means (Cortazzi, 2002). Written documents can take many different forms such as field notes, biographies, autobiographies, photographs, annals and chronicles, photographs…(Robson, 2002) but for the purpose of this study, only SC governors' meeting minutes were considered for analysis. These 'meeting minutes' were treated as important in providing supplementary data for triangulation purposes on 'research question 6' that focusses on the contribution of governors to college improvement. Yin (2003) supports this view and argues that, for case studies, documents are used to "corroborate and augment evidence from other sources" (:87) and according to (Cohen et al., 2007:201), this helps to render more "visible the phenomena under study".

Before settling for SC governors' meeting minutes, consideration was given to the latest Ofsted Inspection Reports based on a four-year rolling cycle of college inspection for each college for analysis, but due to the focussed nature of this enquiry, these were considered not suitable for this study. What I did was to select from each of the 6 colleges, one end of year SC governors' meeting minutes' report (for the period 2011/2012) for analysis. This was considered a representative sample

because end of year meeting minutes would potentially summarise issues covered for the whole year.

SC governors' meeting minutes were eventually selected for this study because they are readily available in FE colleges and their content is nearest to the 'significance' of FE governance and college improvement. Such meeting minutes are also 'authentic', as argued by Cortazzi (2002), they tend to construct their own reality because once an item is recorded in them; the record is taken as true and agreed. These documents are also kept so that "people and institutions can be held accountable for their actions" (Denscombe, 2003:161). Indeed, as Thomas (2009:170) points out, "the knack is to find the right documents, read them and think about them".

This method suited very well with my ontological belief that written words, texts, documents, records… are meaningful constituents of the social world in themselves and they act as some form of representation of relevant elements of the social world, or that we can trace or "read" aspects of the social world about them (Mason, 2002:106). My epistemological position is that these texts, can count as evidence of the above ontological properties.

The method was also suitable for this study because it allows data to be viewed repeatedly. As observed by Robson (2002), documentary data is in a permanent form and hence can be subjected to re-analysis, allowing reliability checks and replication studies.

Furthermore, this method is unobtrusive (Robson, 2002). This means that these documents were not created as a result of this study, but for other purposes. As Robson (2002:358) precisely puts it, you can "observe" without being "observed". There is no reactivity on the part of the writer because the documents were not written with the intention of being research data (Cohen et al., 2007). Finally, 'meeting minutes' were written by skilled professionals such as clerks of corporations and therefore, they may contain valuable information and insights than those written by relatively uninformed amateurs (Cohen et al., 2007).

However, although written documents are a useful source of data for social science researchers, one has got to be aware of their disadvantages. First, documents must be studied in their own context in order to understand their significance at the time (Prior, 2003; Cohen et al., 2007). For this study, it was important to understand the socio-political environment prevalent at the time when these documents were written. A failure to understand the context will result in misinterpretation of these documents.

Written documents can also be biased. This is because they were written for a different purpose, audience and context and it is difficult to allow the biases or distortions that this introduces. In this sense as Yin (2003:87) writes, "the case study investigator is a vicarious observer, and the documentary evidence reflects a communication among other parties attempting to achieve some other objectives". In this light, there is need for 'triangulation' with other data sources to address this problem (Robson, 2002). This explains why this method is being used alongside semi-structured interviews.

Moreover, documents themselves may be interpretation of events rather than objective accounts (Cohen et al., 2007). This problem is closely linked to reporting bias, which may reflect the unknown biases of the author. This is a common problem with documents particularly 'minutes of meetings' as they tend to reflect the biases of those who wrote them (clerks) because of the selective nature of what is included in these documents.

Characteristics of Sampling

Sampling is very important for any empirical research because an unrepresentative sample can lead to biased results. Basically there are two sampling strategies that can be used by a social science researcher. These are either probability or non-probability sampling (Denscombe, 2003) and the latter was used in this study. Examples of non-probability sampling include the convenience, purposive and snowball strategies. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select the interviewees and documents for analysis in this study. Such a sampling strategy is useful in situations where certain important information cannot be obtained from other choices. As remarked by Maxwell, (1996:71): "people who are uniquely able to be informative because they are experts in an area", are chosen to provide important information. In this study SC governors and principals were selected because of their professional expertise. These were deemed knowledgeable to be able to provide data to answer my research questions.

The primary focus was on 6 colleges, selected on the basis of being a General Further Education College (GFECs), located in the Midlands region of England and that their GBs operate through a committee structure. Hence 6 colleges with Standards/Quality committee in their GB structures were purposefully selected for the study. The colleges represent a cross-section of the sector in terms of size, location and provision, and have satisfactory to excellent grading on governance according to Ofsted inspection reports. Having identified the colleges, I then wrote to the clerk of corporations via principals seeking consent to interview SC governors and principals. The proxy selection criteria were made known to gate keepers, who would assist in accessing those to be interviewed. In the event, it would be reasonable to conclude that the selection of governors reflected, in part key gatekeepers notions of "governance, Standards/Quality and Improvement?" as much as desire to include those with responsibilities for "Standards", "Quality" and "Learning" within the college. Although the sample does not represent the wide population and is, therefore "selective and biased" (Cohen et al., 2000:164), it is still acceptable for this study because the aim is not to generalise the findings to the wider population but to offer an insight into how selected individuals contribute to FE college improvement.

The researcher was then informed by the gatekeepers through email(s) to confirm those who agreed to be interviewed, including the dates and times of the interviews. In turn a covering letter detailing the purpose of the research was sent to all the participants. Interview schedules were also sent to participants to allow them to prepare mentally for the interview. The interviews were conducted over a year from October 2011 to October 2012.

Access

Access was a big issue at the onset of this research for two main reasons. The first was that principals are normally busy people and may feel that they do not have time to spend being interviewed by a researcher. Secondly, governors being volunteers in colleges are not easy to get hold of for interviewing purposes. However, as already pointed out above, access was negotiated through clerks of corporations as 'gatekeepers'. The gatekeepers in turn negotiated with informants on researcher's behalf, arranged convenient dates and times and then communicated the arrangement to the researcher. Emphasis on flexibility was made throughout the negotiating process as it was clearly stated in the access letters sent out to colleges *(see appendix 1)* that interviews will be held at mutually convenient times and at the informants' designated college. This helped the researcher to avoid encountering any of the above problems.

Ethical Issues

Ethics refers to rules of conduct; typically, "to conformity to a code or set of principles" (Robson, 2002:65). Ethical issues are a very important aspect of research because our "right to know" should be balanced against the participant's right to privacy, dignity and self- determination (Robson, 2002:65).

Taking the severity of the ethical consideration in mind, this study is done with the highest importance placed on ethics. The guidelines from BERA (2004, 2011), emphasise the confidentiality and anonymous treatment of participant's data. This is

strictly adhered to in this study. At the onset of interviews, the purpose of the interview was explained to participants; assurance was given to them that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained during the dissemination of the results of this study. It was also emphasised that the research will not harm the interviewees in any way and will be strictly conducted within the framework of BERA, (2004, 2011).

A written informed consent *(Appendix 2)* was obtained from the participants at the outset of the interviews. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the research at any time if they were not comfortable with the topics covered in the schedule or if they do not want to give their views on some aspects of a topic.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research like this one, there is normally a close relationship between the researcher and the participants and this has implications for biases. The use of semi-structured interviews automatically creates a closer relationship than the methods utilised by quantitative studies. Denscombe (2003:169) supports this view and points out that the data collected is "affected by the personal identity of the researcher…" It is, therefore, important to declare this relationship and for the researcher and reader to acknowledge this when analysing and making conclusions from the resultant data. Although there was no personal involvement between the researcher and the interviewees in this research, the researcher worked in FE and therefore could be considered by some as an 'insider' and therefore an 'interested

professional.' This could have affected the relationship between the interviewees and the researcher in that interviewees may have assumed prior knowledge in some areas or less likely to talk of sensitive issues for instance on the relationship-balance between governors and principals. However, all the participants were assured that my involvement with this research is as an independent researcher and their views will be treated with utmost confidentiality and respect.

Validity and Reliability

Validity refers to the accuracy of the result (Robson, 2002). Silverman (1993) calls it "truth" which is interpreted as the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers. There are two distinguishable concepts of validity that are important to any research design: internal validity and external validity (Vaus, 2001). Internal validity is the extent to which the structure of the research design enables us to draw unambiguous conclusions from our results. In this study all SC governors from 6 colleges were asked the same questions about education governance in order to ensure data gathered is comparable and closely reflect education governance. In addition to this, data obtained from interviews were supplemented by data from documentary analysis (method triangulation) in order to eliminate alternative explanations for the findings.

External validity refers to the extent to which the results from a research can be generalised "beyond the particular study" (Vaus, 2001:28). As the sample size is small in this research, it would be problematic to generalise the results of the study to

all UK FE colleges. This is because the study is based on 6 FE colleges out of a total of about 224 in the UK (Foster, 2005). Moreover, the selected colleges are all from the same geographical area (Midlands region) which means local political, social, cultural and economic factors may have an impact on the way these institutions are led, which could be different from institutions located in a different geographical area.

Cohen et al., (2007) believe that authenticity should replace validity in qualitative research. These authors argue that it is the meaning that the subjects give the data and the inferences drawn from the data that are of importance. They go on to suggest that 'understanding' is a more suitable term for 'validity' in a qualitative enquiry. It has been reiterated that the aim of this research is to understand the role of governance in college improvement drawing upon the views of SC governors and principals. Subsequently, although the research is not generalisable to the wider UK population, trends and issues will emerge to inform and answer my research questions and contribute to the on-going research agenda on FE governance. It is therefore argued here that, relatability of this research is more important as its results potentially could be related to other similar organisations. No claim is therefore made that, these informants are representatives of all the 'governance players' in FE colleges and that what has been found in this research will be replicated to all other FE organisations. However, issues surrounding the role of FE governors in college improvement are worthy for consideration by any organisation committed to advance and develop the needs of young people.

Reliability is whether the research instruments are neutral in their effect, and would measure the same result when used on other occasions, with the same 'objects' (Denscombe, 2003). However, it is more difficult to ensure reliability using semi-structured interviews because of the deliberate strategy of treating each participant as a potentially unique respondent. Denscombe (2003) believes that this could be dealt with if the aims of the research and its basic premises, the conduct of the research, and the reasoning behind key decisions made are provided clearly in the study. In this study, the reliability of the study was enhanced by piloting interview schedules to three Education doctorate students who are also head teachers or principals. After completing the pilot stage, amendments were made to the original interview schedule before undertaking actual interviews with participants.

Generalizability

This study constitutes 6 case studies of FE college governance in the Midlands region of England, therefore, its findings will not be generalisable to other settings, but it has value for education and may be relatable to others who work within the FE sector.

Analysing Interview Data

As already indicated, interview responses were tape-recorded and then transcribed. This helped the researcher to be closer to the data and made it easier to analyse it. Field notes meant to annotate the transcription were also included in the

transcriptions in order to give a richer meaning to the spoken account. An example of one of the 20 transcripts is provided as an appendix *(See Appendix 5).*

However, qualitative data has been described by Robson, (2002:455) as an "attractive nuisance". This is because, although narrative accounts and other collection of words are variously described as 'rich', 'full' and 'real' and contrasted with the thin abstractions of number, the 'nuisance' of qualitative data is really to do with the potential difficulty of collecting and analysing it (Miles and Huberman,1994).

In this study, analysing the interview data involved giving meaning to the words and what implications the words have in relation to the topic under investigation. Looking for emerging themes from the 20 interviews was a straightforward and methodological approach adopted to analyse the data. The main advantage of using this approach was that semi-structured interview data were systematically analysed, question by question, and allowed all responses to be considered in a similar way and to be fairly treated. Recurring patterns emerged from the interview data enabling themes to be identified. The emergent themes were:

- Governors' early socialisation and influence to governorship: secondary socialisation was more influential than primary socialisation in informants' choice of becoming FE governors.

- The purpose(s) of FE governance: the purposes that governance serves in colleges are many and these vary from college to college.

- Governors' skills and experience: governors need to have a variety of skills and relevant experience to be able to influence the leadership of FE colleges.

- The roles and responsibilities of governors and principals: data reveal that these are blurred or difficult to distinguish in practice.

- Standards Committee governors and college improvement: the work of governors can greatly help colleges to improve.

- Governor-principal relationship balance: the pattern that emerged from the data analysis reveals that the governor-principal relationship in colleges is unsteadily balanced.

A recurrent theme indicated that the issue/idea was something that was shared among a wider group and therefore the researcher could refer to it with confidence rather than any idea/issue which stems from the words of one individual (Denscombe, 2003). For easy analysis of the many separate pieces of data from all the interviews, the researcher created a matrix which placed interviews along the top and themes down the left hand side. When reading through the transcripts, a tick was placed in the appropriate box when a particular theme cropped up and a code given to the data for reference purposes (Gunter et al., 2008). The matrix helped to see patterns in the data and to record evidence of these patterns by selecting appropriate quotations to illustrate these patterns. However, while reoccurring themes were explored, the researcher also remained open to disconfirming evidence when it appeared. This was done to make sure that all the commonalities and differences within these 20 different interviews were equally justified. The complete matrix acted as a 'data display' tool which then enabled conclusion drawing and theory was developed to explain the findings.

Consideration was given on whether each informant should receive a copy of their typed transcript to review before analysis. This idea was discarded because the researcher believed that the informants had been given fair warning of the questions; were promised confidentiality and anonymity; and had enough time to consider their responses before the interview. Access to a summary outline of this thesis was

offered to all informants before final submission, although the researcher reserved the right at such a late stage to maintain the interpretations of the findings.

Analysing Documentary Data

Governor meeting minutes were analysed using the "content analysis" technique. This is a "research technique for making replicable and valid inference from data to their context" (Molina, 1994:121). The content one looks for in 'texts' is nearest to the significance (the relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception) (Molina, 1994). The focus of analysis was on the relationship between what was discussed in those meetings in relationship to the concept of 'college improvement.' The strategy used to analyse the selected documents was the 'Word Text Documentary Content Analysis' (WTDCA). This is a cognitive Inductive process (bottom-up) of controlled omission (Molina, 1994). Figure 5 below shows the content strategy of WTDCA used to analyse selected governors' meeting minutes.
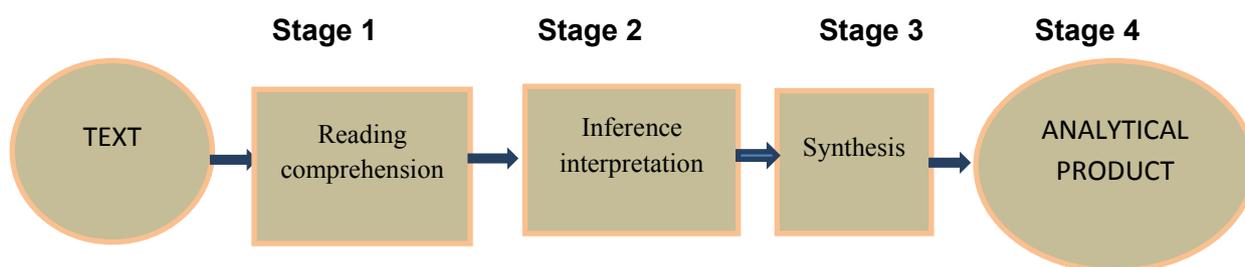
Figure 5: The Strategy of WTDCA (adapted from Molina, 1994:123).

WTDCA involved an examination that governors' meeting minutes underwent to determine their content and its subsequent description in order to get 'second hand' information out of the whole process. Basically, the process consisted of three steps:

1. Identifying and recognising individual words in the text.

2. Analysing the meaning of sentences. This depends on the meaning of words, but also on its grammatical structure.

3. Textual analysis – directly aimed at obtaining textual content. Molina (1994) calls this the updating of meaning.

Nevertheless, governors meeting minutes were appraised and analysed in terms of authenticity, reliability, meaning and theorisation (McCulloch, 2004).

Limitations of Research

This study focuses on FE governance and its contributions to college improvement based on the perspectives of "Standards committee" governors and principals. Although this provided rich data to answer my research questions, the research were only limited to this group of governors and principals in 6 FE colleges, in the Midlands region of England. However, the study could provide an understanding of FE governors and their contribution in college improvement and potentially pave a way for future studies involving other stake holders of FE governance.

Summary

This chapter has provided a snapshot clarification of the wider frameworks and the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin this research. The research strategy as well as the philosophical reasons behind the methodological

approach were explained and justified. Justification was also made of the methods of data collection used and an indication of how findings will be analysed is given. Finally, research management issues such as access, ethics, validity and reliability were also discussed. Having discussed all these and clearly stated and acknowledged the researcher's identity, values and beliefs, this thesis now moves on to present the findings of the research in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents findings from semi-structured interviews, analysing emergent issues and comparing responses from principals and Standards committee (SC) governors. Findings are not presented case study by case study but instead on stakeholder by stakeholder basis. Findings are reported in discursive style and broken down into themes relating to the research questions and are supported by tables and selected quotations from informants to provide a deeper insight into the key findings of the research. Key findings from semi-structured interviews are supplemented by the documentary analysis part of the study. The findings are presented in section(s) format, for example Section 1, 2, 3, 4 etc. The themes that I will focus on are summarised overleaf in Table 3:

Themes	Description
1	Governors' early socialisation and influence to governorship in later life: literature on school leadership reveals that early socialisation plays a very important role in influencing individuals' choice to become future leaders (head teachers) (Gronn, 1999; Ribbins, 2003). However, there is a dearth of literature on FE governors' early socialisation and influence to governorship in later life. This theme explores the role played by early socialisation in influencing informants' choice of becoming FE governors and the impact this may have on their identity transformation.
2	The purpose(s) of FE governance: academic writers concur that the purpose(s) of FE college governance is not clearly defined (Gleeson et al., 2010) and therefore, governance practices vary from college to college. This theme is explored with a view of establishing from informants' perspectives the purpose they think governance serves in colleges and how this may impact their work as governors.
3	Governors' skills and experience: Literature acknowledges that governors need to have particular skills and experience in order to be able to inform and shape the leadership of FE colleges (Shoffield, 2009; Gleeson et al., 2010). This theme is explored with the intention of establishing to what extent governors' skills and experience influence the leadership of FE colleges.
4	The roles and responsibilities of governors and principals: seeks to identify the extent to which the roles and responsibilities of governors and principals are distinguishable in practice.
5	Governor-principal relationship balance: this theme is meant to explore the extent to which governor-principal relationship is or is not in a state of equilibrium in FE colleges.
6	Standards Committee governors and college improvement: seeks to establish the extent to which the work of SC governors contributes to FE college improvement.

Table 3: A summary of themes that emerged from this research

In the text, interviewees are referred to by a two part alpha and a numeric code and colleges by an alpha/alpha code as shown below. The first part of the code identifies the interviewee, while the second part identifies the college from where the interviewee belongs. For example:

G1, CA, T5 = Governor 1, College A, Transcript 5.

P, CB, T8 = Principal, College B, Transcript 8.

The last part of the alpha/numeric code identifies the relevant interview transcript from which the quote was taken.

The chapter begins with Section 1, which provides a brief overview summary of the characteristics of the sample. This is followed by Section 2, which looks at governors' early socialisation and how this might have influenced them to become FE governors. Section 3 focuses on the purpose (s) that governors and principals think FE governance serves in their colleges. This is followed by Section 4, which reports on the experience and skills that are necessary for a governor to have in order to be able to inform and shape an FE college. Section 5 compares the roles and responsibilities of SC governors and principals in order to find any possible frictional points in practice. Section 6 considers governor-principal (G-P) relationship balance and the final Section (Section 7) reports on the role of SC governors in college improvement.

At the end of each section there is a summary of the key findings and at the end of the Chapter I have sought to provide an overall summary of the key findings and indicate emerging issues which will be taken up for discussion in Chapter 5.

Section 1

Characteristics of Sample

A total of 14 FE SC Governors and 6 Principals in 6 case study colleges in the English Midlands region of England were interviewed in this study. All 6 governing bodies (GBs) studied are modelled on a traditional system of college governance; that is, they operate through a committee structure. Subsequently, data from all the 6 colleges are treated the same. In terms of educational background, all the participants, except one who had a background as a police officer, have a minimum of a Bachelor's degree and a maximum of a Master's degree. All governors were either serving professionals or retired, but held senior professional positions before their retirement, and had served a minimum of 2 years as a governor and a maximum of 25 years. Only one principal was in his second year of serving as a principal and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in their college.

Section 2

Governors' early socialisation and influence to governorship

The information contained in this section was relevant in answering Research Question (RQ) 1: Does one's early socialisation have an influence in their choice of becoming a governor in later life?

In order to answer this question, first, I asked governors if there was anything in their early socialisation or family background that influenced them to become governors in FE colleges. My intention here was to find out from governors themselves what role

they think 'early socialisation' played in influencing them to become governors and in helping to shape their current identity. Studies on educational leadership have shown that early socialisation plays a very important role in shaping and paving the way for future leaders, but apparently, there is no research that has attempted to link governors' early socialisation and its influence to governorship in the FE sector.

In response to what influenced them into FE governorship, 86% (n=12) of governors said they were influenced by their educational background to become FE governors in colleges. (n=12 means the total number of respondents out of the total population sample) According to these governors, one's level of education during their time would determine the type of work (employment) that they would go on to do and hence determine one's status. This is reflected from the following statements from governors:

- I have been working in employment and training all my life (G2, CF, T3).

- I was the first graduate in my family and so my knowledge of the education system played an important role (G1, CE, T4).

- To fulfil my belief - I believe that education is fundamental to our overall well-being, not only in our well-being but also in our spiritual well-being (G2, CE, T6).

- I have worked in a college and still wanted to contribute really (G3, CE, T9).

- To make a difference, "well as a former head teacher I was a governor of my school for many years and the secondary school partnership were looking for a head teacher to become a governor of college D, to represent secondary school/college partnership on the college GB and I was prepared to do that at the time" (G1, CD, T12).

One governor succinctly said this:

No not particularly anything in my family background. I was the first graduate in my family which was a working class family…I was the first one to work in

the public sector...Yes, I think my background as a LA administrator and a senior manager, both in terms of expertise and experience have given me the right sort of skills you need to be a governor and also has given me that public sector background. I bring to the governorship an ethos of that public service (G1, CE, T4).

On the hand, only 14% (n=2) of governors thought their family background played a role in influencing them to become FE governors. One of these governors precisely said this about his family background influences:

My family background and my wife's background as working class families (in Town C)-my father was a Painter and Decorator and my wife's father was a store man for Dunlop and the values of both our families like many working class families in (Town C) was that education was the way forward…(G1, CC, T7).

The above data seem to support the view that most people became governors because governorship was related to their educational background, previous employment and expertise or just an innate willingness to continue contributing something back to the college in question. It also seems clear that educational and professional backgrounds had a much greater influence than early family background on interviewees' choice to become governors. What also seems apparent is that, some working class parents had high expectations for their children and this indirectly stimulated the children to pursue education as far as university and later this educational background propelled them to become FE college governors. So, in relation to early socialisation, the findings suggest that secondary socialisation (i.e. educational, social mobility and professional backgrounds) played a central role in influencing most 86% (n=12) of my informants to become governors in FE colleges.

After gaining an insight into the background influences of why my informants became FE governors, I went further by asking them to explain what difference they thought they could make by joining an FE GB. My intention was to explicitly know what these governors thought they could contribute to the governance of FE education. Understanding the motivational factors behind something has been repeatedly linked with endurance in difficult situations (James et al., 2010). Table 4 below shows a summary of what governors' said they could contribute to the governance of their colleges through GBs.

Motivation factor/proposed governors' contributions to their college governance	Number of governors (excluding 2 staff) governors (%)
Understanding the needs of the local community/Links with local organisations/ working in the region before.	67% (n=8)
Understanding of the education system	33% (n=4)
Improve Educational standards/ Expertise	42% (n=5)

Table 4: Governors' motivations of becoming FE governors

As shown on Table 4, 67% (n=8) of governors joined FE college GBs because they thought they were strategically positioned to be able to contribute knowledge of the local community to the governance of FE colleges/ they either had links with local

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organisations or they have been working in the Midlands region before. One governor said this about their motivation to join their college GB: "I have been working in the region and understand the dynamics and the issues as well as the developments" (G2, CF, T3). Likewise another governor said "I understand the needs of those areas (local community) in terms of training, employment which is what the college is all about (G1, CE, T4) and similarly G2, CE, T6 said, "I thought I could contribute by responding to the community needs and indeed to come up with solutions and answers to what the local community needs".

Second in ranking is that category of governors 42% (n=5) who said that they joined college GBs because they wanted to use their expertise to contribute in the improvement of educational standards. In the words of one governor, "it has always been my motivation to improve the educational standards when I was working particularly in this last context in (Town E) Local Authority" (G1, CE, T4). In the same vein, one governor said that at the time when he joined the corporation, the college was in a lot of difficulties and it did not have a good reputation and "I felt that I could help them in a small way by giving the college a great future" (G1, CD, T12). The same also applies to G1, CF, T10 who said he wanted to contribute some business skills: "I think that education today need to put on a business heart, as funding for you (referring to interviewer) in universities and us in colleges is being cut all the way..."

Lastly, 33% (n=4) of governors were motivated to join college GB because of their understanding of the education system. In this category are some of those who have

worked as senior managers in the FE sector before. The views of these is closely mirrored by G3, CE, T9, who asserts that, "I was interim vice principal here for a while, so I know the college well; I have faith in the senior management team and I want to support them really".

The above findings indicate that interviewees had various motivations for choosing to become FE governors.

Summary

From the foregoing findings, it seems evident that there is no clear link between one's primary socialisation (family background) and influence to become an FE governor in later life. The most important message is that secondary socialisation such as education and social mobility as a result of employment played a very important role in influencing my interviewees to become FE governors. Secondly, the findings in this section also reveal that 67% (n=8) of the informants volunteered to become FE college governors out of the need to contribute knowledge of their local communities to the governance of FE education.

Section 3

The purpose(s) of FE governance

The information contained in this section was necessary in answering the following research question: RQ 2 – what purpose(s) does governance serve in the FE sector?

The data for answering this question was obtained from both governors and principals, and my intention was to get personal variation or data triangulation regarding governors' and principals' views on the purpose of FE governance. Table 5 overleaf summarises what governors and principals said about the purpose of governance in their colleges in practice. Here governors' responses are concurrently mirrored to those from principals.

Governors' responses	%	Principals' responses	%
• Offering what the community needs	14%(n=2)	• To oversee the operations of management so that the views of the local community are properly represented	17%(n=1)
• Setting the strategic direction of the college	50% (n=7)	• To set the direction of the college • To oversee the overall activities of the college	83% (n=5)
• Stewardship of the assets of the college • To make the institution legitimate	14%(n=2)	• Legally they have responsibility in terms of disposal of estate and purchasing because of financial regulations and the entire responsibility of committing the college financially	17%(n=1)
• It ensures that the educational character and mission of the college is set	29%(n=4)	• I think it's making sure that governors set the, the educational tone and character of this college.	50% (n=3)
• Ensuring that public money is spent appropriately for the benefit of the public	14%(n=2)	• Making sure that financially in education we are sound	67% (n=4)
• It serves as an external checks and balance • To monitor and challenge management	50%(n=7)	• To provide checks and balances • Monitoring the performance of the college	50% (n=3)
• To appoint a strong principal and senior	14% (n=2)		

management team			
• It is about what you bring to the table- expertise	7% (n=1)		

Table 5: A comparison of the purpose(s) of FE governance from Governors and Principals

A key message from this finding is that, there is general consensus among all governors and principals interviewed that the purposes of FE governance are manifold. Top on the list from both groups is setting the strategic direction of the college and overseeing the activities of the college 83% (n=5) principals and 50% governors (n=7). Equally important from both groups (50% on each) is the purpose of FE college governance in providing checks and balances/keeping the college honest and monitoring the performance of the college. One governor succinctly summed up the purpose of FE governance as follows:

> It ensures that the educational format of the college is set. Make sure that the finance is in good order, that's important and we make sure that there is a quality system in place to deliver good quality results- primarily what we are worried about are students – to provide students of (college C) and surrounding areas with opportunities to develop their skills…As governors, sitting on the back of the principal and his team, asking what about that? What about this? (G1, CC, T7).

However, as can be seen from Table 5, slight variations seem to exist on the following additional points that governors made (which are not mirrored in principals' responses): the purpose of FE governance is to appoint a strong principal and senior management team 14% (n=2) governors and also that governance is about what governors bring to the table as one governor pointed out:

> …the purpose of the whole governance is to have people from a wide range of backgrounds, you got business people, accounts people, somebody interested

in the curriculum, staff governors, student governors, and we have got a whole range of expertise there. So, it's about what you can bring to the table (G3, CF, T5).

Summary

It seems clear from this finding that both governors and principals concur with the view that governance serves many purposes in the FE sector as shown in Table 4. It also appears that there are significant differences on the emphasis of particular aspects of governance that are more important from both groups' point of view. This lack of a clear common purpose of what FE governance serves may cause confusion and exposes it to subjective interpretations by clerks, chairs and managers.

Section 4

Governors' skills and experience

The information contained in this section was relevant in answering the following research question: RQ 3. What are the key skills and experience necessary for a governor to have in order to be able to shape and inform the leadership of a college?

The purpose of this question was to explore in detail, the skills (something requiring special training) and experience that are necessary for one to be an effective FE college governor. I asked both governors and principals to state and explain the skills they thought are necessary for one to be an effective FE governor. Overleaf in Table 6 is a summary of what interviewees said are the important skills necessary for one to be an effective governor in an FE college environment:

Key skills necessary for one to be an effective governor	% governors	% principals
Good communication skills/ ability to read and write/sift through a lot of information /ability to negotiate/listen	57%(n=8)	33%(n=2)
Analytical skills/ the ability to analyse a lot of qualitative and quantitative data/evaluate/ the ability to take a strategic view	71% (n=10)	50%(n=3)
Good interactive skills	50%(n=7)	33%(n=2)
Ask relevant or awkward questions/challenge/comment/ Objectiveness and openness	64%(n=9)	83%(n=5)
Generic/A variety of skills	21%(n=3)	83%(n=5)
Need no any particular skill	7%(n=1)	0%

Table 6: Skills and experience a governor needs to have in order to be able to shape and inform the leadership of a college.

As shown in Table 6, 64% (n=9) governors and 83% (n=5) principals value the ability to ask relevant or awkward questions, to challenge what they see and to comment in an objective and open way as the most important skills necessary for one to be an effective governor in an FE college environment. A good and effective governor needs an open and objective mind, the ability to listen and to form a view of what is before them – whether it's a new building or a new policy for the corporation. "Objectivity and openness are essential" in the concise words of G2, CD, T11.

Equally important to both groups 71% (n=10) governors and 50% (n=3) principals are good analytical skills or the ability to analyse a lot of quantitative and qualitative data and the ability to take a strategic view.

One principal said this about the analytical skills necessary for one to be an effective governor:

> Well, governors need to have quite good analytical and reasoning skills. They need to be able to understand complex situations, analyse them and distil the essence of issues and to be able to think critically about issues (P, CD, T18).

However, 57% (n=8) of governors as compared to only 33% (n=2) of principals see good communication skills, the ability to read and write, the ability to sift through a lot of information and determine what is important for a whole set of reasons as more important. For example as G1, CC, T7 pointed out "we have got detailed data that you don't need, so I should be able to assess what is important and what is not important." Good negotiation skills and the ability to listen are also cited as equally important skills. As concisely said by one principal:

> They need to have good communication skills because they have a relatively limited amount of time to put their views forward and this maybe around the table. They need to know when to talk, when not to talk and they need to be able to communicate simply and effectively (P, CE, T15).

Interestingly 83% (n=5) principals and only 21% (n=3) governors concur that a GB need a variety of skills to be able to add value to a college. One governor said of this:

> Well, they (skills) vary considerably in that a GB is exactly what it is-a board. …What is important is that people bring into it different attributes and skills coming from different backgrounds. For example, coming from my background in education and quality assurance and quality control, I bring in skills of quality assurance and quality control which comes from being an HMI Inspector (G1, CA, T1).

Similarly P, CF, T16 shares the same view that a GB needs people with generic skills in order to effectively contribute to the governance of FE colleges. According to him, governors are people with different expertise-some are very good in business, some

are good with curriculum issues, some are very good in responding to the community

needs – that is important because we are a community college. As he succinctly

asserts:

> If we have 16 Roberts on the GB we fail, if we have 16 Romeos on the GB we
> fail, if we have 16 accountancy on the board we fail, if we have 16 business
> people on the board we fail...but if we have a Robert, a Romeo, a Tonde, a
> Rebecca, a someone, a someone and a someone we succeed. We need
> people with different skills to make up our GB (P, CF, T16).

In support of the above view, P, CE, T15 affirms "…it is helpful when you have a GB

as a whole that you have a range of skills around the table". Sentiments that are also

echoed by (P, CC, T17) who adds that, governors need a variety of skills and the

ability to work on a corporate basis, recognising that other people have different

views on the board and that it needs to be a clear duty type of operation and that

everyone brings something to the process.

In addition to the above, 50% (n=7) of governors and 33% (n=2) of principals think

that good interactive skills are also very important for one to be an effective FE

governor. According to this section of interviewees, governors are separate

governors and should have the ability to work in a team. G2, CE, T6 precisely said

this about interactive skills, "I think also we are a GB, we are separate governors, so

one should have the ability to work with other teams".

On the contrary, only 7% (n=1) of governors from the sample held a different view

about the skills needed for governors to contribute effectively to the governing of their

colleges. This governor took an extreme view and argues that, one can be a very

good and effective governor as long as they are willing to learn and understand what the college is all about. She precisely said this:

> I don't think you need to come with a particular industrial skill necessarily…, it's a willingness to understand those issues, what the local economy is all about and wanting to support… So, you could be anything-you could be a dust man, you could be a milk man, you could be a chief executive of a business, I don't think it really matters. Governance doesn't automatically exclude any one type of individual (G2, CF, T3).

Summary

The findings in this section support the view that, there are a number of key skills that are perceived (by informants) as necessary for a governor to have in order to be able to shape and inform the leadership of an FE college. These include good communication, listening, reasoning, analytical, negotiation, evaluation and interactive skills and the ability to analyse a lot of quantitative and qualitative data. The data also support the emergent theme that, apart from governors' skills and skills attributes, there are also other important priorities that need to be taken into consideration before one becomes an effective governor in an FE college environment. These include subtle things such as: to be a governor for the right reasons; an understanding of what the role is, what the opportunities are and what the limitations are (G1, CD, T12); an understanding of the FE education system (G1, CB, T13); you need to be passionate about education (P, CE, T15); you also need to be well-informed (P1, CF, T16); a willingness to learn and understand what the college is all about (G2, CF, T3) and the need for commitment because as P, CC, T17 puts it, "there need to be a bit of commitment because governors join the GB for various reasons…" What seems to be alluded from this finding is that, in order for

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governors to effectively contribute to FE leadership, they need more than skills and expertise but ethos and values of working in an FE college.

Section 5

The roles and responsibilities of governors and principals

The information contained in this section was relevant in answering the following research question: RQ 4: What duties SC governors do and how do these compare with those of principals?

In order to answer the above question, I asked both governors and principals to explain to me their roles and responsibilities in practice. My intention was to get data (respondent) triangulation that would enable me to make a comparison of what principals and governors do in practice. Relevant literature on the roles and responsibilities of governors and principals points to the problem of a clear demarcation between what governors and principals do in practice. I was aware that most principals are also governors, so in a way they belong to two different 'worlds'. Fortunately, all the principals who were interviewed in this research were both governors and principals.

Table 7 summarises what governors and principals said about their roles and responsibilities in practice.

Governors' responses	Principals' responses
• Monitoring the Standards of performance of the students. • Ensuring that the college itself has a quality assurance process, which is capable, of asking the correct questions and maintaining the quality of provision, the courses, the teaching and obviously concerned with the outcomes as well, the standards which students reach. • Challenging senior management and making sure that they stay focussed. • Make suggestions on how things can improve. • To ensure that what is provided is the best fit that we are bringing in the local people to learn, getting them into the right course for them, they are achieving and at the end they are moving up into higher education or into employment. • Reviewing the progress against targets, considers the issues. • Monitoring and evaluating the performance of the college. • My role is to look at the data that we are getting and to check on policies. • To have an input into the strategy of the college. • We make sure that this college is viable in terms of financial viability. • We set the quality and educational standards • Maintaining quality. • I am involved in the Strategic direction of the college-setting the direction that it is going in, keeping up with the times, which is a constantly monitoring process.	• The role is clearly Principal and Chief Executive Officer. • Accountability for everything that happens within this college. • Responsible to the corporation for the determination and the carrying out of strategy of education and training under the commercial activities. • Responsibility for the entire staffing of the college. • Responsibility for the finances of the college, health and safety of the college and the student performance. So it's all embracing. • Obviously I run the college. I am responsible for the college and the leadership and management of the college. • From the company perspective, I am the "Managing Director" because I am both a principal and a member of the governing board. • I ensure its financial management is viable. • I suppose, I set the tone and culture of the college. • I gain funding for the college. • I suppose I provide the leadership and direction of the college. • To ensure the effective operation of the college • The major priority is to ensure that students are successful, that they have a good learning experience; they achieve the qualification that they are enrolled into. • Management of people.

• My role is not only just monitoring the outcomes of the college in relation to student success rates but also other criteria areas of performance indications, such as equality and diversity, targets, quality of teaching and learning and also business planning process, help to set direction for those key performance areas. • It is about making sure that the quality is there. • It's about challenging some of the teaching and support that is there and always make sure it's of the right standard. • It's about asking questions of why some people are doing well, why actually other people are not doing actually well. • Curriculum delivery, in terms of retention of students. • It's all about being visibly there, going to see and get involved with what students do. • In the S.C we have lots of report given to us by various members of the college , not just regarding results, but also about equality, ethnicity, gender-divided against that and it's our job to make sure that college falls within the top of the list rather than towards the bottom where it used to be.	• My role is to monitor Standards and making sure students achieve. • The Chief Executive's role is for making sure that we survive as a business. • I am here to monitor the financial outcomes. • I am here to monitor students' success rates or how students succeed. • To get students into higher levels of education or to get them into work. • Partnership – it's about engaged with business, it's about creating work experience, it's about working with employers; It's about working with industry so that a lot of our students get into work. • I am responsible for running the college effectively. • I am providing strategies and direction for the corporation, making sure that we have everything in place to provide a high quality service. • Shout a lot. • Do what the governors tell me to do. • The responsibilities that are commensurate with that role are to put into practice what the governors set as strategy.

Table 7: The roles and responsibilities of governors and principals in practice

As shown in Table 7, it is evident that, although the roles and responsibilities of governors and principals are laid down by the Articles and Instruments of Government and are in a state of flux in colleges, there are some grey areas where these rub into each other. This might be a result of how these roles and

responsibilities are interpreted by respective college GBs. For example, both groups said their roles and responsibilities involves ensuring that their college is financially viable 67% (n=4) principals and 21% (n=3) governors and that they are both responsible for monitoring and ensuring quality and high standards of education in their colleges 83% (n=5) principals and 86% (n=12) governors. As P, CC, T17 pointed out "the major priority is to ensure that students are successful, that they have a good learning experience; they achieve the qualification that they are enrolled into." The issue here is where does principals' monitoring role starts and where does it ends and where does that of SC governors' starts and ends? As can also be seen from Table 6, there seems to be some contradictions within one group, with 33% (n=2) of principals saying they just implement what the governors tells them to do, as said by one principal for example, "I do what the governors tells me to do" (P, CD, T18). The remainder principals 67% (n=4) said much of the work (strategy) in practice is done by the senior management team and the governors have an involvement there and have the final opportunity to agree the strategy. For example, one principal said: "I am responsible for providing strategies and direction for the corporation, making sure that we have everything in place to provide a high quality service" (P, CC, T17). Similarly another principal said, "In terms of strategy, the way it works in practice is that senior executive team do much of the detailed work on strategy and then discuss with governors" (P, CE, T15).

From this finding, it can be inferred that some principals see their role as simply implementing what governors tell them to do (lower level participation) and for others,

it is about providing strategies and direction to the corporation (high level participation).

I followed the above question by asking both groups to explain whether they think there is a clear distinction between what each group do in practice. The finding from this question also demonstrated a polarised view on the distinction between strategic management (governance) and operational management from both governors and principals. On the one hand are those from both groups 67% (n=4) principals and 57% (n=8) governors who think that the distinction (between governance and management) is clear in theory/on paper and these gave the following points to explain their position: the Articles and Instruments of government are clear on the distinction 50% (n=2) principals; an understanding that governors are not managers but employ other people such as principals and senior managers to run the college 50% (n=4) governors and 25% (n=1) principal; an understanding that governors do not need to be involved in operational management and that there is a clear induction for new governors on the difference between governance and management when they join corporations 13% (n=1) governor and 25% (n=1) principal. One principal said this about the difference between strategic and operation management in theory:

> Massive differences, in law GB members cannot be involved in the management of the college. For example they can't hire people, they can't dismiss people, they can't spend money, and they can't tell me what course to put on, what course not to put on… (P, C1, T1).

In the same vein, one governor said on the distinction between their roles and responsibilities to those of the principal:

> Management is responsible for the day to day running of the college and we monitor what they do very closely and we sit down with them to decide what

the strategic direction and the mission of the college is...we monitor the academic performance of the college; we don't manage the managers (G1, CA, T2).

Both groups 71% (n=10) governors and 50% (n=3) principals also cited experience and length of service as providing help in understanding the distinction between governance and management. According to them, those governors and principals who have been long in the post have developed a working relationship with their principals and vice versa and can easily understand what is expected from each other, as one principal asserts, "…having been a principal established over 14 years, you tend to know what you are doing in terms of working relationships, but if you were new it can be difficult" (P, CC, T17). Likewise, one staff governor who has served as a governor for two years admitted: "the distinction is clear now, initially I wasn't aware of the distinction between the two, because the role of governance is setting the strategic direction and policy and then that influence how the college is managed" (G2, CB, T8).

Only one principal cited induction and training that is organised for new governors by individual colleges as providing vital information in understanding the distinction between governance and management to new governors.

On the other hand, 43% (n=6) governors and 33% (n=2) principals concur that the distinction between the roles and responsibilities of principals and governors in FE colleges is very blurred in practice. One governor clearly said this: "I think the only difficulty that I sometimes find is the exact line between executive management and if you like strategic management, because sometimes these two can rub at each other

and it is not always clear" (G2, C5, T6). Thus, according to him for some governors distinguishing between executive management and their responsibilities and duties that at times can blur and lead to problems. Likewise G2, CB, T8 said, "yes, it has taken me a while to be able to separate the two, but I don't want to divorce them too much because they are related".

Conversely, both 43% (n=6) governors and 33% (n=2) principals said another problem of distinguishing between those two (governance and management) in practice is associated with the problem of definitions, for example one governor said:

> Defining governance and management, sometimes there are always some grey areas. Different colleges have different views about what they see as governance and what they see as management. The Instruments and Articles of government laid down what is management and what governance is responsible for specifically…, but in practice the role of governors and the principal invariably cross over (G2, CE, T6).

Similarly, (P, CF, T16) refers to the distinction between governance and management as a "delicate balance". He says: "It's a delicate balance. What we want governors to do is to sit back and advise on strategy". According to him, it is management who tells governors and advise them on issues that they have got to focus and concentrate on. He goes further to say that, sometimes governors go too far, sometimes they don't go for enough and we have got to try and push a balance as far as we can. "It is an interesting one", he says, "in every governance in any organisation, it is very difficult to get a balance mix between management and governance and I haven't yet strike that balance yet" (P, CF, T16).

The patterns that emerge from this finding can be summarised using a collaborative model of working as shown in Table 8 below:

Governors said they are responsible for:	Principals said they are responsible for:
• Setting the strategic direction of colleges. • Setting the mission of the college. • Determining the overall policy. • Considering proposals put to them by the principal/senior managers and determine which options the college might follow. • Advise on strategy or agree the strategic plan. • They are non -executive directors. • Have no executive authority. • The overall oversight of the activities of the college. • Set the overall educational nature of the college. • Ensuring that financially the college is solvent. • Ensure that the college is managed properly. • Monitor the performance of the people that they employ and make sure that they deliver. • Act as an advisory board on the college's approach. • Hold the college in good repute. • Support the management team in putting those selected ideas into place and then monitor the progress they make on those.	• Putting proposals to the corporation. • Implement policies put forward by the governors/corporation. • It is management who tells governors and advise them on issues that they have got to focus and concentrate on. • Implementing strategic objectives. How they do that is up to them. • Management of the college, including hiring people, dismissing people, spending money, and deciding what course to put on and what course not to put on. • They are employees of the college. • They have a vested interest in the college. • Staffing of the college. • Monitoring standards. • Financial management of the college. • They are Chief Executive Officers of their colleges. • Providing staff leadership in the college. • Partnership between the college and its stake holders such as employers and industry. • Set the overall educational nature of the college.

Governors said they are responsible for:	Principals said they are responsible for:
• What the college is about. • Hold management to account for the performance of the college. • Approve expenditure.	

Table 8: An overview summary of the responsibilities of governors and principals in FE colleges

Summary

From these findings it is evident that the distinction between what principals and governors do in practice is not always clear. There are some grey areas where the roles and responsibilities of governors and principals do cross over into each other. This lack of a clear distinction between what governors and principals do in practice is a recurrent theme in the literature and is augmented by the above findings which seems to confirm that the roles and responsibilities of both principals and governors are difficult to distinguish in practice. This can lead to duplication of duties or lead governors to drift into operational management issues and also principals into governorship issues. The distinction between what governors and principals do in practice is very important particularly in the turbulent FE environment where central government has, in recent years, been challenging governors to be more proactive and edging them to take more responsibilities in supporting FE education.

Section 6

Governor-principal relationship balance

RQ 5: To what extent is the principal-governor relationship balanced in FE colleges?

This section considers governor-principal relationship balance and how this may impede or influence decisions in an FE college environment. In order to explore this relationship balance, similar questions were posed to both governors and principals. Areas covered by the questions included whether both groups feel empowered in their roles and their own views on governor/principal relationship balance in FE colleges.

In responding to the question of empowerment, all the principals 100% (n=6) said they absolutely feel empowered in their role as principals. According to them, their empowerment derives from having a very supportive GB which generally leaves them alone to go on with the job. P, CE, T15 has this to say: I give responsibility to people (senior management) in the college; I have a good relationship with my Chair; I am a key part of leading the college and I work with a good GB who are skilled, knowledgeable and understand the situation. He went on to point out that, "I know college principals in other colleges who would give different answers to that question, in a way, but I personally feel much empowered."

Similarly (P, CC, T17) said "I have got powers in the parameters I am set". He went further to say that in his view; local school head teachers have real power than a college principal. According to him, this is because they basically operate in different

ways and they are much more dictatorial. The way how colleges operate, he insists, is that it is a big organisation, the student base is more adult, the students pay fees, they have expectations and so if you do not deliver what you are supposed to deliver, you are accountable for that…I have powers in certain ways to determine things, he said. I am accountable to the board and equally I am accountable to the staff and to the students in terms of what goes on. The other thing is how we operate in reality…I have to go and give responsibility to people. So, that's some degree of power, but, it's some degree of a collaborative model than dictatorial power (P, CC, T17).

Comparatively, 86% (n=12) of governors also said they feel much empowered to do their job. Their empowerment is derived from statutory powers they have to appoint the principal, senior managers, the power to ensure that senior management are doing their job, questioning the principal, power to sack the principal, to approve the budget, to determine the pay policy of the staff and approving the long term strategy of the college and making sure that senior management deliver that strategy. As affirmed by G1, CD, T12:

> The governors work together with the principal, appoint the principal and can sack the principal. It's the responsibility of the corporation; it is not one governor involved but the whole corporation.

In the same vein, one governor also said this, "within the confines of the regulatory regimes, I feel fully empowered; I don't feel restricted in anything that I can ask or do within the basis of consensus…" (G2, CE, T6). Likewise, G2, CF, T6 also said, "you feel able to give a point of view and ask naive questions without feeling intimidated in

anyway, not held back. I do feel that I can ask anyone without feeling that I am being stupid".

Interestingly, a small section of these governors 29% (n=4) also recognised that, the other most important form of power that they have in a college environment is in terms of influence. According to them, they want their colleges to listen to the governorship and feel that they are able to influence. For example one governor said:

> What you have got to understand is that, governors are not professionals in the field, so there is a balance to be found between my view as a governor and perhaps the professionals' view of the world, but I certainly feel here that people listen. I have got the ability to influence what goes on (G2, CD, T11).

On the other hand, 14% (n=2) of the governors who said they do not feel much empowered to do their work cited the prevalence of certain committees within their colleges that are perceived as more important than others and that the Chair of GBs have much more powers than everybody else. According to one of these 2 governors:

> …sometimes there is the Search and Strategic Committee which is a sort of smaller committee and will probably take those decisions about staffing that are very important. So, it's a bit like a pecking order in terms of the committees (G3, CF, T5).

It seems evident from this finding that most governors' feel empowered to do their work because they do have statutory powers to appoint the principal, senior staff, dismissing the principal and determine the pay and conditions of employment for staff. More so, these governors also feel that they do have powers in terms of influence, in terms of generating morale, in terms of setting the tone of the college, as commented by G2, CE, T6, "…but I think it is the softer, it is the influential powers that we can

bring as a corporation acting in concert, that are important and I think that affects and influence the morale of staff." However, 14% (n=2) who said they do not feel much empowered cited the dominance of certain GB committees such as the Audit and Search Committees. Governors who sit in these committees tend to make big decisions about the college, which makes them more influential. It also seems clear from this finding that, although all principals said they feel empowered to do their work, they face many limitations in terms of what they do in practice. Governors have powers to approve or disapprove principals' decisions. This seems contrary to the schools sector, where head teachers are said to be more dictatorial, and seem to suggest that college GBs are more powerful than those in schools. As supported by the above evidence, principals feel empowered to do their work if they have a good, skilled GB and a Chair that support them in their role. If the GB is not supportive that seems to create problems for principals. What also seems evident from this finding is that, in colleges where there have been power struggles between governors and principals, this was mainly due to poor working relationships between senior management and the GB.

After hearing governors and principals' views on empowerment, I went further to ask both groups to give their comments on G-P relationship balance. With regard to this, 83% (n=5) of principals viewed their relationship with governors as a balanced one. According to these principals, there is theoretically no problem in terms of positional power. They repeatedly talked of the fact that, they are both governors and principals and that they listen to the governors and involve them in everything they do at the college. P, CE, T15 said this in response to that question:

> Don't forget that I am a governor as well, because the principal is a Chef Executive Officer (CEO) and a governor. So, I consider myself as an equal on the board of governors, not above the GB, but as a principal I am a senior governor and a CEO of the college and a senior member of the senior team of the college.

According to these principals, the relationship balance may only be upset where principals choose not to be governors. This would probably make a difference on the relationship balance because the principal would literally not be responsible to the GB (P, CF, T16).

Similarly governors were asked to explain how they view their relationship balance with their principals. This question generated varied and interesting answers. Answers to this question differed on whether these governors were staff governors, Chairs of GBs or co-opted governors. For instance 2 out of 14 (14%) staff governors who participated in this study felt that, although they occasionally challenged the principal, there is a feeling among their colleagues (staff members) that they should not challenge the principal because he/she is still the principal and their employer as G2, CB, T8 succinctly pointed out:

> My view of this is that, from my own point of view, I am still a member of teaching staff and therefore, the principal is my employer. As far as I am a staff-governor, I don't see that as raising me to a different position at all. I don't see it that way..., it's a kind of a two scenario here of an employer-staff level, but also as a staff governor, I can challenge and influence certain decisions as well… The principal is obviously the principal (G2, CB, T8).

In the same vein, 38% (3/8*100) co-opted governors and associate governors also pointed out that the principal has powers to run the college and as a governor he has

immense operational powers and therefore for them he is the boss. This is illustrated by G1, CB, T13 who pointed out that: "As far as I am concerned he is the boss, he runs the college. He is responsible for the effective running of the college and we are set back…Just monitoring, then a word if found truly wanting…" For these governors, it should definitely be a 'hands off' relationship.

The remainder 62% (5 out of 8) of co-opted and associate governors acknowledge the structure of FE governance as enabling governors to challenge and to ask as many questions as they want and because of this, these governors think the relationship-balance between governors and principals is balanced. According to this category of governors, principals have operational powers and they have got strategic powers. G1, CD, T12 pointed out that, as governors they provide checks and balances because the principal as a governor has immense operational powers. So it's a relatively balanced relationship as a critical friend to support and challenge depending on the situation.

On the other hand 4 out 14 governors (29%) who participated in these interviews as Chairs of GBs indicated that the relationship balance is slightly tipped in their favour, as one Chair of GB pointed out:

> The Chair is the "boss" …I have the powers to dismiss the principal or any other corporate appointee. I can set an emotion or the action to do that. At the end of the day, although the principal is our principal and chief executive with the responsibilities of delivering responsible management for the college…, if it (college) goes "bonger", it is the Chair that carries the cane (G1, CF, T10).

From this data, it is clear that although the principal runs the college, governors have got strategic powers. They can determine what kind of college it should be and how well it should be run. Chairs of GB performance-manage the principal and hold him accountable for the performance of the college. Regardless of this, some governors claim that the power is balanced and the most important person in a college is the principal, "because we appointed him to run the college and he sets the tone and standards of the college". He sets the style, "but we make sure that he is doing what we want him to do. The most important barrier is about dismissing him. That makes him accountable to us" (G1, CC, T7).

Another issue that is re-affirmed by the above data is that the power responsibilities of the principal sometimes rubs against that of the GB and according to G2, CE, T6 that has got to be resolved. He went on to say:

> I think broadly, we understand the roles of the CEO and governors, but there are times when interpretation of governorship sometimes rubs that of the principal. That is true in any organisation; I don't think that's something that is peculiar only to FE colleges. That will inevitably rise because of the budgets of these colleges – £20-30 million (G2, CE, T6).

G2, C6, T3 also thinks the principal has authority and it is down to the culture and the working environment that governors and principals have created at their college. I feel at the moment each of us has an appropriate level of power commensurate with our roles. However, there are some situations where Chairs of GBs have been given too much power and it creates a working environment which is not healthy.

Section 7

SC Governors and college Improvement

Information contained in this section was necessary in answering RQ 6: To what extent does SC governors' work contribute to college Improvement?

The Section is divided into two sub-sections (7a and 7b). In section 7a, I asked SC governors to tick from a given list the tasks that they have actually performed in their colleges over the past 12 months and then followed this by asking these governors to rate specific roles that they have actually performed in the SC and how valuable they think these roles have been. The data on this first sub-section is presented quantitatively.

Section 7a

SC / Teaching and Learning Quality Committee Governors' Roles

This question was only directed to SC governors and was meant to investigate the specific tasks that governors who sit on SC of colleges consider to be part of their role (what they do in practice). In Table 9 overleaf, I summarise what these governors said about the specific tasks that they have performed over the past 12 months.

Task	Yes	No
Chair of a committee	71 (n=10)	29% (n=4)
Heading Performance Review	43% (n=6)	57% (n=8)
Taking an area of responsibility e.g. governor for special needs/literacy…	71% (n=10)	29% (n=4)
Helping to write the college Improvement Plan/Development plan	71% (n=10)	29% (n=4)
Exclusion panel	0%	100% (n=14)
Appointing college staff	43% (n=6)	57% (n=8)

Table 9: Specific tasks performed by SC governors in the 12 months of the 2011/12 (FE college) academic year.

As shown in Table 9, 71% (n=10) of SC governors have been involved in chairing of a governing committee of some sort (NB, most of the interviewees said they participate in more than one other committees apart from the SC committee); 71%, (n=10) said they have been involved in helping to write their college's improvement plan and also 71% (n=10) said they have taken an area of special responsibility such as safe guarding, special needs, child protection, health and safety, student voice and conferences, attending college's special activities, governor link, distributing awards and sitting on the appeals committee if a member of staff has a disciplinary problem. It is also evident that sitting on the exclusion panel, appointing college staff and heading performance review lie low on the list of tasks performed.

The above question was followed by asking these governors to rate specific roles that they have actually performed in the SC and how valuable they think these roles have been. The evaluations (responses) are summarised in Table 10:

Role	Very valuable	Valuable	Some value	Little value	No value
Scrutiniser of data and information to manage students' performance	71% (n=10)	0	14% (n=2)	14%(n=2)	0
Involvement in college Self Evaluation (SAR)	100% (n=14)	0	0	0	0
Visiting lessons and giving feedback	0	29%(n=4)	7% (n=1)	21% (n=3)	43% (n=6)
Getting to know the strength and areas of development for the college	71% (n=10)	29%(n=4)	0	0	0
Involvement in college improvement planning e.g. SDP/setting targets (SMART)/setting priorities	71% (n=10)	29%(n=4)	0	0	0
Monitoring and evaluating college improvement plans and targets	79% (n=11)	21%(n=3)	0	0	0
Challenging the college leadership as a critical friend to effect improvements for students	64% (n=9)	21%(n=3)	14% (n=2)	0	0
Holding the leadership to account for the performance of the college	50% (n=7)	43%(n=6)	7% (n=1)	0	0
Setting the strategic direction of the college	57% (n=8)	43%(n=6)	0	0	0

Table 10: SC governors' evaluation of the specific roles they have actually performed.

As shown in Table 10, all the governors rate their involvement with (SAR) as very valuable 100% (n=14), followed by their role in monitoring and evaluating college improvement plans against targets which they said was 79% (n=11) very valuable and 21% (n=3) valuable. College improvement planning and getting to know the strength and areas of development for the college were also rated high 71% (n=10) and 29% (n=4) very valuable and valuable respectively. Explaining their involvement

with the college improvement planning, one governor said it is a collaborative process between governors and management. However, another governor pointed out "we are involved but it's a post talk event – fundamental work is done by the staff team" (G2, CE, T6). These governors also said their role as scrutinisers of data and information to manage students' performance was 71% (n=10) very valuable, 14% (n=2) some value and 14% (n=2) little value. Those governors who said some value or little value to this role justified their answers by saying that although they scrutinise data, they don't manage students' performance – in one governor's words, "we don't manage students' performance (that's for management), but we want to understand what they do and how successful they do that" (G1, CC, T7). Other roles considered important include challenging the leadership of the college as a critical friend, setting the strategic direction of the college by appointing the principal and his team and holding the leadership to account for the performance of the college. However visiting lessons and giving feedback was seen as of little or no value by most governors (71%, n=10) including staff governors. According to these governors, although lesson observation is valuable it is not within their remit to visit lessons and give formal feedback.

The patterns of data that emerged from these two questions were mapped into Section 7b below in order to obtain a richer understanding of the role of governors in college improvement. Findings from this sub-section (7b) are presented qualitatively.

Section 7b SC *governors and college improvement*

First, both SC governors and principals were asked to explain how governors monitor the academic performance in their colleges.

In responding to that question, all governors 100% (n=14) and 67% (n=4) principals said governors monitor and evaluate the academic performance in their colleges by receiving regular reports from senior management on each and every outcome of the college, for instance, "A" levels, Vocational qualifications and Apprenticeship and then review the progress against targets and consider the issues.

Example of reports/documents that governors receive from senior management staff to help them perform their monitoring role effectively include: the deputy principal quality improvement short report; student examination results report; reports from the quality department on success rates of students; policy documents; curriculum reports; observation of teaching and learning reports (P, CD, T18); students survey reports; the college and quality improvement plans; Ofsted inspection reports; Ofsted performance tables; annual reports on student performance, recruitment and retention; self-assessment reports (SAR); all targets for the delivery and successes of courses; gender, disability and monitoring reports. On top of all these reports, each member of the corporation gets a student number monitoring report – how we are recruiting, students' retention… (P1, CA, T1). Commenting on the monitoring role of governors, G1, CF, T10 pointed out that:

> We are not just looking at results, but also what are the students' experiences
> at the college are. How well are we teaching…Taking all those reports, such

as annual reports on students' performance, lessons that were observed – were they good or bad and the college will set the targets…We also look at students' attendance.

From this finding, it seems clear that governors monitor and evaluate the performance of their colleges by looking at figures and reading reports. If there are any queries, these can be raised in meetings. As one governor pointed out, "we seek reports from senior management linked to the cycle of events. We need reports/data to monitor and evaluate how they are progressing against targets (G3, CF, T3). In the event of any issues, management will also write reports explaining how they should respond to various issues. A typical example is illustrated by G1, CE, T4 who said that two years ago their "Apprenticeship success rate was not good enough, the completion rate was poor, the net effect was we were not doing particularly well". He said they did 2 things about that, first, the governors took it on board and asked for reports from management about what they should do in order to improve. Governors considered those reports, and then put down action plans as to when and how everything was to be done. That is one thing. The second thing they did, as a corporation, was to identify the problem as a key issue of the college and assigned the principal to take personal responsibility for the issue and G1, CE, T4 as Chair of the GB said to the principal, "one of your annual target is going to relate to Apprenticeship success rates". As a result of these actions, the Apprenticeship success rates have greatly improved. This certainly shows that governors can help colleges to improve.

Principals and governors also repeatedly emphasised the importance of the SAR as one tool that is frequently used by governors to monitor and evaluate college

performance. According to both groups, the SAR is a very important tool to find out how their college is doing. G1, CC, T7 succinctly said this: "We know if it was a 3 last year and a 2 this year, we look at how the performance of each cluster is managed, but we do it through the SAR – which is completed by the college itself".

Apart from the SAR and all the various reports that governors receive from management, one governor also pointed out that he uses his own little network of people who work at the college who come to speak to him outside his governorship. According to him:

> …these are people, who are student teachers, or learners and I also ask students as well, where I can, about what they think can be improved and how they think certain things are going. The network is really good (G2, CD, T11).

As already said earlier on, all 6 colleges had Standards/Quality/Teaching and Learning Quality committees responsible for looking at the performance and quality of the product – how the courses were performing across the college and we are talking of literally tens of courses. What actually happens according to P, CA, T1 is that the quality improvement group, which is comprised of senior staffs, will discuss with SC governors and the governors will actually ask questions of the relevant managers and they get the necessary reports. At the end of the year, there is the overall reporting and monitoring process – if the college does not perform well academically then governors have got to put down an action plan so that the underperforming areas are actually dealt with.

However, although governors receive numerous reports from senior management such as the SAR, Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and other regular reports (with

matrix which can be measured) to help them in monitoring and evaluating the performance of FE colleges, findings from this study also indicate that governors face a number of hindrances in their key monitoring role. One of these challenges is being given inaccurate data, as said by one governor:

> I suppose we could be more effective because sometimes if you are only given so much data, you have got to take that on face value, you can't physically walk down the whole college and see how departments are doing, so you have to rely with the data that comes through from them (senior managers). Sometimes, in some cases the data is not quite correct… (G3, CF, T5).

Similar sentiments were also echoed by G1, CC, T7 who said that, the problem with FE governance is how do we know if something begins to go horribly wrong? "Of course", he continues, "we rely with information from Ofsted, our own auditors, on talking to senior managers, the principal and various committees, but it's difficult to know if something goes horribly wrong", because "we are relying too much on the expertise and trust of the senior educational team, the technical skills of the accounts department backed by auditors…It is very difficult for governors to get under the skin of that" (G1, CC, T7).

From this finding, it is clear that SC governors need enough and accurate information from senior managers to be able to effectively perform their monitoring role. However as precisely warned by G2, CE, T6 'executives' should not give too much information to governors "so that they cannot see the woods from the tress". That really is a challenge because governors are not homogenous as a group. Some want to be given more information but others will say, 'just give me the headlines. I just want to hear 3 or 4 major points', but the most important thing is that there is trust and openness between governors and executives. That way, according to P, CF, T16, you

will avoid the situation where the executives can effectively withhold information from the GB and depowers the GB because it will not be able to make decisions and to fulfil their role as a critical friend.

Following from how governors monitor the academic performance of their colleges, I asked both groups to explain how closely governors are involved in target setting and monitoring college improvement against targets? The aim here was to explore governors' strategic role in practice.

86% (n=12) of governors and 100% (n=6) of principals agree that governors do not set targets. According to them, targets are set by senior managers and governors only agree, support, influence, challenge, suggest or approve these targets and then monitor them. G1, CC, T7 said this about target setting; "we approve them (targets) and make sure that they are challenging. We don't want to see targets that will be cheap, but those that push people to improve all the time…" Likewise, G2, CE, T6 also said, "Our involvement in target setting is a post-hoc thing".

On why governors should not be directly involved in target setting, 86% (n=12) governors and 83% (n=5) principals said they think that most governors lack professional competence and that setting targets will compromise their role as monitors of college improvement. Responding to the question on whether governors should be directly involved in setting targets, one principal said, "They are not allowed to set targets but they approve them/agree the headlines, if they set targets

they own those targets and are not in a position to do anything about them" (P, CA, T1).

However, an interesting finding that emerged from this study is that governors do influence the targets. G1, CC, T7 said of this, "we do influence the targets, but in the main, we allow the senior management to set them, we do consider them and question whether they are valued targets or not realistic as well as challenging" (G1, CC, T7).

The data from this finding indicates that, apart from Chairs of GBs who set targets for their principals and then monitor those targets regularly throughout the year, most governors are not directly involved in target setting. They only contribute to the process by making suggestions, challenging and approving these targets and then monitoring them. They assign codes for target that have been achieved –for example green for achieved targets, amber almost there and red not yet there. P, CB, T 14, said this about targets…"what they do is benchmark in terms of where we have been the previous year and this year and they do that every year".

Following from the above, I also asked both groups to explain to me any other external information sources that governors rely on in order to help them perform their strategic role effectively. Most governors 71% (n=10) seem either unaware about external sources of information, as they seem to ignore this question and revert to talking about the paper and electronic documents such as emails and reports that they receive from their colleges or seemed not to understand the

question. However, the 29% (n=4) of governors who seem aware of their external sources of information said they get information from the Local Chamber of Commerce (statistics and marketing information); they have got external speakers who come in from the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and other funding associations and they have as government priority, staff from LSIS who come to give them information. Hence as G3, CF, T5 asserts, "they come if we have external information that we need and then we decide what should be taken on board". For example, "if engineering skills are lacking, then we look at that strategically", she said. She went further to say that they also do a 'curriculum mapping exercise' and if there were any gaps "in our curriculum, we look at that".

Following from the above question, I also asked both groups of governors' involvement with future curriculum offers?

All the Governors 100% (n=14) and all the principals 100% (n=6) agree that governors are involved in future curriculum offer in a strategic way or as a post hoc thing. According to these interviewees, governors are informed on future curriculum offer every year through 'Governors away days', where they discuss the way and direction the college is going being pushed and dictated by the labour market information; government policies and funding and how the college is closing those funding gaps and what that means in terms of the product they are putting on. One principal said this about governors' involvement in future curriculum offers:

> Every year in June, they go away for a corporation retreat-a strategic meeting. All governors go and they sit down and consider the strategic direction of the college, what is happening at the college, what we should do, offer and the

costs-a curriculum direction… Community governors may ask for e.g. "what is our provision on Asian girls?" (P, CB, T14).

However, governors are only involved in setting the strategic direction on future curriculum offers, but not in detailed curriculum planning and offer. They can make some suggestions as one governor said, "I am involved in that, but it's purely in suggestions" (G1, CD, T12). The suggestions that governors make are based on information they receive from the college, governors' papers and information about trends within industry that a governor may have. Some governors are more involved in making suggestions, particularly those who come from industry or educational backgrounds and they have a good understanding of where industry and education is heading and can "stir our targets towards that direction" (G1, CD, T12). Governors can also get involved in future curriculum discussions where there is a huge financial risk involved.

As evidently shown above, governors are involved in future curriculum offers at a strategic level and will only be asked to make a decision if it was a strategic change, which makes a kind of significant departure from current operational strategy, or if it requires a whole new level of investment, which is beyond the powers of the principal or there was a high degree of risk involved (G1, CE, T4). In such situations, what happens is that there is a consultation with the GB, but the decision making process is with the executives or the senior management team. A typical example of a strategic change that requires a 'strategic decision' is the new reforms of professor A. Wolf, which gives FE colleges much greater freedoms to work with 14 year olds. The enrolling of 14 year olds in colleges is a 'strategic change' because traditionally these

have been under the care of schools and colleges worked only with 16 year olds. So, many colleges are discussing on whether to take on board Professor Wolf's freedoms and work with 14 year olds. Such a decision cannot be made without the approval of the GB. However, what is important to note here is that, management will be responsible for the details of courses that will be offered once a decision is made on enrolling 14 year olds in a college (implementation) and the governors will only monitor that.

Following from the above, governors and principals were then asked, first, to give their opinions on what aspects they think indicate improvement in an FE college environment? Answers to this question are summarised in Table 11 below:

Improvement indicators	% governors	% principals
Outcome indicators for e.g. students results, surveys and that intake/ enrolment is improving	86%(n=12)	100%(n=6)
The learner environment is improving e.g. new buildings	43%(n=6)	67%(n=4)
Financial management is improving	43%(n=6)	67%(n=4)
Leadership management of the college is improving	21%(n=)	17%(n=1)

Table 11: FE college Improvement indicators

The most important indicator of improvement in a college according to all the 6 principals (100%) and 12 (86%) governors is when outcome indicators are looking good (the success rates of those students, that is the number who stay and the number who pass the course are improving (G2, CE, T6); student feedback from

surveys is good and when student enrolment is improving-that is a popularity issue because more learners want to come to your college. Equally important according to these informants, 43% (n=6) governors and 67% (n=4) principals is the learner environment-for instance new buildings. Also 67% (n=4) and 43% (n=6) of principals and governors respectively, think that good financial management is inextricably linked with students' academic performance and all other aspects of improvement in a college. Finally, low on the ranks is the leadership and management of the college. According to 21% (n=3) governors and 17% (n=1) principals if the leadership and the management of the college are improving it also shows that the college is improving.

In addition to the above points, other soft indicators of college improvement mentioned include things like student feedback is generally very good and levels of staff sickness absents are low (G3, CE, T9). With these key indicators of college improvement in mind, I then turned to my key question on the role of governors in college improvement.

In this regard, informants were asked to give their views on the contribution role of FE governance to college improvement. My intention was to get views from both groups on how the work of governors helps to improve colleges. Answers to this question were presented using 4 categories as shown in Table 12 overleaf:

Improvement Role Categories	% Governors	% Principals
Monitoring/ challenging/ making sure that the college improvement plan takes place/ vision and advice on strategy	71%(n=10)	67%(n=4)
Making sure that the leadership is sound and effective /holding management to account	57%(n=8)	83%(n=5)
Appointing a good principal and senior management staff	50%(n=7)	50%(n=3)
The role of governors as a critical friend to the principal	14%(n=2)	17%(n=1)

Table 12: A comparison of governors' and principals' views on the role of governance in college improvement

The data suggests that, 71% (n=10) of governors rate their monitoring and challenging role, their role in making sure that the college's improvement plan takes place, setting the college' vision and advising on strategy as governors' most important contribution to college improvement. On the other hand most principals (83%, n=5) spoke about the role of governors in making sure that the leadership of the college is sound and effective and holding management to account as the most important contribution(s) of governors to college improvement. The role of governors in contributing to college improvement by appointing a good principal and senior

management staff was also viewed as equally important from both groups 50% (n=3) and 50% (n=7) principals and governors respectively, while acting as a critical friend to the principal has the lowest score.

As can be evidenced from the above findings, it seems clear that the work of governors can greatly help colleges to improve and to enhance the overall academic performance of students. The following illustrations from individual governors' and principals' responses to governors' contributions to college improvement seem to support this view:

- Helping management in decision making about the future of the college.

- Making sure that the leadership of the college is sound and effective.

- Governors challenge what they see, they are involved in the planning process, so they can put a different point of view, they do have experience of local community, engineering, business and accounting (G3, CF, T 5).

- I think they deliver the strategy. I think, if you have got the right governors, with the right skill base, and they are really well-informed and have a good clear set of targets, they can help to improve colleges.

- Improving the learner environment in terms of new buildings.

- The ability to have an open-mind and an objective mind in terms of where the college might improve, challenging and critiquing proposal for improvement, (G2, CE, T6).

- Making sure that the college's Improvement plans actually takes place, making sure that we say what we do we do and it does make a difference (G1, CC, T7).

- Monitoring and challenging. Definitely monitoring, I see that as the key role – monitoring at all levels really. The monitoring and challenging go together, that is what I have seen as the role of governors in improvement (G2, CB, T8).

- Being a critical friend and support the challenge role, showing an interest in college things (G3, CE, T9).

- They provide expertise (P, CD, T18).

On the contrary, P, CE, T15 believes that governors' contribution to the institutional performance of students is indirect. The most direct contributions according to him are made by senior managers or executives in a college. He precisely said this:

> On the educational side, mm, it's a complex question (silence). The answer is yes, but not necessarily directly. So, in a way, in a sense, I think good governors and good governorship with a framework in place, which allows the executives to work on improving the institution's performances for students and in that sense, the governors play that role well. They should rightly take credit, at least in part for the improvement made on an organisation.

He went on to point out that there are many of those improvements that could happen in a college without the governors, the executives could have done them.

Another point that emerged from these findings is that, although the work of governors does generally help colleges to improve because they hold management to account, "you need to have the right governors on board" (P, CF, T16). Commenting on this point P, CC, T17 cogently said, "Well, yes they do. I am accountable to them; I am accountable to the board, so I will make sure that I do have an increasing profile. That's my job". He went on to question, "if governors were not there at all, who would do that?" According to him, it is also important for staff to know that the principal is accountable to somebody. So they are accountable to management and principals are equally accountable to the governors and that this is not something that is going to go away. So, governors do offer some checks and balances as P, CC, T17 cogently wraps it up, "I could not operate without them being there in the same way".

Summary

From the above findings, it is evident that governors contribute to college improvement both directly or indirectly. Governors can contribute to college improvement through their monitoring role, challenging role, their role in appointing the principal and senior management, setting the strategic direction of colleges, acting as a critical friend to the principal, and by providing checks and balance to management. What is also apparent from the above findings is that, in order for governors to be able to fulfil their role of helping colleges to improve, they need to be the right governors with a good skill base, who know exactly what is expected from them. It is important to note that, governors do not define or implement the processes; their role is to be supportive, to help establish the framework, approve the targets set by senior managers and ensures that changes take place if targets are not being met. Their role in college improvement is not limited to academic, but to all aspects of college improvement.

Documentary Analysis

Data obtained from documentary analysis were used to supplement interview findings relevant in answering research question 6, on the role of SC governors in college improvement.

As already pointed out in the previous Chapter, documents selected for analysis in this study were SC governors' meeting minutes for end of academic year 2011/2012. In analysing these documents first I read through each of the 6 selected documents

to understand their content. This was followed by inference and interpretation of the document and then the synthesis of the information. Thus, an interpretative theorisation of the documents was adopted. I was aware that studying the meaning of a 'text' is not like studying the meaning of action, because unlike in studying the meaning of action, in the study of the meaning of a text the "author and product are forever divorced" (Prior, 2003:111).

The meeting minutes were analysed in relationship to the topic of FE college improvement and the following points were taken into consideration in the analysis:

- Agenda items or area covered.

- What is the role of governors in these meetings and how does that relate to college improvement.

- Verbatim quotes from the minutes.

Findings from all the 6 SC governors' meeting minutes studied indicate that topics covered in meetings varied and included: discussions on corporation self-assessment reports (SAR), quality strategies, student survey reports, quality assurance reports, observation of teaching and learning reports, leagues tables, quality and diversity, punctuality, destinations of students, Ofsted inspection reports, success targets and monitoring reports, retention, achievement rates and value added. This seems to indicate evidence of targeting topics relevant to college improvement.

Data related to governors' role in FE college improvement were honed into the following two categories thought more important to the terms of reference of SC governors:

- monitoring/challenging and making sure that the college improvement plan takes place, and
- The role of governors in ensuring that the leadership of a college is sound and effective/holding management to account for the performance of the college.

Findings from 83% (n=5) colleges meeting minutes' reports reveal that SC governors asked questions; challenged managers and suggested solutions to issues that were raised by senior managers during presentations at meetings. For example, in college C, a governor asked on what should be done in relation to staff whose lessons were at grade 3, and it was explained that a support plan was agreed with the relevant member of staff and they would have support from their line manager. Likewise in college A, a governor asked the Vice Principal, after presenting a risk management report that, future risk management reports be amended to include the level of risks and this suggestion was taken on board. Similarly, in college B, governors expressed concern at the Plumbing and Electrical issues. Others asked why this had not been picked up earlier. The Deputy Principal confirmed that he had asked a number of questions of the staff to establish this. More importantly the Deputy Principal of college B asked governors' feedback and comments on the 'New Draft curriculum strategy' (see appendix 6). Contrary, only 17% (n=1) out of 6 SC governors' meeting minutes reports studied lacked evidence of challenging or asking questions by

governors. In this case, the meeting seems to have been more of an informative meeting led by the principal, than an open discussion in any way.

The above findings seems to support the view that SC governors can help colleges to improve by asking questions, challenging management, making suggestions and asking for information. This in turn enables practitioners to be reflective on their practice and to be accountable for what goes on in a college, which is important for college improvement. These findings strongly corroborate interview findings that the work of SC governors can greatly help colleges to improve. However, evidence also seems to reveal that these meetings can easily be dominated by senior managers, turning them into 'information meetings' instead of being platforms of discussing issues relevant to college improvement.

Overall Summary

The issues that emerged from the foregoing findings are manifold. First, in terms of early socialisation and influences into governorship in later life, it is evident from the findings that most informants became FE college governors because governorship suited their secondary socialisation i.e. social mobility, educational and employment backgrounds. It is also clear that the factors that motivated informants to become FE governors are many and varied from individual to individual.

Another important finding that emerged from this study is that, in order for governors to be able to contribute effectively to the governance of FE colleges they need a

variety of skills such as good communication, reasoning, analytic and interactive skills. In addition to these skills and skills attributes, governors also need to have a good understanding of the FE education system; the structure of FE colleges; they need to understand what the role is, what the opportunities are and what the limitations are; they need to become governors for the right reasons and must also be committed to contribute to their colleges' agenda. What can be alluded from these findings is that, for a governor to be able to shape and inform the leadership of FE colleges, they need more than skills and skills attributes but values and ethos of working in an FE college environment.

This study has also confirmed that, although the roles and responsibilities of governors and principals seem clear on paper (Articles and Instruments of government), in practice, there seems to be some grey areas where these rub into each other. Most interviewees acknowledged that this is not always helpful in terms of working relationships in an FE college environment. 29% (n=3) of GB Chairs have indicated that when they were appointed as Chairs of college GBs, the first thing they did was to sit back with the principal to discuss and agree the delimitation of each other's roles and responsibilities in practice. While this sounds good effort for creating a good working relationship, it is also an acknowledgement that there is no clear dividing line between what governors and principals do in practice. A sign that might indicate lack of uniformity in FE governance practices. So, a clear distinction between what governors and principals do in practice, will help to improve practice.

The study also explored the purpose of FE college governance from principals' and governors' perspectives. Findings in this area reveal that the purpose(s) that governance serves in colleges are varied. For example business, educational and finance purposes. While this is good for flexibility purposes, it presents problems on how governance is interpreted in different colleges.

In addition to the above, governors' strategic, monitoring, challenging and critical friendship roles were considered in line with how these contribute to college improvement. Findings in this area indicate that governors' work makes important contributions to FE college improvement. Such improvements are not only limited to students' academic performance, but to all aspects of college work such as health and safety, finance and new buildings. However, a point repeatedly mentioned by both principals and governors is that, they need to be the right governors with a good skill and knowledge base to be able to effectively contribute to college improvement.

Finally, the governor-principal relationship balance was also explored. Contrasting messages seem to emerge from principals and governors here, with 100% (n=6) principals saying that the relationship is a balanced one, while some staff governors and co-opted governors acknowledge that the principal has enormous operational powers and therefore is the 'boss'. Chairs of GBs on the other hand claim that the power is tipped in their favour because they have powers to sack the principal or any other corporate employee. This lack of agreement on the balance of power points to a lack of a 'collaborative working relationship' which is necessary in promoting college improvement. These themes will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis and discussion of the findings identified in the previous chapter. Each of the 6 research questions are addressed with the intention of responding to the theoretical and methodological issues identified in previous chapters. At the end of each research question a discussion summary is given.

Question 1 is addressed under the sub-heading 'Governors' early socialisation and motivations to become FE governors'; question 2 under the 'Purpose of FE governance'; question 3 under the 'The skills and experiences that governors need to help shape and inform an FE college'; question 4 under 'The roles and responsibilities of governors and principals'; question 5 under 'Governor-principal relationship balance in FE colleges', and finally research question 6 is addressed under 'Standards Committee (SC) governors and college improvement.

By critically discussing and answering each of these research questions, I hope to reflect the new knowledge gained in addressing them and to outline how this research can potentially contribute to the greater understanding of the role of FE governance in college improvement.

Governors' Early Socialisation and Motivations to Become FE governors

Research Question 1:

- Does one's early socialisation have an influence in their choice of becoming an FE governor in later life?

Studies of educational leadership have shown that early socialisation plays a very important role in shaping and paving the way for future leaders (Gronn, 1999; Ribbins, 2003; Inman, 2011). These authors inform us that factors such as family background, social mobility, peer groups and education play a very important role in shaping future leaders. These "agencies", especially those that exert their influence during the early years shape the personality of a future head teacher by generating what Ribbins, (2003:23) calls a "conception of self along with the rudiments of a work style, attitude and outlook". Apparently, little is known from academic literature on the relationship between governors' early socialisation and its influence on governorship in the FE sector.

When governors were asked if there was anything in their 'early socialisation' that influenced them to become FE governors, 86% (n=12) said they became FE governors because they have been working in education and employment all their lives; some said they had knowledge of the FE education system and wanted to contribute their experience to make a difference to college governance; others said they were committed to make a difference to the education of young people; while others were first graduates in their families and therefore thought they had a leading role in their communities; with others saying they wanted to fulfil their belief that education is fundamental to one's wellbeing and the remainder have either lived in

the local area and the college was part of their life or have worked in FE colleges before and wanted to continue to contribute. These comments suggest that educational background, peer groups and social mobility (confirmation of it) were more influential for my interviewees' choice of becoming FE governors. A finding that resonates strongly with aspects of "secondary socialisation" described in much of the literature (Gronn, 1999; Ribbins, 2003). These comments from governors also mirror their profiles as highlighted above, which shows that 93% (n=13) of governors interviewed were University graduates. This affirms educational background and subsequent social mobility to have been more influential for their choice of becoming governors.

On the other hand, 14% (n=2) said they chose to become FE governors because of their family background (primary socialisation). These governors were either from a working family background or their parents had much higher expectations for them.

This finding indicates that primary socialisation also played a part role in some of my informants' decisions of becoming FE governors in later life. This might mean these governors may have different values from the remainder governors and may need more support to develop values of working in FE colleges.

Motivations

Following from the above question, governors were asked to explain anything that they thought could contribute (motivational factors) by joining FE college governance. Understanding the motivational factors behind something has been repeatedly linked

with endurance and perseverance in difficult situations (James et al., 2010). So, an understanding of what 'motivated' these individuals to join FE GBs could help in the better management of their 'talent', resulting in perseverance and in better retention of governors capable of high performance in FE colleges. According to Rhodes (2013) 'talent management' should be concerned with talent identification, ensuring continued development and commitment and encouraging the retention of individuals' capable of high performance in key posts in order to achieve success.

Responding to the question on what these governors thought they could contribute by joining FE college GBs, 67% (n=8) said they could contribute knowledge of the local community because of their links with the local community or because they have been previously working in the region. Second in ranking were 42% (n=5) governors who said they joined FE college governance in order to help improve educational standards through their expertise and the remainder 33% (n=4) said they joined FE governance because they have a deep understanding of the education system.

This finding indicates that, there are varied motivations why the informants became FE governors (for e.g. to serve the needs of the local community; to improve the educational standards through their expertise, and a deep understanding of the education system). This finding resonates strongly with aspects of motivations described in much of the literature cited above (Davies, 2002; Gleeson et al., 2010; Hill, 2013). Davies (2002:22) for example, finds out that the main reasons why his respondents became FE college governors were: because "I felt my expertise would

be of use (76%); to do my bit to support further education (60%); and to help ensure that the college was responsive to the local community (39%)". Although the majority of Davies's (2002) respondents were from a business background, only 29% indicated that they have become FE governors to help ensure that the college is responsive to local employers. As such, the study offers further corroboration that people joins FE College GBs for a variety of reasons. This implies the need for better governor talent management in order to ensure their retention and to maintain their continued commitment.

However, although it seems clear that there is some resonance between this study's findings and some 'aspects of motivations' described in much of the literature, there are differences of emphasis on each of those aspects. For example, while Davies's (2002) respondents ranked high their 'expertise', in this study, contributing knowledge of the local community is ranked high, an aspect ranked third in Davies's (2002) findings. Also in Davies's (2002) study, 'expertise' has the highest ranking, but in this study, it has a second ranking. This difference in emphasis may reflect a possible change in FE GBs composition in recent years from governors with a business background to those primed to serve the needs of the local community. A change that reflects the introduction of a more diversified approach to college GB membership by the New Labour government in 1997, through an equalisation of membership status and the type of governors to feature in the formation of the FE GB (Hill, 2013). This broadening of the membership base was mainly a reaction to some high profile financial and governance collapses of colleges such as Derby, Wilmorton, Cricklade, Bilston, Stoke on Trent, Wirral, Halton and Gwent (Gleeson, et al., 2010; Hill, 2013).

Indeed, Gleeson et al., (2010:14), assert "in this context the process of encouraging FE colleges to engage with their communities is perhaps more important than requiring them to respond to market rhetoric…that appears distant from the main issue of improving the quality of FE provision…" A conclusion that is congruence with this study's finding, which reveals that 67%, (n=8) governors became FE governors so that they could be able to contribute knowledge of the local community because they had links with local community organisations. A finding that might mean FE governance is becoming more democratic.

So, in relation to early socialisation, the findings suggest that 'secondary socialisation' was more influential in most 86% (n=12) of my interviewees' decisions to become FE governors, although a minority section 14% (n=2) of governors indicated that 'primary socialisation' was also influential in their decisions. The above results can be interpreted in twofold ways. First, it can mean that most people chose to become FE governors because they had achieved a higher level of education in their society (such as going to university) and therefore felt that they were in a position to be able to contribute their education knowledge to the governance of FE colleges and/or that they have been working in the public service such as LA and therefore, governorship suited well with their previous professional background (employment) because they felt they understood the ethos of public service. Others have worked and lived in the area for a long time and felt that being a governor in a local college would help to enhance their status. In that sense, these governors may be already familiar with the education system, unlike their peers who have not worked in public service. A less controversial interpretation might be that those who join FE college GBs may do so

precisely because they feel that their skills would be most useful here than in other areas (such as the National Health Service (NHS) for example) based on their discussions with friends and governors who have had prior experience in FE governance. In that sense, these governors may already be similar to incumbent principals and governors in terms of their governorship preferences. The implications of these findings are that, all these 'individuals' may need more strengthening in their knowledge of education.

The notion that both 'primary' and 'secondary' socialisation played influential roles in interviewees' choice of becoming FE governors, and the fact that people may be motivated to become FE governors for various reasons (as augmented by findings from the motivational factors) above is problematic. This is because it may mean people might become FE college governors for subjective reasons. One governor precisely warned about this:

> I think one should be a governor for the right reasons (silence). Mm, I am aware in the past people would become governors so that they can have something good on their Curriculum Vitae. I know of other people (I am not just talking here) who became governors because they had a little bit of spare time and they did not know what to do with it. Yeah, this should not exclude them but I think you are looking at different things of people (G1, CF, T10).

In that sense, FE governors may have different perceptions of governorship, attitudes towards education; divergent views of what governance is or what it should be; may differ in their priorities, expectations of the job and the perception of their role in an FE college environment, which is not good for FE governance practices. A logical conclusion from this finding is that, although some governors may be familiar with the education system, overall these are people who had their previous 'identities' who

are now seeking a new identity and they need help to achieve this new 'identity' in order for them to be able to contribute effectively to the core business of FE colleges. Interview evidence suggests the need for a clear, detailed and enhanced new FE governor coaching and mentoring (induction) programme, highlighting the expectations, challenges and opportunities of being a governor in an FE college environment. Rhodes and Fletcher (2013) have shown how the three-stage self-efficacy process of coaching and mentoring (Acculturation, Assimilation and Actualisation) can help head teachers to develop organically as part of the school community and embodying the values that the school aspires. In a similar way, governors could be helped to understand the overall remit of their role in FE colleges through coaching and mentoring, and this could help to lay the foundation for uniformity and pursuance of same goals, which is important for college improvement. Using Maslow's hierarchy of needs, colleges need to meet governors' physiological, safety and security, and belonging and love needs before they can reach their full potential. Maslow (1954) says that a person needs to fulfil all of these needs in order to reach their full potential. Colleges should help and support governors to govern through coaching and mentoring. That way governors can feel valued, loved, develop a sense of security, belonging, happiness and can develop the hunger to accomplish assigned goals and in turn help colleges to improve.

The Purpose of FE College Governance

Research Question 2:

- What purpose does governance serve in the FE sector?

The purposes that governance serves in Further Education colleges have been a bone of contention among academic writers since the 1992 Incorporation of FE colleges. Part of the controversy emanates from the fact that the concept of "governance" itself, like many other concepts such as 'leadership' and 'learning' are not easy to define. While Gleeson and Shain (1999) describe the purpose of FE governance after Incorporation as serving the dual purpose of transferring business values into the corporate culture of FE and, at the same time, injecting greater market and managerial realism into an area of public sector education seen to be "carrying excess fat and suffering from dogged sloth"(:556), recent studies (Schofield, 2009; Gleeson et al., 2010) indicate that the purpose of FE college governance is not clearly defined and is left for each GB to decide for them. More recently an LSIS (2010) study has raised the stakes by claiming that governance for representation and democracy is only one of three primary purposes in FE governance, running alongside governance for accountability and compliance, and governance for maximising institutional performance and success.

In responding to the question on what purpose they think governance serves in FE colleges, 100% (n=14) governors and 100% (n=6) principals agree that the purposes of FE governance are manifold. High on the pecking order from both groups 83% (n=5) principals and 50% (n=7) governors, is setting the strategic direction and overseeing the activities of the college, a point that fits well with Parnham's (1998)

definition of FE governance. Equally important from 50% (n=7) governors and 50% (n=3) principals was that FE governance helps to provide checks and balances/keeping the college honest and monitoring the performance of the college. A point echoed by James et al., (2010). Thus the findings are consistent with earlier literature (Parnham, 1998; Cornforth, 2003; James et al., 2010) and as such, the study strengthens the current discourse on the dilemma about the purpose that FE governance should serve – business, legal, stewardship, educational, community or all? This is an issue which is very pertinent to all those who are involved in FE governance practices and this has direct implications on the work of FE governors.

Table 13 overleaf shows a résumé of what governors and principals said about the purpose of FE governance.

Governors' Responses	Principals' Responses
Offering what the community needs (14%) (n=2)	To oversee the operations of management so that the views of the local community are properly represented (17%) (n=1)
Setting the strategic direction of the college (50%) (n=7)	To set the direction of the college (83%) (n=5)
Stewardship of the asserts of the college (14%) (n=2)	Legally they have responsibility in terms of disposal of estate and purchasing (17%) (n=1)
It ensure that the educational character and mission of the college is set (29%) (n=4)	I think it's making sure that governors set the tone, the educational tone and character of this college (50%) (n=3)
It serves as an external checks and balance To monitor and challenge management (50%) (n=7)	To provide checks and balances Monitoring the performance of the college (50%) (n=3)
Financial viability. Ensuring that public money is spent appropriately for the benefit of the public (14%) (n=2)	Making sure that financially in education we are sound (67%), (n=4)
It is about what you bring to the table-expertise (7%) (n=1)	
To appoint a strong principal and senior management team (14%), (n=2)	

Table 13: A comparison of the purpose(s) of FE governance from Governors and Principals

As shown in table 13, there are some variations on points of emphasis on the purposes of FE governance from both groups, with 67% (n=4) of principals emphasising the purpose of FE governance as making sure that financially in education we are sound as opposed to only 14% (n=2) governors. It seems evident that, from principals' perspective the main purpose of FE governance is to serve a

corporate purpose. This may mean FE governors are ideally strategic via entrepreneurism, which might be different with colleges in different contexts, for example agricultural colleges. This finding is consistent with some aspects of corporate governance cited in the literature in this study, which shows that the emphasis after incorporation was more on business matters and principals would boast if they had a high number of governors with a business background in their GBs (Bargh et al., 1996; Gleeson and Shain, 1999; Bennett, 2002). As Bennett (2002:292) puts it "business" governors in particular were seen to occupy a central role in the enterprise culture of FE colleges, portrayed by its advocates as "culture change agents" inculcating their institutions with enhanced awareness of competitiveness and the need for excellence in management. A point also shared by Gleeson and Shain's (1999) study. So, to act strategically in this sense, they would need to be aware of environmental scanning in terms of external but also internal resources.

Likewise 50% (n=3) principals as opposed to only 29% (n=4) said the purpose of FE governance is to set the educational tone and character of the college. A finding that shows a surprisingly lower ranking from governors considering that those interviewed were serving in the Standards/Quality committee of FE colleges and supposedly responsible for educational matters. This may reflect a lack of educational knowledge from SC governors and also that corporate culture is still dominant in FE colleges. This finding seems to contradict repeated recommendations by several writers (Davies, 2002; Gleeson et al., 2010; Ofsted, 2012; Rogers 2012) who in recent years have been calling FE GBs to shift emphasis and focus more on educational rather

than business and financial matters – a finding that might indicate a lack of understanding from SC governors on their educational role in FE colleges. If this was the case, this may render these governors less effective in monitoring standards and quality across both vocational and academic programmes, leaving the locus of control (of educational matters) to senior management teams.

Variations also exist on the following additional points that governors make, (which are not mirrored in principals' responses): the purpose of FE governance is to appoint a strong principal and senior management team 14% (n=2) governors and that governance is about what governors bring to the table 7% (n=1).

Perhaps the variation in these two last points emanate from the factor that the role of appointing a college principal is only privy to governors, excluding principals in the process and in that sense it is an aspect not considered important by principals. Likewise, 14% (n=2) governors emphasised the importance of providing expertise to college leadership as another purpose of FE governance. According to these governors, the purpose of the whole FE governance is to have many people from various backgrounds contributing their skills to college governance. Community needs and stewardship of the assets of the college are ranked lowest by both groups 14% (n=2) governors and 17% (n=1) principals. A surprisingly lower ranking considering that all the case study colleges were community colleges.

What seems clear from this finding is that FE college governance serves many purposes and such purposes may vary from college to college. A finding that fits well

with Gleeson et al.'s (2010) finding that the purpose of FE college governance is not clearly defined and left for each GBs to decide for themselves. The question to ask is, 'how informed are these governors to make such decisions?' As such, this study offers further corroboration that the purpose (s) that governance serves in FE colleges is ambiguous and may differ from college to college as deemed necessary by particular GBs. While this might provide flexibility, it may lead to lack of engagement and passivity which is not good for effective FE governance.

This lack of a clear purpose of what FE governance serves may cause lack of transparency in FE governance practices and also causes confusion and exposes FE governance to subjective interpretations by FE college clerks, GB Chairs, managers and principals. This study suggests that as the weight of responsibilities for FE governors increase and FE governance priorities shift from business to educational and community needs, there is a need to reconceptualise the purpose that governance serves in FE colleges. Therefore, the study proposes a 'Professional model of FE governance' as shown on page 211, to help us conceptualise the purpose of FE governance in contemporary FE colleges.

Governors' Skills and Experience

Research Question 3:

- What skills and experience do governors need to have in order to be able to effectively help in shaping and informing a college?

Gleeson et al., (2010:11) report that personal issues to do with "calibre and chemistry" make a difference in the way the GB performed and contributed to the leadership of colleges. The ideal governor according to these authors is someone who: has a sense of responsibility; possesses a good intellect; has personal confidence; has excellent communication skills; provides emotional commitment and has a strong value position on people, education and community. Likewise, a study by Cornforth and Edwards (1999) also found that, many GB members experienced some problems in carrying out their roles. For example few knew how to analyse and pick out important points from the information they received, or when and how to ask the right questions or how to be both supportive and constructively critical of management proposals…this was further worsened by lack of appropriate training. Again, this indicates the need for governors' talent to be properly managed through induction and continued support so that they may feel 'belonging, to FE college environments' (Rhodes, 2013).

When both governors and principals were asked to state and explain the skills that they thought were necessary for one to be an effective FE governor, they gave the following responses as shown in Table 14 overleaf.

Key skills necessary for one to be an effective governor	% governors responses	% principals responses
Good communication skills/ ability to read and write/sift through a lot of information /ability to negotiate/listen	57% (n=8)	33% (n=2)
Analytical skills/ the ability to analyse a lot of qualitative and quantitative data/evaluate/ the ability to take a strategic view	71% (n=10)	50% (n=3)
Good interactive skills	50% (n=7)	33% (n=2)
Ask relevant or awkward questions/challenge/comment/ Objectiveness and openness	64% (n=9)	83% (n=5)
Generic/A variety of skills	21% (n=3)	83% (n=5)
Need no any particular skill	7% (n=1)	0% (n=0)

Table 14: A comparison of the skills necessary to be an effective governor from principals and governors

What is clear from this finding is that, the two categories that are consistently ranked high by both groups is the ability to ask relevant or awkward questions and to comment in an objective and open way 64% (n=9) governors and 83% (n=5) principals. With analytical skills/ the ability to analyse a lot of qualitative and quantitative data/to evaluate/ the ability to take a strategic view ranked as the second important skill(s). The general variation in the pattern of these responses could indicate a growing discordance from both groups on the skills they think are necessary for one to be an effective FE governor, assuming of course that frequency of comments can be interpreted as an indicator of the importance of the skill.

Slight variations are also evident from both groups, with 83% (n=5) principals emphasising the importance of generic skills as opposed to 21% (n=3) governors and only 7% (n=1) governor saying one does not need any particular skill to be an effective governor. The only attribute that is important according to this single governor is a willingness to participate – a finding that is not supported by literature cited in this study.

Thus, with regard to governorship skills highlighted in the semi-structured interview findings, both governors and principals identified a number of skills (communication, analytic, interactive, ability to ask awkward questions, evaluative, challenge and to take an objective view) that resonate strongly with aspects of governorship skills described in much of the literature (Cornforth and Edwards, 1999; Davies, 2002; Gleeson et al., 2010). Whilst these skills are fairly well covered in the literature and are also acknowledged in this study's findings, the study suggests the need for governors to also have some values and ethos of working in FE colleges. Governor values include things like commitment to attend meetings; having the ethos of the reasons why governors are there; the ability to take responsibility; the ability to be able to work on a corporate basis, and the ability to recognise that it needs to be a clear duty type of operation and everyone brings something to the process.

Professional values and public service ethos could help FE governors to work well with principals, students, senior managers, lecturers and the general public, which is conducive for good governance practices. Hence, the need for governors not only to have skills and skills' attributes but also to have values and ethos of working in FE

College environments.

Roles and Responsibilities of SC Governors and Principals in FE colleges

Research Question 4:

- What duties Standard Committee governors do and how do these compare with those of principals?

Several writers (Carter, 1998; Cornforth and Edwards, 1999; Bennett, 2002; Davies, 2002; Bush, 2003; James et al., 2010) acknowledge that the duties that governors and principals do in schools and FE colleges are difficult to distinguish in practice. While there is a general agreement that corporate governance differs from management in theory, this distinction is not always clear-cut, especially when the GB interfere in management matters or a dominant chief executive officer (CEO) determines strategic issues without adequate involvement of the GB. Coleman (2011) discusses similar problems about the difficulties and possibilities in collaboration. Confusion is also created in other organisations by having the CEO, and other senior managers, sitting on the board-an observation confirmed by the documentary part of this study which shows that CEOs, deputy principals, senior managers and corporation clerks were all in attendance to SC meetings.

When asked about their duties in an FE college environment, 67% (n=4) principals and 21% (n=3) governors said their roles and responsibility involves ensuring that their college is financially viable and that they are both responsible for monitoring and

ensuring quality and high standards of education in colleges 83% (n=5) principals and 86% (n=12) governors. As P, CC, T17, pointed out "the major priority is to ensure that students are successful, that they have a good learning experience; they achieve the qualification that they are enrolled into". The issue here is where does principals' monitoring role start and where does it end and where does that of SC governors' start and end?

Findings from interviews indicate that there are grey areas where the duties of governors and principals in an FE college environment do rub into each other. This might be a result of how these roles and responsibilities are interpreted by respective college GBs. This lack of a clear understanding of what governors and principals do in practice can lead to unnecessary duplication of duties or lead governors to drift into operational management issues and also principals into governorship issues. This could create negative relationships similar to those described by Hall and Wallace (1993), which is not helpful for collaboration. It can also lead to uncritical engagement into governance by both principals and governors. This can create problems leading to ineffective governance and management in FE colleges, which is not conducive for college improvement. So, there is a need for both governors and principals to clearly understand what is expected from them in an FE college environment and also to be aware of the blurred line that divide their duties in order to avoid frictional points. Akpeki (1998:21), whilst agreeing that the two functions are different stresses that "effective management and governance is about health interactions between the two". This study therefore suggests the need for clarity on

the tasks that principals and governors do in FE colleges in order to help improve working practices.

The way how governors' and principals' roles and responsibilities are interpreted by respective GBs also create another problem of how FE principals see and interpret their roles in a college. While 67% (n=4) of principals interviewed agree that they are involved in setting strategies and direction for the corporation, "making sure we have everything in place to provide high quality service" (P, CC, T17) (higher level participation) the remainder 33% (n=2) said they just implement what governors tell them to do (lower level participation). If a principal operate at a lower level, it means they do not have power to influence the decision-making process in an FE college. It is only if principals operate at a higher level when they are in a position to effectively influence decisions and contribute to FE colleges' strategic leadership: for example those decisions involving setting the direction of the college. The study therefore, suggests the need for a collaborative or partnership working relationship between FE governors and principals in order for both parties to be actively engaged in FE governance. However, as Wheatley (2005) argues, relationships require an investment of time, and time for governor-principal interaction is often restricted in FE colleges.

Principal-Governor Relationship Balance in FE Colleges

Research Question 5:

- To what extent is the principal-governor relationship balanced in FE colleges?

Studies in the schools sector (Ranson et al., 2005b:317) have found that a "partnership of mutual support" between the head teacher and governors is a "practice of good governance" that is associated with school improvement. However, although writers such as (Bush, 2003; Shoffield, 2009) acknowledge the importance of the work of FE college governors, there is very little academic research that have focussed more attention into the principal-governor relationship balance in an FE college environment – a lacuna this study aims to address.

When asked to what extent they feel empowered to do their work, all the 6 (100%) principals said they absolutely feel empowered to do their job. Their empowerment derives from having a very supportive GB which generally leave them alone to go on with the job; giving responsibility to people (e.g. senior management) in the college; I have a good relationship with my Chair; I am a key part of leading the college and I work with a good GB who are skilled, knowledgeable and understand the situation. This finding echoes well with the Win-Win (Problem Solving) dimension of collaboration described by Hall and Wallace (1993), in which strategies comprehensively include the aim of achieving success for all those engaged in interaction, thus resulting in positive relationships.

In response to the same question on empowerment, 86% (n=12) of governors also said they feel much empowered to do their job. The empowerment of these governors derive from their statutory powers to appoint the principal, senior managers, the power to ensure that senior management are doing their job, questioning the principal, power to sack the principal, power to approve the budget,

they determine the pay policy of the staff and approving the long term strategy of the college and making sure that senior management deliver that strategy.

Interestingly, a small section of these governors 29% (n=4) also recognised that, the other most important form of power that they have in a college environment is in terms of 'influence'. By this they mean they have personal power to influence the beliefs, attitudes and actions of others. This type of power fits well with French and Raven's (1959) description of legitimate power and connection power. The former being invested in their role as governors and the latter being based on their "connections" with influential or important people inside or outside the organisation. According to them, they want their colleges to listen to the governorship and feel that they are able to influence what goes on in an FE college environment. From these findings, a typology of conceptualising governor's influence in FE colleges can be discerned as shown in Figure 7.
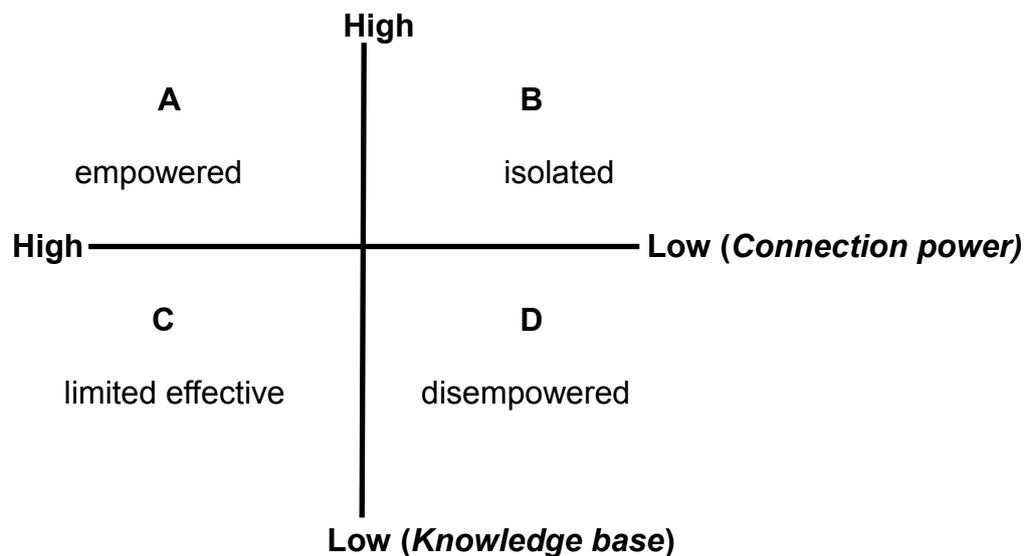
Figure 7: A typology of governors' influence in FE Colleges

As shown in Figure 7, if governors have high knowledge base and high connection power they would feel empowered to influence what goes on in an FE college and the opposite is true if they have low knowledge and connection power. So, in order for governors to move to quadrant A, they need proper training so that they could fully understand the remit of their role in an FE college environment.

On the other hand, 14% (n=2) of governors who said they do not feel much empowerment to do their work cited the prevalence of certain committees within their colleges that are perceived as more important than others and that Chairs of GBs have much more powers than everybody else.

It seems evident from the above data that FE governors feel empowered because they have statutory powers such as to appoint and dismiss a principal and also the ability to influence what goes on in a college. Similarly, Gleeson et al., (2010) found out that, it was possible for governors to influence the shape of a college through a learner voice forum, involving staff, students and governor participation, as such the finding offers further corroboration of governors' influence in shaping FE colleges.

It also seems clear from the findings that although all principals (100%, n=6) said they feel empowered to do their work they have many limitations in terms of what they can do in practice. Some governors have powers to approve or disapprove principals' decisions. The most deterrent power that governors seem to have in a college environment is the statutory powers to appoint and dismiss the principal – a finding that resonates strongly with aspects of governor-principal employer practices

described by Hill (2006), in which there was evidence of GBs struggling to achieve a satisfactory standard of employer practice. Hill's (2006:56) study observes that, whilst most of the principals reflected a positive psychological contract, "the employment arrangements put in place by the majority of GBs for their principals" were not sophisticated and were usually without an executive employment package, adequate performance management process or stimulating executive development. Likewise, Gleeson et al., (2010:10), acknowledge that the "employment relationship between the principal and the board, through the setting of performance criteria, linked to college improvement, is often opaque and underdeveloped." This seems contrary to the schools sector where head teachers are said to be more dictatorial and seem to suggest that college GBs are more powerful than those in schools. As can be seen above, principals feel empowered to do their work if they have a good, skilled GB and a Chair that support them in their role. If the GB is not supportive that seems to create problems for principals. What also seems evident from this finding is that, in colleges where there have been power struggles between governors and principals, this was mainly due to poor working relationships between senior staff and the GB.

When both governors and principals were asked to give their opinions on the principal-governor relationship balance, 83% (n=5) of principals said they viewed it as an equal balance relationship because they are also FE college governors. The same question generated varied answers from governors. The opinions of governors on this issue differed depending on whether one was a staff governor, a Chair of GB or a co-opted governor.

However, what emerged from the analysis of the findings is that although principals run FE colleges, governors have got strategic powers–which imply a good knowledge of both external and internal environment of an FE college. They determine what kind of college it should be and how well it should be run. Chairs of GB performance-manage the principal and hold him accountable for the performance of the college. Regardless of this employer-employee type of relationship, some co-opted and associate governors 62% (n =5 out of 8) claim that the power is balanced and the most important person in a college is the principal, "because we appointed him to run the college and he sets the tone and standards of the college. He sets the style, but we make sure that he is doing what we want him to do. "The most important barrier is about firing him. That makes him accountable to us…" (G1, C3, T7). This finding makes an interesting comparison with the role of sponsors in academies. Through the 2010 White paper and Academies Act, these new schools (academies) are given enhanced autonomies and sponsors are made accountable for their academic performance and overall improvement. The sponsors could work in partnership with experienced school managers, whom they can dismiss if the academy underperforms. The Academy Trust delegates the management of the school to the GB, which implies a profound shift in the ways of leadership and management of schools (Higham and Hopkins, 2007). The position of sponsors fits very well with that of governors in this study, which may imply a 'marginalisation' of the role of the principal in FE colleges.

Summary

The above discussion seems to suggest that the relationship between principals and governors in FE colleges is unsteadily balanced. Not only the governor-principal relationship, but also the governor-governor relationship is not balanced. Amongst governors themselves, Chairs of GBs, Search and Audit Committee governors are perceived as more powerful in making important decisions about the college as opposed to governors who participate in other committees such as the Standards Committee. Other governors such as staff governors have less power because of their perceived relationships with the principal. Whilst opinion by associate and co-opted governors is divided between those who say that principals are "bosses" because they run FE colleges, with others saying, it's a balanced relationship because, "…the structure of FE colleges enable them to provide checks and balances to principals' enormous operational powers". This lack of agreement on the balance of power points to possible problems of a good "mutual working relationship" of support, which is important in promoting FE college improvement. So, with regard to governor-principals' relationship balance, findings indicate that GBs have more powers in FE colleges because they have statutory powers to hire and dismiss principals and they also make important decisions to influence how the college is run. This finding strongly fits Murray's (1996) '*board-dominant'* power pattern often found in smaller organisations, where a core group on the board plays the main role in formulating policies and proposals for the board, and the CEO is just one player in this process. This is not good for FE governance because it may result in the disempowering of principals and other governors in the decision-making process of a college. The study suggests the need for an all-encompassing collaborative working

model between governors and principals in FE colleges. That way, FE governors can be able to effectively help colleges to improve.

Standards Committee (SC) governors and College Improvement

Research Question 6:

- To what extent does SC governors' work contributes to college improvement?

Governors have been seen as individuals who can contribute to the improvement of schools (Hopkins, 1996; Grey et al., 1996; Carter, 1998; Hopkins, 2001; Davies, 2002; Ofsted, 2008; Ranson et al., 2005b; LSIS, 2010; Masunga, 2012; Hancock, 2013). However, research internationally and nationally draws attention on the importance of head teacher leadership, the learning environment, high quality of teaching and learning, monitoring pupils' progress and careful planning and purposeful teaching (Sammons, et al., 1995; Macbeath and Mortimore, 2001; Martinez, 2003), but the role of GBs in improving colleges/schools and raising standards has until recent years been neglected in research (Ranson et al., 2005b). Perhaps this is because as Martinez (2003) remarked, College improvement research like that of School improvement is less mature than that of College effectiveness.

In spite of the fact that there is limited research on the role that FE governors play in the process of continuous College Improvement, a Report by Ofsted (2008), informs

us that, some of the most improved colleges visited were significantly influenced by governing bodies raising achievements and standards. The colleges involved:

> …recognise that governors need to supply high level, constructive challenges, not only in relation to strategic direction and mission, but aimed at assuring achievements and standards, and the quality of provision (Ofsted, 2008:20).

An earlier CIQS (1994) study observed that most colleges realised that continuous quality improvement was essential if they were to survive and prosper. Often this is reflected in mission statements and strategic and operational plans. An observation that alludes to governors playing an active role in college improvement, as mission statements and strategic operational plans are the province of governors.

Bearing this in mind, governors and principals were asked to explain; first, what they think constitutes "continuous improvement" in an FE college environment? I was mindful that, continuous improvement as the name implies, adopts an approach to improving performance which assumes many small incremental improvement steps (Murray and Chapman, 2003). The above question was followed by question "two", which required both governors and principals to give their thoughts on the extent SC governors' work contributes to the continuous improvement process in FE colleges.

In response to the first question "what constitute continuous improvement in an FE college environment", governors and principals gave answers that are summarised overleaf in Table 15.

Improvement indicators	% governors	% principals
Outcome indicators for e.g. students results, surveys and that intake/ enrolment is improving	86% (12)	100% (6)
The learner environment is improving e.g. new buildings	43% (6)	67% (4)
Financial management is improving	43% (6)	67% (4)
Leadership management of the college is improving	21% (3)	17% (1)

Table 15: Continuous college Improvement indicators

As shown in Table 15, outcome indicators for students were ranked high by both governors 86% (n=12) and principals 100% (n=6), followed by the improvement in learner environment, then financial management, and leadership and management has the lowest ranking. The similarities in ranking pattern from both groups suggest a general understanding from governors and principal that the most important indicator of improvement in a college environment is the outcome for students (i.e. examination results, positive feedback (from surveys), positive progression and when enrolment is improving), which according to G1, CF, T10 "is a popularity issue because more learners want to come to your college".

The high level of importance accorded to students' outcomes concurs with much of the literature cited in this study (Martinez and Munday, 1998; Martinez, 2000; Cousin, 2001; Davies, 2002; Martinez, 2003). Martinez (2003:277), for example, finds that most College Improvement research assumes a process model of students' experience which extends from initial contact, advice and guidance, to recruitment

and selection, student preparation and which ends up with progression. However, none of the above authors have alluded to the role of governance in the college improvement process – a gap explored by this study. Some writers like (Gleeson and Shain, 1999; Cornforth and Edwards, 1999) earlier observed that the responsibilities of FE governors greatly increased after incorporation. A point further elaborated by Davies (2002) in a survey of 447 FE governors across England and Wales that the main area of complaint by FE governors concerned the demands made by the work load and consequent involvement of time, and what were perceived as the increasingly onerous responsibilities of the post. The study therefore adds to the discourse of FE college improvement by considering the role of SC governors in college improvement.

From the above interview findings, it is clear that there is a general consensus from both governors and principals that the most important indicators of improvement in an FE college are student outcomes-that is if student intake is increasing in numbers, examination results are continuously going upwards, and students are giving positive feedback about the college. A finding that may reflect an awareness by FE GBs of recent calls by central government to focus more on educational and student matters as opposed to financial or business issues of finance as was the case before (Davies, 2002; Rogers, 2012). Significant differences also exist between this study's findings (on this aspect) to that earlier on by Cornforth and Edwards (1999), which tells us that, although the work of FE college GBs was beginning to play a more important role in examining how the performance of the college could be improved, this aspect of its role needed to develop further, and that in part it was hampered by

a lack of comparative information about the performance of the college with other similar organisations. The learning environment (buildings, white boards, and all ICT systems) is ranked second. The condition of an FE college buildings' is perceived as an important factor in attracting students. A point earlier echoed by Foster (2005), who points out that, some adults are reluctant to enter unwelcoming physical environments, especially those that remind them of their schools. This finding has some resonance to the LSC's, (2008) findings on the impact of new FE buildings as bait for FE College learners in recent years. Improvement in financial management is ranked third - which could reflect a decline in financial mismanagement in FE colleges in recent years. An interesting finding (to governors) as it may indicate that, perhaps some colleges may now be on top of their financial matters. The leadership and management of the college have the lowest score -a finding that seems to show significant differences to Jameson and MacNay's (2007) findings that accorded more importance to the leadership (GB) and management (principal) improvement for the overall performance of the college, although Harris (2004) warns us that there is lack of evidence between distributed leadership and improved student outcomes.

In response to the second question, 'to what extent do governors and principals think the work of SC governors contributes to continuous college improvement?' governors' and principals' responses are summarised in Table 16.

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Improvement role categories	% Governors	% Principals
Monitoring/ challenging/ making sure that the college improvement plan takes place/ vision and advice on strategy	71% (n=10)	67% (n=4)
Making sure that the leadership is sound and effective /holding management to account	57% (n=8)	83% (n=5)
Appointing a good principal and senior management staff	50% (n=7)	50% (n=3)
The role of governors as a critical friend to the principal	14% (n=2)	17% (n=1)

Table 16: A comparison of governors' and principals' views on the role of governance in college improvement

As shown in Table 16, ranked high by most governors 71% (n=10), as compared to 67% (n=4) principals), is their monitoring/challenging role and advising on strategy. While making sure that the leadership of the college is sound and effective and holding management to account for the performance of the college had the highest score from principals. A point that may reflect the importance attached to governors' role in providing "checks and balances" that challenge college leadership by principals. The role of governors in appointing a good principal and senior management is ranked third by both groups 50% (n=7) governors and 50% (n=3) principals, while governors' role as a critical friend to the principal has the lowest score. These findings resonate strongly with aspects of governors' influence in improving FE colleges cited in this study (Ofsted, 2008; LSIS, 2010). However, unlike in the schools sector where literature specifically singled out governing bodies' 3 main roles in helping schools to improve: to provide a strategic view, to act as a

critical friend and to ensure accountability (Earley and Weindling, 2004; DfES, 2001), literature on the role of FE GBs in college improvement is generally patchy.

Similarly data from 5 out of 6 case study governors' meeting minutes reveal that governors could advice, comment, question and challenge senior managers on various issues about the performance of the college – a finding that might reflect the importance of holding senior management accountable for the performance of the college by governors. Hence, findings from the documentary analysis strongly support findings from interviews that the work of SC governors can help colleges to improve through monitoring and challenging management; by making sure that the college improvement plan takes place; advising on strategy; by asking awkward questions after senior managers' presentations, and by making suggestions. These challenges from governors seem to enable practitioners to be reflective on their practice and to be accountable for what goes on in a college which is important for college improvement.

So, with regard to the contribution of governors to college improvement, data from both documentary analysis and interviews identified a number of ways (such as monitoring, challenging, supporting, providing checks and balances, setting the strategic direction of the college, making sure that the leadership is sound and effective, and by holding management accountable for the performance of the college) that governors can contribute to the continuous improvement of FE colleges either directly or indirectly. This means governors may need to know how to do this, with the necessary self-belief to carry it out, which can be achieved through proper induction

and continued support. These findings resonate strongly with aspects of improvement described in much of the literature above (CIQS, 1994; Hopkins, 1996; Grey et al., 1996; Carter, 1998; Martinez, 2000, 2001, 2003; Hopkins, 2001; Davies, 2002; Ranson et al., 2005b; Ofsted, 2008; LSIS, 2010; Hancock, 2013;) as such the study strengthens evidence from the schools' sector by arguing that FE governors' work can greatly help colleges to improve.

What is also apparent from this finding is that, in order for governors to be able to fulfil their key role of helping colleges to improve, they need to be good governors with a good skill base, who knows exactly what is expected from them. For instance, the key message from Ofsted, (2008), states that …the only specific reference to governors within the "key drivers for improvement" states that "well-informed governors who challenge managers vigorously on the college performance" (Ofsted, 2008:8). If governors do not know what is expected from them they end up drifting into operational management issues (Cornforth and Edwards, 1999) or they can end up paying too much attention on 'marginal concerns', instead of focusing on the 'big issues', such as "the quality of teaching, the progress and achievement of their pupils, and the culture which supports this" (Wilshaw, 2013:2).

As already mentioned above, the study recommends a clear and detailed induction and training programme/continuous professional development programme (CPD) for FE governors that involves 'coaching and mentoring' in order to help governors to clearly understand what is expected from them in FE colleges. Such an induction programme should not only be limited to governors but should also be extended to

include newly appointed principals as well. This could help governors to understand their educational role in FE colleges and also principals to understand the framework of working with a GB team. Recruitment teams (Search Committees) could also focus on recruiting more governors who are well grounded in educational matters or those with an educational background. This is because as Davies (2002) reports, the complexity of an FE college environment is quite a challenge for new comers to the GB to understand and, unlike universities or schools, FE colleges have more limited time with their students. In that short time as Davies (2002:54) continues, there is still considered to be a need for the board to "get its corporate head" around curriculum, students and quality issues. Hence the need for a detailed coaching and mentoring training programme for new FE governors.

The interviews reveal that governors' role in FE college improvement is not only limited to academic, but to all aspects of college improvement. Again, as already mentioned earlier on, governors do not alone contribute to college improvement, they work closely with other professionals such as principals and senior managers to effect continuous improvement in FE colleges. A point that is consistent with Angelle and Anfara's (2006:48) finding that, "Improvement does not depend upon any single person." Thus both governors and principals should mutually work together to effect improvement in a college as illustrated in Figure 8 on page 199.

Principals' roles:

1. implementing policy

2. Monitoring college performance

3. Sourcing funding for the college

4. Leading/managing the college

Governors' roles:

1. Critical friend

2. Monitoring college performance

3. Holding management to account for the performance of the college

4. Appointing a principal and senior management staff

FE College Improvement
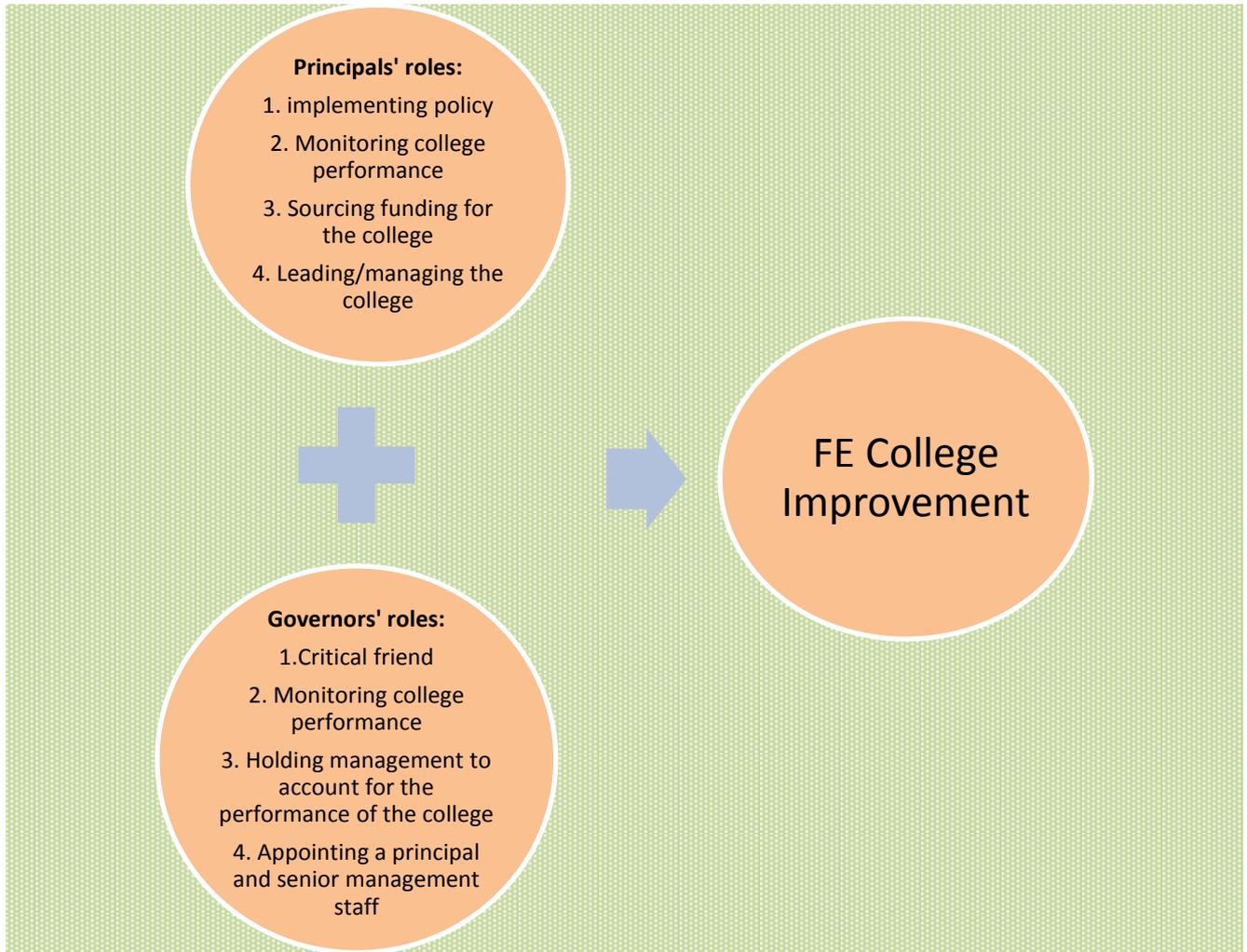
Figure 8: Governors and Principals' Contributions to College Improvement

Therefore, the study suggests that in order for continuous improvement (CI) to take place in all aspects of FE colleges business, there is need for governors and principals in these institutions to develop a culture of mutual working (collaborative) practices (which need an investment of time and energy to build such relationships in colleges) essential for meeting the challenge of today's turbulent FE college environments. As Hancock (2013:60) reminds us "effective leadership and governance is essential in ensuring that further education colleges continue to improve."

Overall summary

From the foregoing discussion, it seems clear that both 'primary' and 'secondary' socialisation can influence individuals' choice of becoming FE governors in later life. In that sense, governors are a group of individuals with different family, educational, professional and cultural backgrounds who are seeking a new 'identity' and they need help to achieve this new identity/identity transformation to be able to effectively contribute to the core business of FE colleges. As such, the study suggests the need for a new enhanced induction programme (coaching and mentoring) for new FE governors. That way, governors could be helped to develop a deep understanding of the remit of their role in an FE college environment.

The literature and interviews also reveal that people are motivated to become FE governors for a variety of reasons (such as their expertise; knowledge of the local community; knowledge of the educational system; while others want to enhance their curriculum vitae (CVs) and status, and others may just want to belong to a group). This means that governors may have divergent views of what governance is or what it should be; different expectations of the job and of the remit of their role in an FE college environment, which is not good for FE governance practices. As pointed out a little earlier above, a new coaching and mentoring programme will/can help new FE governors in identity transformation as they embark on their governorship journey.

Furthermore, the finding from literature that the purpose(s) that governance serves in FE colleges is not clearly defined appears not to have changed. Interview evidence confirms that governance serves variable purposes in FE colleges. The purposes

also seem to vary from college to college. In some colleges the business purpose is emphasised; in others it may be compliance and legal; in other colleges the stewardship purpose is regarded more important, while in some colleges all of the above purposes are concurrently emphasised. This perceived variation of 'purposes' that corporate governance serves in FE colleges is not good because it can cause discordant to governance practices and exposes the interpretation of FE corporate governance to subjective interpretations by colleges, which is not helpful for college improvement. In that regard, the study suggests the need for a new conceptualisation on the purpose that corporate governance serves in FE colleges. That way a new model of governance suitable for the FE sector can be developed.

Over and above that, there are similarities between literature and interview findings that the roles and responsibilities of governors and principals in FE colleges are blurred in practice. In part this is because of lack of training for governors and also because of the problem of defining governance and management in different colleges-particularly given the fact that most principals are also governors, which makes it difficult for most to distinguish 'governorship' role from their 'principalship' role. As remarked by P, CB, T14, "as a principal, I am also a governor don't forget. I am one of the people who is very experienced in that context. From the company's perspective, I am the 'Managing Director' because I am both a principal and a member of the governing board." This begs a further question of whether principals participate in FE governance as observers or what? The fact that the roles and responsibilities of governors and principals invariably cross over is problematic and not helpful in a mutual working relationship needed in FE colleges. The study

suggests the need for an understanding 'role clarity' between principals and governors in FE colleges. If both governors and principals have a high level of understanding of their roles and responsibilities, then the chance of either principals or governors meddling into governorship and management issues respectively will be reduced.

In a similar way, there is difference of opinion among principals and governors at the level that principals should participate in FE governance. The divided opinion hinges on the fact that some governors want their principal to implement what they tell him/her to do, while others would prefer him/her to be actively engaged in all aspects of the college governance decision-making processes. Likewise, some principals hold the view that their job is just to implement what governors tell them to do (lower level participation), while others want to be actively involved in all strategic decision-making processes in their college. Low level participation from principals is potentially not good because it means less power in the decision-making process of a college. In this regard, the study suggests the need for FE principals to actively engage (high level participation) with the process of FE governance in their colleges rather than being second fiddle to governors. That way, a principal could be able to actively contribute to the strategic leadership of FE colleges and help colleges to improve.

Governors and principals also hold a consensus view that governors need particular skills and "skills attributes" to be able to inform and shape a college's leadership. A finding that is also supported by literature cited in this study. However, while acknowledging the notion that governors need to be 'good' governors with a good

skill base, who know exactly what is expected from them in order to be able to contribute to the process of college improvement, this study suggests the need for more than just "calibre and chemistry" from FE governors, but rather certain shared ethos and values of working in FE colleges. In this light, a new "skills and experience" typology that include values and ethos of working in increasingly complex and heavily regulated FE college environment is suggested in order to help governors to govern more effectively.

Findings from documentary analysis also support interview findings that, the work of SC governors can play a very important role in college improvement, and that their (governors) contribution to college improvement is not only limited to academic but to all aspects of improvement that take place in a college. This means governors may need to know how to fulfil this vital role, with the necessary self-belief to carry it out, which can be achieved through proper induction and continued support.

Finally, it is evident from interview findings that although both governors and principals said they feel empowered to do their work, the governor-principal relationship balance in FE colleges is not balanced. Some GB members and some committees seem to have more powers than that of principals and other members of the GBs. This in itself is inimical to a good working relationship of mutual support which is a recipe for college improvement. Hence, the study suggests the need for an all-encompassing collaborative working model for governors and principals in FE colleges in order to help improve governance practices.

The next chapter, Conclusions and Recommendations, presents a complete picture of the conclusions drawn in relation to the aim and purpose of this study. It considers the possible contributions of this research to knowledge by reflecting on the light shed by literature, findings and discussions of the study and how these can be used to develop a new conceptualisation of FE governance and its contribution to FE college improvement. There is also some consideration for further research in this little researched area and how it could support further the contributions of FE governance to college improvement. It also presents recommendations for policy makers, current and aspiring governors, principals and the institutions they work in.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter presents an overall picture of the conclusions and recommendations drawn in relation to the aim and purpose of this study which is to investigate FE governance and its contributions to FE college improvement. The chapter begins with a section highlighting the contributions of this research to knowledge on FE governance by reflecting on light shed by literature, findings and discussions of the study and how these can be used to develop a new conceptualisation of FE governance and its contributions to college improvement. The theoretical and practical implications of the contribution to knowledge are then considered. In the penultimate section, I suggest further work that is needed in the light of the current research findings and then end with recommendations on how practitioners can reflect on their own practice in the light of this study's findings.

The next section considers the study's contribution to knowledge and how far it has provided evidence that addresses the main aim of this investigation.

Contribution to Knowledge

The study has made several contributions to the body of knowledge on FE governance and its contributions to FE college improvement. The main contribution of the study is that it is the first attempt to explore and give an insight into governors' role in FE college improvement. Over and above that, the study offers a novel

approach to the study of educational governance by linking FE governors' early socialisation to influence on governorship in later life.

Governors' Early Socialisation and Influence to Governorship in Later Life

Interview findings reveal that both primary and secondary socialisation have an influence on people's decisions to become governors in later life, and that people can choose to become FE governors for a variety of reasons. This means FE governors from diverse backgrounds may have different priorities, perceptions and expectations of their role (Gleeson et al., 2010). In that sense, FE governors are a group of individuals with different family, educational, professional and cultural backgrounds who are seeking to establish a new identity and they need help in their quest for that new identity/identity transformation in order to be able to effectively contribute to the core business of FE colleges. In an exploratory study that examines the transformation of educational practitioners into educational researchers, Rhodes (2013) suggests that these practitioners likely need to reconcile cultural differences between the world of their practice and the world of the educational researcher. He further points out that successful transformation requires a change in an individual's specific capabilities and world view, which involves a re-understanding of the self and one's beliefs whose manifestation is a change in behaviour. Similarly, the identity transformation to an FE governor is likely to be dependent to some extent on levels of personal and social interaction to create belonging, the prevailing governance culture of the host college, and the pedagogy and supervision style and content. My research suggests the need for a detailed mentoring and coaching framework

(induction) for new FE governors as they embark on their FE governorship journey as shown on Table 17 below.

Mentoring and coaching process	Aspirant governor	Early career governor	Later career governorship
Acculturation	√	√	
Assimilation		√	√
Actualisation	√	√	√
Goal: boosting self-efficacy	√	√	√
√ Signifies where the process names is predictable			

Table 17: Three-stage self-efficacy framework for coaching and mentoring for the governorship journey (adapted from Rhodes and Fletcher, 2013)

Kelly and Mayes (1995) describe mentoring as a process in which a more experienced person teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person to promote the latter's professional/personal development. Bloom et al., (2005) broadly define coaching as the practice of providing deliberate support to another individual to help him/her to clarify and achieve goals. More specifically Simkins et al., (2006) describe coaching as a form of professional development that is narrower than mentoring. Coaching as they conceive it focuses on skill development and job-specific tasks rather than career development. Table 17 above shows a three stage goal-oriented holistic approach to mentoring and coaching whereby a governor, for an example, pursues a supported induction journey towards self-and college-actualisation through mentoring and coaching. The process is three dimensional and starts with a governor becoming part of the college and the wider societal culture (acculturation), becoming assimilated as

a member of the college 'team' in a particular FE college (assimilation) and attaining

the stage of enacting the envisioned characteristics of a successful FE college

(actualisation). This would be part of their on-going socialisation.

Leadership mentoring and situated learning have been successfully used (Browne-

Ferrigno and Muth, 2006) to enable aspirant principals to build confidence and aid

socialisation into the community of educational administrators they wish to join.

Rhodes and Fletcher (2013) have shown how the three-stage self-efficacy framework

of coaching and mentoring can help head teachers to develop organically as part of

the school community and embodying the values that the school aspires. Browne-

Ferrigno, (2003) in work on the transition to leadership in USA also reaches similar

conclusions. She revealed that there are 4 key elements in the transformation

process to headship:

- role conceptualisation which is related to participants' understanding about the roles and responsibilities of a school principal;

- initial socialisation into a new community of practice;

- role-identity transformation where professional growth is indicated by the mind-set shift of participants to that of an educational leader;

- purposeful engagement based on career aspirations.

Equally, at the early career stage, it is important that new governors are supported

especially during the potentially difficult early years of governorship. Coaches and

Mentors of new governors should for example convey the day-to-day realities of the

job, the job priorities and expectations, help new governors assimilate an existing

professional culture, give emotional support, reduce feelings of isolation, answer

questions drawing on their own experience and enable the confidence of the new governor to be raised (Daresh, 2004; Hobson and Sharp, 2005; Silver et al., 2009). While at the later career governorship stage, coaching and mentoring can enable longer serving governors to sustain self-efficacy, remain enchanted, motivated and passionate about their work and the profession. That way, governors could be helped to develop a deep understanding of the remit of their role in an FE college environment.

Purpose of FE Governance: A New Conceptualisation

A governing body of an FE college in England is underpinned by charitable status (Hill and James, 2013) and after incorporation, FE governors took on responsibilities equivalent to those of company directors. In the early years (1993-1999), governors with a business background dominated the composition of FE GBs and FE governance practices were more aligned to the stakeholder model of governance (Cornforth and Edwards, 1999; Cornforth, 2003). However, unlike in the schools sector where the stakeholder model of governance is still dominant (Ranson, 2008; James et al., 2010, 2013), the model of FE governance adopted by those in this study can be closely aligned with the partnership model of governance. A point also echoed by Shoffield (2009).

Studies within FE (Cornforth and Edwards, 1998, 1999; Gleeson et al., 2010) have found out that GBs were either serving a compliance role, rubber-stamping managerial decisions or act as stewards of colleges. What seems apparent from this study's analysis/findings is that the purpose(s) that corporate governance serves in

FE colleges is ambiguous and vary from college to college. In part this is because the purpose of FE governance is not clearly defined in statutory guidelines and also that the current partnership model of FE governance is not enough in providing a framework that illuminates on all aspects of a GB's work. This has prompted calls by some critics that 'corporate models' of governance are not suitable for FE colleges (Bennett, 2002) and others calling for a complete overhaul of the FE governance system, arguing that the job of being a governor is overdue for an injection of professionalism (Mourant, 2010). One of these dissenting voices is the Head of Education at Birmingham Law Firm Martineau, who thinks that FE colleges should not go on being run by what she, calls 'well-meaning amateurs' referring to governors (Mourant, 2010). Citing the size of some FE colleges, she hints to us that the model of the GB cannot be sustainable considering that these institutions are multimillion-pound businesses. With this in mind, the study suggests that as the weight of responsibilities for FE governors' increases and FE governance priorities shift from business to educational and community needs, there is need for a new conceptual framework for FE governance. I have proposed a new model shown overleaf on Figure 9 that can be used to conceptualise the purpose of FE governance. I have dubbed this model: 'The Professional model of FE governance'.
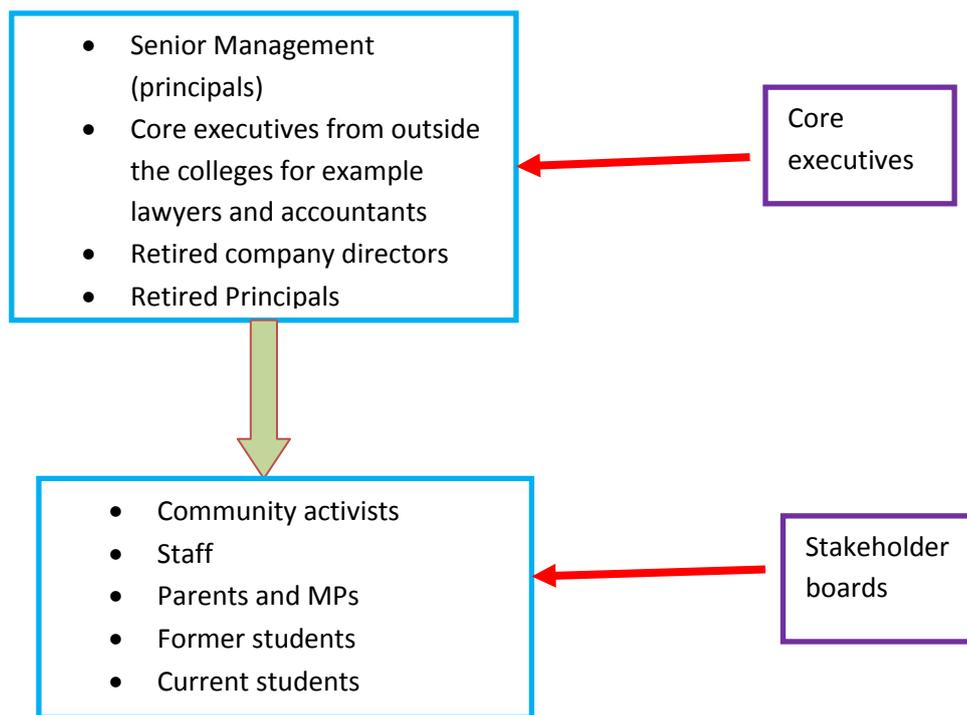
Figure 9: The Professional Model of FE governance to emerge from this study

From this model's perspective, a few key people including the principal, senior management and paid 'outsiders' could form a core executive of the GB. These will be selected based on their expertise. This correlates well with Harper's (2000) observation that specialist managers such as director of finance, quality and performance were needed to lead FE institutions in FE's new environment. Below them "Stakeholder boards" drawn from staff, former students, parents, community activists and current students would scrutinise the work of the core executives and approve/disapprove strategic decisions. Such a framework will give real power to 'Stakeholder boards' because these will be representing the needs/interests of the local community, which augers very well with Ranson et al.'s (2005a) concept of democracy. The 'Professional model of FE governance' framework would integrate insights from both the stakeholder and partnership perspectives. This way, a balance

on the purpose of FE governance as governance for improving institutional performance, democracy and accountability as advocated by the 2011 Act can be struck.

The proposed model of FE governance is suitable to FE colleges because it is feasible. Feasibility here will be concerned with whether FE colleges have the resources and competence to deliver this strategy. In this sense, this strategy is feasible because FE colleges have already 'expert governors' such as accountancy, lawyers and retired business people in their GBs. These could form part of the core executives. It is also sustainable because it is cheaper to adapt, yet very useful in helping to address the current ambiguities on the purpose of FE governance, which would suit very well with future trends and changes within the FE sector, where there is a priority shift in governance emphasis from business to educational and community matters. The strategy is highly likely to be acceptable to governors and principals because of its expected improved decision-making prospects.

Role Clarity between FE Governors and Principals

Despite the extensive literature on the nature of FE leadership and the importance of distinguishing FE college 'governance' from 'management', what emerges from this study is how the roles and responsibilities of governors and principals are blurred in practice. In part, this is because of lack of training for governors and also the problem of defining governance and management in different colleges. Many interviewees 83% (n=5) principals and 86% (n=12) governors mentioned a lack of understanding on where a principal's role and responsibilities begin and end, and where those of

governors begin and end. This situation as Baxter (2013) opines, is further exacerbated by the fact that FE governance has entered an era of increasing regulatory control and governor responsibilities in the last 20 years.

This lack of a clear definition for the role, or even a formal list of duties, generally impedes the role holder in either understanding the true extent of their role or, in practical terms, undertaking the relevant responsibilities in a prescribed way, which is not helpful in FE college environments. The study advocates the need for a clear understanding remit of governors' and principals' roles and responsibilities to avoid possible frictional points. I have devised a "role clarity" typology shown in Figure 10 overleaf that can be used to conceptualise the importance of governors' and principals' understanding remit of their roles and responsibilities in FE colleges.
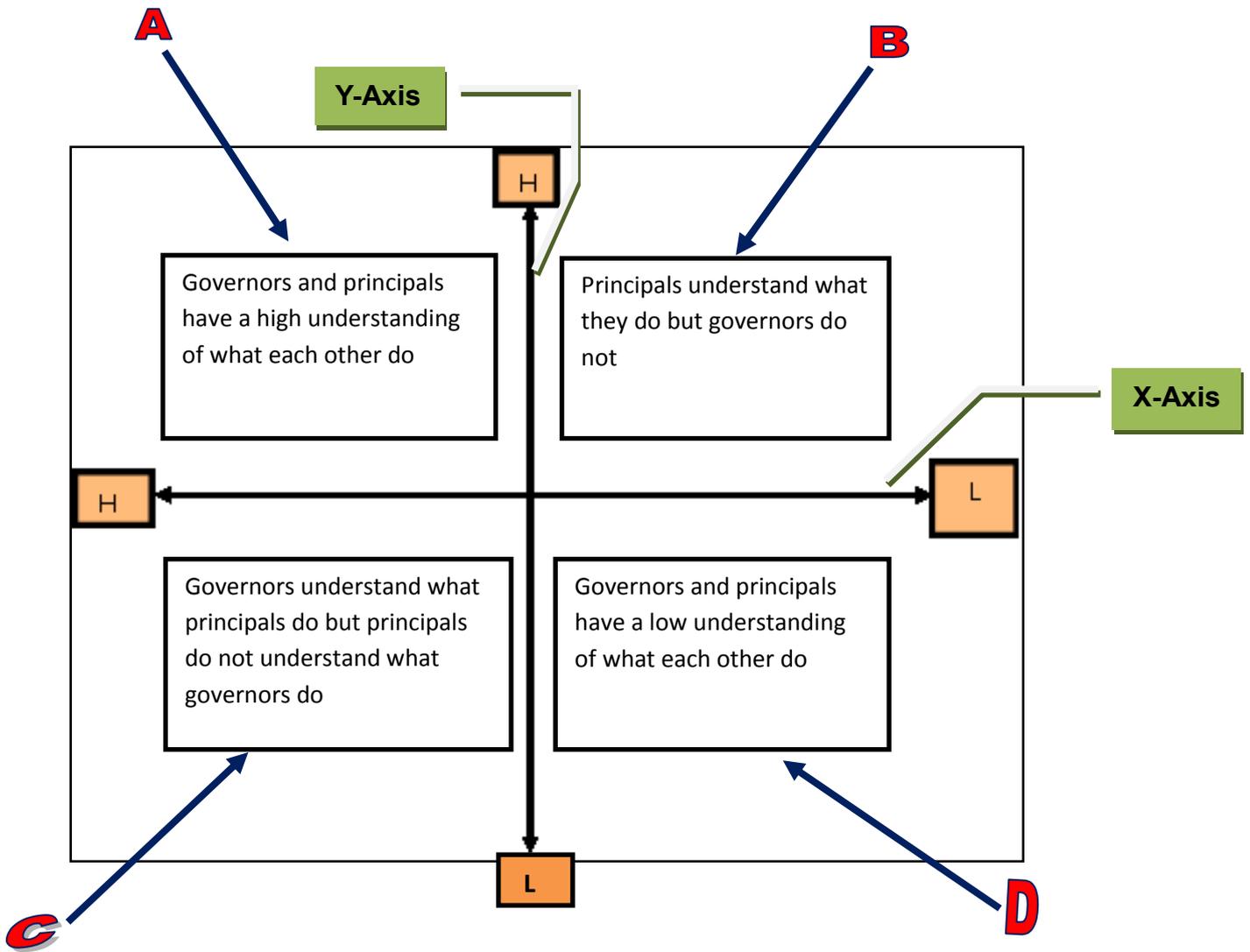
Figure 10: Governors and Principals Understanding of Role

Key
Y axis – principals understanding of role
X axis – governors understanding of role
H – High understanding
L – Low understanding

As shown in Figure 10, if college governors have a higher understanding of the remit of their role (as shown on quadrant 'A') they do not drift into operational management issues as is normally the case and that also means no unnecessary duplication of duties. Similarly if a principal has a higher understanding of the remit of their role (as

shown on quadrant 'A') then they do not drift into governorship issues. However, if both governors and principals have a low understanding of what each other do (as indicated by quadrant 'D') it means they can easily drift into each other's roles. For example governors can drift into operational management matters and principals can easily drift into governorship issues and both can engage in petty issues, resulting in an uncritical engagement into FE governance by both governors and principals. All this can result in friction(s) between governors and principals which is problematical to effective governance and management needed for FE college improvement. So, as previously discussed, what is needed for both governors and principals to move to quadrant 'A' is a detailed training (mentoring and coaching) programme that could help them to understand more the remit of their roles in an FE college environment.

Interview findings also reveal that, if a principal does not understand the remit of their role in an FE college, they tend to participate at a lower level in the decision-making process. This means, a principal may not have the power to influence the decision-making process in the college and will only do what governors tell him/her to do, which is not helpful for FE leadership. I have adapted Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation as shown in Figure 11 overleaf to help conceptualise the level of engagement of a principal in the decision-making process of an FE college.

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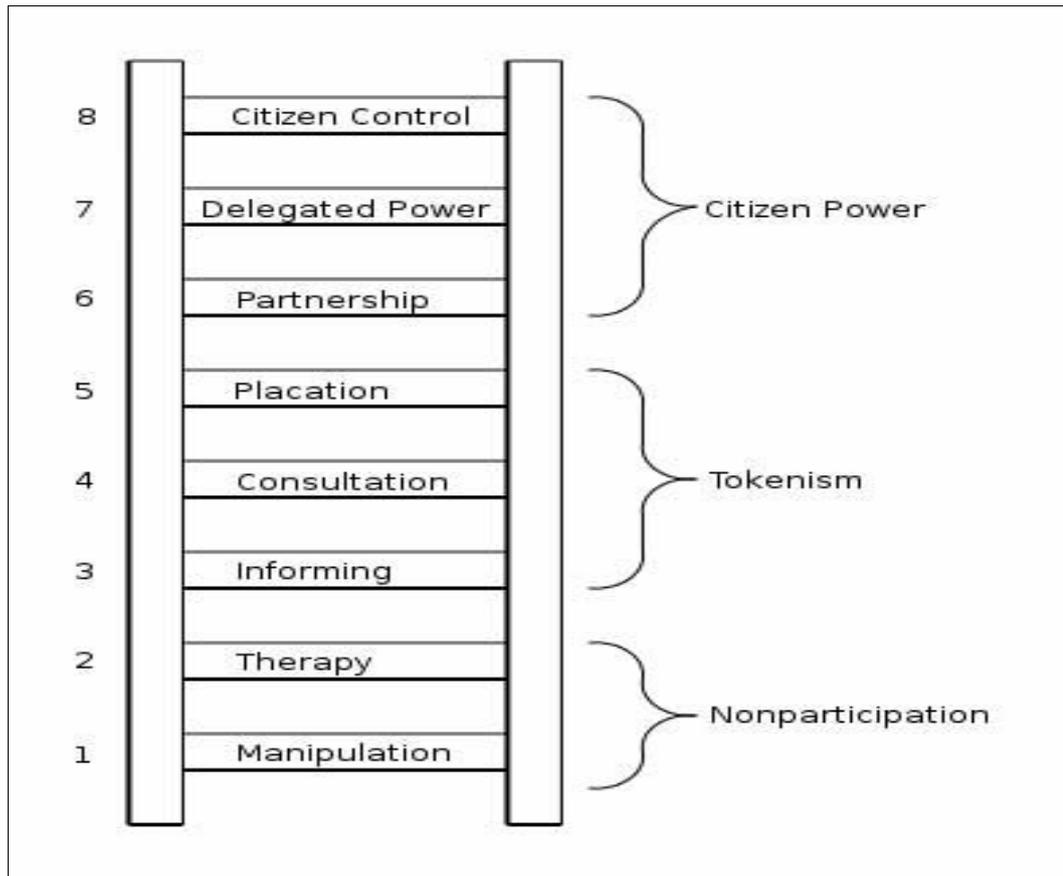
Figure 11: Ladder of Engagement (adapted from Arnstein's 1969)

As can be seen in Figure 11, each group of steps corresponds to changes in degrees of citizen engagement ranging from non-participation through tokenism to citizen power. According to Arnstein (1969:216), the ladder is based on a conceptualisation that "participation is a categorical term for power." Arnstein (1969) sees participation as essentially a power struggle between citizens trying to move up the ladder and controlling organisations and institutions. Despite its many criticisms such as unpacking the definition of participation (Tritter and McCallum, 2006; Cornwall, 2008) the metaphor of the ladder is very important in explaining the findings of this study with regard to the participation of principals and governors in the strategic decision-making in a college. What emerged from this study's findings is that 33% (n=2) of

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principals said they just implement what the GB tells them to do, which may fit tokenism in Arnstein's (1969) 'Ladder of Citizen engagement' in the decision-making process. However, the remainder 67% (n=4) seems to have achieved citizen power. Using this ladder of participation, if a college principal operates below level 6 it means they are participating at a lower level and they do not have power to influence the decision-making process in the college. Only if a principal is participating at the top three steps – partnership, delegated power and citizen control, demonstrate citizen power. Leadership in FE colleges is about influence. West (1999) hints to us that, as schools and colleges have become autonomous then micro political activity has increased: there is more to play for around the decisions and directions that the institution may take. Arnstein's (1969) ladder of engagement is useful in explaining the participation of principals in the decision-making process of FE colleges, considering the employer-employee relationship between governors and principals. So, some principals might need training and empowerment for them to be able to move up the ladder.

Typology of Governor Skills

The findings of this study support the need for further investigation into the experience and skills that are necessary for one to be an effective FE governor. Some writers (Cornforth and Edwards, 1999; Gleeson et al., 2010) judge personal issues to do with 'calibre and chemistry' to make a difference in the way the GB perform and contribute to the leadership of colleges. According to Gleeson et al., (2010), the ideal type governor is described as shown in Table 18.

- Has a sense of responsibility;
- Possesses a good intellect;
- Has personal confidence;
- Has excellent communication skills;
- Provides emotional commitment; and
- Has a strong value position on people, education and community.

Table 18: Calibre and Chemistry Typology (Gleeson et al., 2010)

From interview findings, it is possible to redraft a contemporary view of the needed commitment and abilities required to further advance the 'Calibre and Chemistry' typology by including ethos (culture) and values (moral principles) of working in an FE college environment as shown below in Table 19.

- Commitment to attend meetings;
- Willingness to participate;
- Having the ethos of the reasons why governors are there;
- The ability to take responsibility;
- The ability to be able to work on a corporate basis;
- The ability to recognise that it needs to be a clear duty type of operation and everyone brings something to the process.

Table 19: Governors' Ethos and Professional Values Typology

In this light, ethos and values need to be taken into account at selection, induction and training of governors. Culture is the collective and deeply held values, beliefs and attitudes that bind a group of people together. It determines what Southworth, (1998:2) calls "the way we do things here". As shown on Table 19, ethos and values of working in FE College environments can help governors to integrate into the FE college community and help them develop a sense of belonging. Therefore, in addition to "calibre and chemistry", governors also need values and ethos of working in an FE college in order to be able to effectively inform and shape the strategic

leadership of FE colleges. Ethos and values can be integrated into the coaching, mentoring and talent management of governors.

Collaborative Working Model

Another theme that emerged from this study is how disequilibrium is the relationship balance between governors and principals in FE colleges. Chairs of GBs seem to have more positional power than their peers, while a minority governors 14% (n=2) do not feel empowered to do their work because there are certain committees in GBs which are regarded more powerful than others, and these committees have big decisions to make about the running of the college. This relationship imbalance is not good because it makes a small section of governors more influential in the decision-making process of a college and may hinder the democratic decision-making process that may be needed for college improvement. In this light, I have suggested a collaborate working model shown on Figure 12 overleaf that can be used by FE colleges to help effect changes that are necessary for college improvement.

<table>
<tr>
<td>

Driving Forces
(Positive forces for change)
Forces which assist
the quality
initiative – for example
GB Chairs, the Audit and Search
Committees

</td>
<td>

Restraining Forces
(obstacles to change)
Forces that prevent
the achievement of the
quality initiative – for example the
principal and rest of
GB committees

</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>

Promoting change

Steps which can be taken
to promote change

</td>
<td>

Resisting change

Factors which need to be
neutralized as they inhibit

</td>
</tr>
</table>

Current position

Figure 12: Force Field Analysis-Kurt Lewin (1951) (adapted from Edward, 1993)

Findings from this study show that Chairs of GBs, the Audit and Search committees seem to be 'driving forces' for tasks related to change and the remainder governors including principals are opposing forces. If this was the case, an imbalanced level of power could disenfranchise principals and the rest of governors, so it maybe that these are opposing forces which may inhibit change. This could lead to poor as well as good decision-making or no decision-making at all. So, there is need for more collaboration, openness and trust, power-based knowledge and a clear role clarification between governors and principals. The 'Force Field Analysis' is a useful tool for studying a situation which requires change. It is based on the idea that there are two opposing forces to change. One set of forces is driving the change while the other set resists. According to this model, change can be brought about either by strengthening the promoting forces or neutralising the resisting forces. Lewin (1951)

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suggests that, to increase the level of output one would reduce the forces that restrain performance-for example setting specific goals and defining expectations of subordinates. Neutralising opposition has the same effect as increasing support. Effort should be spent on the areas it is possible to influence (Edward, 1993).

Using this model, if a Chair of a GB has more powers than the principal and the remainder governors that may mean that a Chair of GB will be driving the process and principals and other governors may be less effective in opposing the change. As interview findings have shown, principals feel empowered to do their work if they have a good, skilled GB and a Chair that supports them in their role. If the GB is not supportive, that seems to create problems for principals. Similarly, if some GB committees such as the Search and Audit committees have more powers than other committees, any quality change necessary for college improvement may well face resistance from other committees such as the Standards Committee. So, in order for change to take place, you can either strengthen the GB Chairs or the remaining governors resisting change can be neutralised. That way, necessary changes that promote improvement in a college can be effected. The balance essential in making changes necessary for 'college improvement' requires collaborative leadership skills similar to those described by Coleman (2011), in which effective practice of collaborative leadership involves the skilful combination of *Authentic, Relational, Distributed, Political and Constitutive* leadership to suit the specific context within which they are to manifest. The model could be further developed and used to enable planning so that greater collaboration may be sought and improvement facilitated.

Implications of contributions to knowledge

This section considers the practical and theoretical implications of the contributions to knowledge of this study to policy makers, aspiring and incumbent governors, principals and FE college senior management teams.

What emerged from this study is that, FE governors are an elite group with diverse backgrounds and that they join college GBs for a variety of reasons. This means governors may have divergent views, priorities and interpretations of FE governance which is potentially not good for practice. As observed by Carver, (2006) governors arrive at the table with dreams, they have vision and values…, but what they need is support in their quest to seek a new identity as FE governors. The study proposed a framework that colleges could use to better prepare governors for their eventual governorship posts in FE colleges by including coaching and mentoring in their governor induction and training programmes. Coaching and mentoring have been successfully used internationally to support new principals /head teachers in schools (Rhodes and Fletcher, 2013; Browne and Muth, 2006; Bengtson et al., 2013). Likewise, coaching and mentoring could be used to support new governors in FE colleges. Practising governors would pursue professional development templates which are more adaptive to the complicated contexts within which they occasionally work. The current self-study governor training offered by the Association of Colleges (AoC) and the Learning and Skills Improvement Services (LSIS) appear not to be enough. The challenge for colleges would be on recruiting appropriate role model mentors for governors–particularly those colleges in deprived areas where finding a role model mentor may be difficult. In addition to finding appropriate mentors, coaching and mentoring for governors may also have financial implications for

colleges, particularly in recent years when funding for training governors is being cut. However, coaching and mentoring for governors would be better value for money overall, given their possible increased impact. This has practical implications for the way governors are recruited, retained and integrated into FE college environments.

With regard to policy, the Education Act 2011 and its new freedoms and flexibilities provides the theoretical framework that underpins current governance practices in FE colleges. The Act reflects the coalition government policy of removing unnecessary barriers to innovation and diversity of provision to increase learners' choice. It leaves the potential for increased flexibility on the way in which corporation decisions are taken-for example meetings may not be required, written resolutions will become possible. The Act also allows corporations to consider how they might change their composition and ways of working. This could provide a leeway for many GBs to reform their composition in line with my proposed 'Professional Model of FE governance' framework above and also provides an insight into the type of governors a college might appoint – for example appointing more governors with educational backgrounds. Governors' recruitment teams could also snatch the opportunity to adopt in FE colleges what Goodall (2013:211) refers to as "Recruit for attitude, train for skills" approach to governors' recruitment.

The study also reveals limitations to the present state of theoretical knowledge and the ways in which it informs research on the purpose (s) of FE governance. It has emerged that the purpose of FE governance in FE colleges is ambiguous and I have gone some way to unpack this ambiguity by suggesting a new framework that could

be used to conceptualise the purpose(s) of FE college governance. This proposed new framework can be used to strike a balance on the purpose of FE governance as governance for maximising institutional performance, democracy and accountability. Hence, the current study provides insight into a possible framework for FE governance and the composition FE GBs might adopt.

The study has shown that the roles and responsibilities of governors and principals are blurred in practice and based on the findings, I have suggested a "role clarity typology" that can help governors and principals to reflect on the importance of understanding the remit of their roles and responsibilities in an FE college environment. The implication of this to policy makers is a need for clear guidelines to governors and principals as they undergo their duties in FE colleges.

Finally, it is important to note that leadership and management are about the use of power to influence and /or control the values, beliefs, feelings and actions of others to achieve the organisation's aims and objectives. As Lumby (2013:583) asserts, "organisations are fields of power". The study has revealed that governor-principal relationship in FE colleges may well lack balance. In theory, GB Chairs have more powers than other governors and principals. This implies GB Chairs have more influence on what goes on in FE colleges. Some GBs committees are also perceived as more powerful than others. In one Case Study College, for example, one governor mentioned the Chair and Principal 'cherry picking members' into governing board committees, which points to possible unhelpful working practice. This implies also a lack of transparency into some aspects of a college GB's work, for example, the ways

governors are appointed into various GBs committees. The study suggests a collaborative working model of 'mutual support' between principals and governors as best practice that can promote college improvement and Coleman's (2011) all-encompassing model of collaboration may be useful to help in achieving this.

Suggestions for Further Work

There are a number of areas this study could benefit from further research. First, the research was conducted with established SC governors and principals, who have been in the role as governors/principals for a minimum of 2 years. While this was valuable in providing data to answer my research questions, it would be more beneficial to conduct further case study work with newer governors, student governors and colleges that do not have standards committees in their GB structures to find out the extent to which the current study's findings can be confirmed.

The research employed semi-structured interviews with 14 FE governors and 6 principals in 6 case study colleges located in a relatively narrow geographical area of the Midlands region of England, and supplemented interview data with documentary analysis. While this provided an insight into the role of FE governors in college improvement and data to answer my research questions, it does place limitations on the extent to which the knowledge gained in this research is transferable to other localities outside this geographical region. It would be helpful to have further research with a much broader sample of SC governors and principals nationally, using survey

questionnaires for instance, to find out the extent to which the current study's findings can be corroborated by other UK institutions.

In a similar vein, a more in-depth study which includes discussions with significant people working with FE governors in colleges such as clerks, observations of governors' meetings and the use of focus groups to discuss the role of governors in college improvement would definitely provide an extra dimension to this topic. This would triangulate the data and offer a more rounded view and therefore enhance understanding of how governors have learnt to govern.

Furthermore, one of the tentative conclusions drawn from this study is the lack of training and professional development for governors. However, this only can be considered from the data emanating from this study. It would be interesting for researchers to explore how recently developed professional development programmes (if any) are intending to develop governors capacity to lead and to what extent the participants of the programme are both engaged in the process and are allowed to draw upon experiences from their early life and professional backgrounds. This is particularly important in recent times where the new Ofsted Inspection framework (2012) specifically refers to governors as part of FE college leadership.

Although these findings are useful in providing an insight into the role of governors in college improvement, they are based on the views of principals and SC governors in 6 case study colleges only. Further cross-sector research would be useful to find out the contributions of governors to institutional improvement in those sectors, for

instance compulsory and higher education sectors and compare this with the findings of this research. The study, however, serves to provide key insights to inform the on-going research agenda on FE governance which should now be broadened to include a wider range of other educational institutions.

Clearly, the role of governors in FE college improvement remains an under-researched area in the UK and as such it is an exciting time for those seeking to undertake investigations that are aimed at understanding this important role.

Recommendations

The findings have thus provided a basis on which to make some recommendations to college governor recruitment teams; incumbent governors; policy makers and senior management teams which are outlined in this section.

First, this study's findings have alluded to a possible lack of sharing good governance practices among governors of case study colleges. Interview findings indicate lack of knowledge or ignorance from many governors on governance practices that go on in neighbouring colleges. What is evident from this study's findings are divergent views from governors and principals in respective colleges of what governance and management means to them in their own particular contexts. A little of what seems to be known from neighbouring colleges is informal and down to rumours, which may not be best practice. In this light, the study recommends inter-college governance collaboration (within constraints of unavoidable competition) so that governors could

share good governance practices with their counterparts in neighbouring colleges. Those responsible for training governors could for example, organise governor visits to other colleges/exchange programmes where a governor could spent a day or two in a different college learning on how they govern and compare that with their own practice. Seminars, inter-organisation training days' and visits to colleges that have been graded as "outstanding" by Ofsted can also be organised to enable governors from struggling colleges to share good practice with their peers. That way, governors could certainly be helped to govern.

Despite repeated calls from central government in recent years for a shift in FE governance priorities from serving business interests to community and educational needs, the research has shown very little evidence to suggest a paradigm shift by FE colleges in practice. Thus, the research recommends that as FE governance priorities shift from business to educational and community needs, governor recruitment teams (Search Committees) should reflect on this by recruiting more governors with an educational background and those with community knowledge background in order to conform to changing trends in FE governance priorities.

The study also reveals a lack of transparency in ways GBs carry out their work, for example how they recruit and appoint governors' to respective GB committees. Cornforth and Edwards's (1999) research also reaches similar conclusions. Using 'informal networks' to facilitate the search and recruitment of competent board members, these authors observed that the process is not always open or transparent to outsiders, with the danger that it can lead to a narrow closed group of board

members. A finding also confirmed by the findings of this research, which have shown that some aspects of a GB's work such as discussions on awarding pay packages to senior management staff are only privy to a small section of governors. The remaining governors such as staff governors are excluded from these discussions. Staff governors and student governors are also sanctioned from participating in some committees such as Remuneration and Finance Committees, which points to a lack of openness in how some deliberations of important college issues are made-making some aspects of a college GB's work hidden from a section of its own members, let alone from the public eye. Similarly, Robinson and Shaw (2003) in a study of GBs in the North-East of England, inform us that, most GBs are far from open in relation to provision of information and access to their meetings. This is despite recommendations from the Second Nolan Report (1996) on good practice across sectors on: appointments, training, openness, codes of conduct, conflicts of interest and whistle-blowing (Cornforth, 2003). Indeed, there is a need for the criteria of recruitment, appointments and awarding of salary increments to senior managers to be shared throughout the college; if the criteria is obscure to one section of the GBs (as it appears in this study) then there may be a lack of openness and trust between GB members/committees, which is not good governance practice. Thus, the study recommends more openness and transparency in the way GBs enact their duties.

Finally, the findings of this study allude to the need for the professionalisation of FE governance-an issue also raised in Shoffield's (2009) recommendations. The study recommends policy makers to change current charity commission rules so that FE

governors could be paid. While Shoffield's (2009) recommendation left the issue to individual colleges to decide, with each having to make its own case, this study recommends that, policy makers need first to repeal the charity commissioning rules, which currently do not permit governors to be paid. Paying governors would potentially enable colleges to attract better individuals with a high commitment and professional intent for governorship and to help eliminate anyone who may be overly motivated by reasons of vanity or CV enhancement. That way, FE governance can be able to effectively contribute to the overall strategic direction of the college and help colleges improve.

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Appendix 1

<div align="right">

(Researcher/student)
Address
09/05/2014.
</div>

The Principal
Address – FE College

<u>RE: Request for permission for access to Interview the principal and governors at your college for Doctoral research purposes.</u>

Dear - name of Principal

I am writing to request your permission to access your college for a small scale piece of research. I am a Further Education (FE) qualified lecturer (PGCE and QTLS) with more than 12 years teaching/lecturing experience. I am also a member of the Institute of Learning (IfL) and hold a current enhanced CRB. I am currently studying for a Professional Education Doctorate in Leaders and Leadership in Education at the University of Birmingham and am researching on FE college governance and how it contributes to college improvement. This research specifically focuses on the views of governors who sit on the "standards Committee" and the incumbent principal, regarding their views on the contributions of governance to college improvement.

It is for this reason that I request for your permission to carry out research in your college next term (January – April 2012) to interview governors and the principal. If you grant your permission, on the first visit I would need about an hour to interview your principal. After interviewing the principal, I will also need to interview a cross-section of selected governors and these interviews will last for 45 minutes to about an hour and will be carried out at mutually convenient times – say an hour before or after governors' term general meeting.

 The data gathered in this research as well as the results will be used only for the purposes of this small scale research project. No any other use of the data will be made without your consent. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained at all times throughout this investigation. A copy of the headlines of the research project can be provided if requested.

Your co-operation on this issue will be greatly appreciated. I look forward to hear from you in three weeks' time. I can speak on the phone or visit your college if you want to have a better idea of the type of questions to be asked. Thank you for taking your time in reading this letter. For more information please do not hesitate to contact me on ▓▓▓▓▓▓ or by e-mail on ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ . Or you may contact my supervisor Dr Christopher Rhodes whose contact details are:

[REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,

Robert Masunga

I would be grateful if you could pass this letter to the clerk to the corporation and standards committee governors for signing to show their voluntary consent to participate in this research and then return the attached consent form for my records.

 Please tick where appropriate:

- I agree to be interviewed for the research on FE governance and college improvement: ☐

- I request a copy of my transcript of my interview: ☐

- I request a Headline copy of the thesis (50, 000 words): ☐

Name:_____   Date:_____

Signed: _____

Appendix 2

Research Interview Consent form

Interviewer	………………………………..
Interviewee	………………………………
Date of interview	………………………………

Purpose of interview

This interview is part of my research for the award of an Education Doctorate (EdD) in Leaders and Leadership in Education at the University of Birmingham. Before we start I would like to emphasise that:

- Your participation is entirely voluntary;
- You are free to refuse to answer any questions;
- You are free to withdraw at any time.

Confidentiality

The data will be kept confidential at all times. Data from the interview will only be available to the staff tutoring on the Education Doctorate programme at the University of Birmingham and, possibly, to the External Examiner for my thesis. Excerpts from the interview may be included as part of the final thesis, but your name will be excluded, and any identifying characteristics will be removed. The interview data may also be used as part of written papers or books, but without your name and excluding any identifying characteristics, and subject to research ethics. After the completion of this research, research data will be preserved and will be accessible for 10 years in confidence to other authorised researchers for verification purposes.

Right to withdraw

Participants have the right to withdraw any time during the research and only up to one week after the data collection – please contact me at the following email address: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ One week for withdrawal was considered as reasonable to avoid other issues that could arise for me as a doctoral student if participants decide to withdraw just before thesis submission.

Acknowledgement: Please sign this form to show that we have agreed its content.

Signed (Interviewee) …………………………………

Signed (Interviewer) ………………………………..

Date   ………………………………….

Request and access to professional college documents to be analysed:

Examples of college documents to be analysed:
Governors Meeting minutes
Corporation Self-Assessment (SEF): Areas for Improvement

Name   …………………………….   (Principal only)

Signed   …………………………………..

Date   ………………………………….

Appendix 3: List of Interview questions for governors

Background

1. Is there anything in your background, that you think inspired you to be a governor? (e.g. potency, competences and capacity to make a difference to organisational outcomes).

2. What made you think (your motivation) that you can make a difference in this college?

3. As a governor who sits in the "Standards Committee" of your college, can you please describe briefly what you do in practice;

4. What is the remit of your role?

5. Can you describe the responsibilities that are commensurate with this role?

6. In your view, is there a clear distinction between what you do (as a governor) and what the principal do in practice?
    (Probe 'can you elaborate on...........)

7. In your experience as a governor so far, what have you found to be the key skills necessary to perform your role?

6. In your view, what do you think is the purpose of college governance

Standards committee roles

7. Have you performed a specific task within the Standards /Learning & Quality Committee?

(Below are prompt questions for the interviewer)

Chair of a Committee	Head's Performance Review
Taking an area of responsibility e.g. governor for special needs / literacy...	Helping to write the college development / improvement plan
Exclusion panel member	Appointing college staff
Other	

8. What specific roles do you think you have undertaken within the Standard or Quality Committee and how valuable have they been? *(Below are some examples for probing purposes)*

	Very Valuable	Valuable	Some Value	Little Value	No Value
Analyser of data & information to manage students' performance					
Involvement in college self-evaluation e.g. SEF					
Visiting lessons and giving feedback					
Getting to know the strengths and areas for development of the college					
Involvement in college improvement planning e.g. SDP/setting targets (SMART)/setting priorities					
Monitoring and evaluating college improvement plans and targets					
Challenging the college leadership as a critical friend to effect improvements for students					
Holding the leadership to account for the performance of the college					
Setting the strategic direction of the college					

Monitoring and evaluation of college improvement

9. How do you monitor and evaluate the academic performance in this college? (*Probe for evidence of effective evaluation of academic performance)*

10. How closely are you involved in target setting and in monitoring college improvement against targets?

11. What kinds of documentation does the governing body receive from senior professional management in order to undertake its role effectively? (*Probe for evidence of clear and shared criteria for evaluating performance).*

12. Are you involved in the college's future curriculum offer? How?

13. In your view, what aspects do you think indicate that your college is improving?

14. Overall, what do you see as governors' most important contribution to college improvement?

Governor-Principal relationship balance

15. To what extent to you feel empowered to do your job?

16. How do you view your positional power in relation to that of the principal?

17. Any additional information you would like to add?

Thank very much for taking your time in participating in this interview.

Appendix 4: List of interview questions for principals

1. As a college principal, can you please describe to me what you do in practice;

    IV.   What is the remit of your role?

    V.   Can you describe the responsibilities that are commensurate with this role?

    VI.   In your view, is there a clear distinction between what you do (as a principal) and what the governors do in practice?
(Probe 'can you elaborate on...........)

2. From your own experience of working with governors, or in your capacity as a principal-governor, what do you think are the skills necessary for one to be an effective governor?

3. Overall, what purpose(s) do governors serve in your college?

Monitoring and evaluation of college improvement

18. How do governors monitor and evaluate the academic performance in this college? (*Probe for evidence of effective evaluation of academic performance)*

4. How closely are governors involved in target setting and in monitoring college improvement against targets?

5. What kinds of documentation does the corporation receive in order to undertake their roles effectively? (*Probe for evidence of clear and shared criteria for evaluating performance).*

6. What sources of information about the performance of the college do governing bodies base their judgements? (examples).

7. In your view, what aspects do you think indicate that your college is improving?

8. How are governors actively involved in determining the strategic direction of the college – including the future curriculum offer?

9. In your own opinion, do you think governors make a difference in improving their colleges? (Probing – in what way?)

Principal-governors' relationship balance

10. To what extent do you feel empowered in your leadership role? *(Expansion)*

11. How do you view your positional power in relation to that of governors?

12. Any additional comments that you would like to give?

Thank you very much for taking your time in participating in this interview.

Appendix 5: an example of an interview Transcript

Transcript 15 (P CE T15)

R – Thanks very much for agreeing to participate in this interview. Shall I start by introducing myself before we go into the interview? (LW, nodding, yeah). My name is Robert Masunga (R) and I am a doctoral research student at Birmingham University studying Leaders and Leadership in Education. I am currently collecting data for my doctorate research project, which is investigating the contribution of college governance to college improvement. It is for that reason why I am here today. Should I also confirm if you have received a copy of the interview schedule, consent form and an overview thesis summary for participants (LW-yes, I did, handing in a copy of a signed consent form). R – thank you very much. May I also reiterate that this interview is recorded so that I can transcribe it later to get more details from our discussion today and you have the right to withdraw at any time during the course of this interview if you feel uncomfortable with any topics being discussed. May I ask you to briefly introduce yourself?

LW- My name is LW, Principal College E, I am male and my qualifications, I have a BA Honours in English and American Literature, an MBA in Education Management with a distinction. My profession is that I am a principal. I have worked in the FE sector since 1991 and have been a principal since 2001 at two different colleges.

R – Thanks for that. Shall we now go straight into our interview (Interview schedules double-checked and confirmed). In fact, the questions in the schedule are divided into three sections. The first is about your personal information, your background, motivations and the remit of your role as a governor. The second section is about governor's roles and responsibilities in monitoring and evaluating college improvement and the last section is about the relationship balance between the principal and governors if further education colleges (FE). If we can go straight into our next question which says can you please describe your role as a principal?

LW- A principal's role is to ensure the effective operation of the college. The major priority is to ensure that students are successful, that they have a good learning experience; they achieve the qualification that they are enrolled into. Also I am the Chief Accounting officer of the college, so I am responsible for the financial health of the institution and matters that deal with the probity/property of the college. As we are a people-centred business, the major management task is the management of people (R- excellent. Thanks for that)

R- So, in your view, regarding your role, do you think there is a clear distinction between what you do (operational management) and what the governors do (Strategic leadership)?

LW – I think the governors have the overall responsibility for the strategic oversight of the college. They don't have any responsibility for operational of the college. I have got the executive responsibility, they act as an advisory board on the college's approach and they have some other matters that they have the authority to decide to agree. In terms of strategy, the way it works in practice is the senior executive team do much of the detailed work on strategy which is then discussed with governors. We ensure that within this college as what the other colleges does, that we have a wide range of skills from the GB and the governors are responsible for agreeing such a strategic plan. Much of the work in practice is done by the Senior Executive/management team and the governors have an involvement there and have the final opportunity to agree the strategy.

R – So, from your opinion, do they know exactly what they are expected to do and what senior management do and you are expected to do?

LW – It depends on the experience of the governor and it depends on how the college works. In this college, I think they are very aware of it. We have a detailed induction programme for governors and one of the things that the induction programme do is to make governors aware of the role of the principal, the clerk, the Chair and the corporation or governors. Part of that clearly focuses on the fact that governors are non-executive directors and that they have no executive authority and provided we have those types of structures in place, I think it works well and it depends on the experience of governors as well. So, governors who are experienced and have been governors for some time will be more confident and comfortable with where their role starts and the executive role finishes, quite often those who had comfortable roles, perhaps a charity in a trustee or as a director in a company, they know how these structures work and then I think it is easier for them then to understand how the governance role fits into the college.

R- Thank you for that. Are there any situations where your vision of leadership may differ with that of the governors?
LW – I think it can happen. In terms of the vision of leadership am not sure, I think, I haven't experienced any difficulties there. But, you do have to remember that the GB appoint the principal/Chief executive, so you would hope that any discrepancies in the GB's view of leadership and the principal's view of leadership have been resolved at a time when the principal was appointed. What you do get is that, you get different voices on the corporation who have different views about Governance and Strategy. In fact that's a good thing because that's what they are here for. For e.g. The College should be risk taking and very commercial, in order to raise funds and revenue. Some governors will have an appetite for that as well. That's why the GB has a dialog to come to a consensus view. * I am aware there have been times in the sector where there have been clashes between Principals and GB and where governors have misunderstood their role or the principal have misunderstood their authority* and I think when that happens you end up in some kind of serious problems. I don't believe that's the case here. I think the role of the clerk is very important. He/she has a role to ensure that people are equally trained so that they know what their role and authority are (R- Great).

R – That lead us to our next question which says, what do you think are the most relevant skills for one to be an effective FE governor?

LW – Well, they need to have quite good analytical skills, reasoning skills. They need to be able to understand complex situations, analyse them and distil the essence of issues and to be able to think critically around issues. Mm, they need to have/to be passionate about education; they need to be education-minded. They need to be interested in the wellbeing and success of students and not just a business organisation, because this is a type of business. They need to have good communication skills because they have a relatively limited period of time to put their views forward and this maybe around the table which has 20/22 people. They need to know when to talk, when not to talk and they need to be able to communicate simply and effectively. Passion with education and analytical skills, critical skills and good communication are very important and it's helpful for governors to be skilled in one particular area – for instance you may have a governor who have detailed knowledge of community issues, one who have knowledge of finance, Auditing, Curriculum etc. and it's helpful when you have a GB as a whole that you have a range of skills around the table (R-Excellent stuff)

R – So in your GB, do you have any governors who have experience of vocational education?

LW – I don't think we have situations like those, but governors in this college understand quite clearly that they are not the academic experts. We have 2 governors on our GB who have educational experience their experience of being students on the.... Mm, actually that's quite helpful because there is a clear line by the fact the executive staff of the college experts by identify their training or by the time they set on the sector, we get into those serious difficulties – a governor with a limited knowledge of education start to try and dictate to an executive who have a detailed knowledge of education – how the curriculum should be designed and shaped. What governors are more likely to do is to be aware of the outcomes that are required in terms of the fact that in vocational education, the outcome we require is the skilled individual with technical competence and having passed meaningful qualifications. Governors need to set a challenge to the executives around those issues and the outcomes that are required, but beyond that, perhaps shouldn't be trying to advice on how we teach a lesson and how we structure the curriculum (strategic direction on how we structure the curriculum) (R- Great)

R- So, on the whole what do you think is the major purpose of FE college governance?

LW – I mean, it's (silence). If I put it in a slam way, I think they keep the college honest. They ensure that they are scrutiny; they ensure that there is a vehicle for discussion; they ensure that the executives don't go beyond their power and limit; they ensure that the strategy and focus stays on mission. So they do have a very important role there which is about checks and balances and moderating, keeping the organisation honest and directed towards goals (R- some sort of a watch dog?) mm, it's a critical friend isn't? It's not like a 3rd part watch dog; it's not like an auditor

or an inspection. It's an expert critical advisor to the principal/ who are there to put the college in the right way. (R – Great)

R – We are now moving into the section on College improvement. In your own opinion, what do you think constitute improvement in a college?

LW – Students success rates, the destination of students-what happens to them after leaving college- do they get the job, do they go to university (HE), do they go to FE, has the college made a meaningful impact to them. The satisfaction that is expressed in the college service, the quality of teaching... All these are indicators the destination of students and impact, qualifications success rates and the quality of teaching are probably the 3rd most important ones. In terms of the organisation, financial success of the organisation is also important. That is ensuring that the organisation is generating sufficient cash for to reinvest in its facilities and keep the resources and all up to date. So, that's the interesting thing about FE that these are private sector organisations although we spent public sector organisations, so we need to offer sufficient business arguments to stay profitable but we also need to keep on our core mission (R – thanks)

R – So, how do governors evaluate the effectiveness of performance in a college?

LW – That's a very interesting question, as the executive of the college I set targets before the start of the year. Those targets include performance in terms of success rates, financial performance and the things that we need to do, recruitment in terms of students and where we are recruiting from, industrial relations. A whole series of targets...Those are monitored throughout the year in terms of where we are in terms of those targets. At the end of the year, there is the overall reporting and monitoring process – if the college doesn't perform well academically, then we have got to put an action plan, so that the areas are actually dealt with. We have a process of auditing and monitoring our educational performance/academic performance as well as Ofsted. We have got our own internal process. If you have a governor who is experienced in reading management accounts, will prepare management accounts on a monthly basis which goes to internal and external auditors and governors can look at those accounts…. have sufficiently knowledgeable, analyse them and say why your expenditure on staff is rising here and what is happening with the value for money in these areas. So, governance providing their covering information with a certain skills is able to challenge that way. Informally, good governors can be involved in college life, we have a rolling lead programme here, where governors get involved and they can interact with students and go to observe lessons that are taught. They can also get involved in the student union, when we have college events like celebrating events, musical sports performance, exhibition and those governors routinely attend and informally during those events, they talk to staff, students, parents' and for gaining those professionally and intelligently, you are able to make judgement. A slightly more subjective feel about the temperature of the institution So really when you talk/ ask about what skills they need governors need to be able to analyse data and reports they need to have the empathy with the tone of the institution, they may need to say this is good and we need to support it, when it's not good that's when governors need to offer a challenge as a critical friend- why are our

success rates going down, why are the students not happy and why are our qualities going down and not that etc.

R – Great staff. So, how closely are governors involved in target setting and monitoring college improvements?

LW – In this college we are very closely involved in that. We have a very open relationship between the executive and the GB. So the GB actually formally approve the college's KPI (key performance indicators) and the KIM (key impact measures) so we have two sets of high level targets. KPI are the success rates of students, the outcomes of our work for example whether students got into job etc. and those are set annually and reviewed termly which is a summative review, the performance review by the end of the year. So the governors review the targets and check whether they are met or not met (R – Great).

R –What documents do governors receive from the senior management staff (professionals?)

LW – They receive a lot of documents that summarised all those KIM and KPI with matrix which can be measured. They receive appropriate monitoring reports to go with them. In terms for e.g. of Financial Reports, they receive Accounts Management Reports, Curriculum reports – with data that relates to teaching, Observation grades for example. One of the challenges for governors and the challenge for executives is to give governors enough information so that they are able to analyse, but not to give them too much Information so that they can't see the woods from the tress (Laughs), that really is a challenge. Governors are not homogenous as a group. Some governors want to be given more information but others will say, just give me the headlines. I just want to hear 3 or 4 major points, but the most important thing is that there is trust and openness between governors and executives. That way, you will avoid the situation where the executives can effectively withhold information from the GB and depowers the GB because it will not be able to make decisions and to play their role as a critical friend (R- Great stuff)

R – So, are these governors directly involved in any curriculum decisions for example introducing a new course...?

LW – Curriculum decisions? They are certainly involved in the discussions. I think they will only formally ask to make a decision if it was a strategic change which marks significant departure from current operational strategy or away from strategy if it requires a whole new level of investment which is beyond the powers of the principal or there was a high degree of risk involved. So, on that as a detailed curriculum design – I think what happens is that there is a consultation with the GB, but the decision making process is with the executives. This is a more strategic decision for e.g. the new reforms of Professor A. Wolf which gives colleges much greater freedoms to work with 14 year olds. To enrol 14 year olds to come to the college that is a strategy change which covers the hole that traditionally has been under the care of schools – these are strategic changes, because previously we worked with 16 year olds. So, many colleges are discussing on whether to take on board Prof. Wolf's

freedoms and work with 14 year olds who were traditionally supposed to be catered for in schools. That's a decision that I will always take with the GB that represents a strategic change. If the GB say (following all the Wolf' recommendations, debates and development) that we don't want you to enrol 14 year olds, I will go with that and in the same way no any executive will go against that. If the question was about the detailed curriculum that should be provided to these 14 year olds, then the executives will do that and the corporation won't be involved.

R – So, who are the executives in this college?

LW – myself plus 5 other directors. We have myself as Principal, the Director of Finances, the Director of Learning who is responsible for the Curriculum, the Director of Standards and Performance – who is responsible for Quality Assurance processes, the Director of Personnel - who is responsible for people processes and the Director of Estates and Capital projects – and that's because we are currently in the phase of building a multi-million project scheme.

R- Thanks for that. Are these qualified teachers/lecturers or governors?

LW – there are not all teachers. The Director of Finance and the Director of Estates are not teachers. The Director of Finance is an Accountant and he Director of Estates comes from the Construction Industry. The rest comes from a teaching background (R- that's great).

R – In your opinion, do you think governors make a difference in improving their Colleges?

LW - On the educational side? (R- Yeah), mm, it's a complex question (silence). The answer is yes, but not necessarily directly. So, in a way, in a sense, I think good governors and good governorship puts a framework in place, which allows the executives to work on improving institution's performances for students and in that sense, the governors play that role well. They should rightly take credit, at least in part for the improvement made on an organisation. Now, there are many of those improvements which could happen in a college without the governors, the executives could have done it. We are fortunate here that, this GB has been incredibly supportive of the work and the direction of the college, which have allowed us to get out and do what is supposed to be done. If you ask whether we could have done it without governors, the answer might be probably "yes", but equally so, you never know, do you? Just because the GB here have been positive and supportive of the proposal, doesn't mean that they have not played a role of challenging, which made sure that we took the proposal forward in our way through. If you have had no GB there which offer that challenge, have the proposal have been good as they are/were-probably no. There is always the danger of our principals, get behind themselves and I think get principals they can get above the law and do what they want etc.... A good GB can provide the checks and balances and with the challenges helps to make sure that things are kept in within scale and are going well, but the GB make sure that they appoint the executives staff and make sure that they understand what they are doing. The day to day work is for the executive board (R- Excellent)

R – Are they involved in appointing directors?

LW – senior post absolutely. So, you can't appoint the principal or senior post holders in the college without governors' involvement. Mm, no senior post holders are allowed technical holding which depends on contract type. You can't have directors of the college who are not senior post holders. In those cases, they can be appointed directly as Directors by the principal, but senior staffs are the senior post holders and the appointment is made by the governors not the principal, but don't forget that the principal is a governor as well is in the panel and will be an actual disaster to appoint a senior management without a principal involved that will not work but technically it's the governors who appoint senior post holders. In this college, like many other colleges around, the principal manages the senior post holders on behalf of the GB (R- nodding, great).

R- We are now moving to the last section which is about Governor-Principal relationship balance. Our first question on that section is, as a principal, do you feel empowered to do your job?

LW – Yes, I do very much so. Well, I work with a good GB who are skilled, knowledgeable and understand the situation. I know college principals in other colleges who would give different answers to that question, in a way, but I personally feel much empowered (R- Great).

R- So, how do you view your positional power in relation to that of governors?

LW – Don't forget that I am a governor as well, because the principal is a Chief Executive and a governor, so, I consider myself an equal on the board of governors, not above the GB, but beyond the governors I am a principal, senior governor and a Chef executive of the college and a senior member of the senior team of the college. The way it works here is a largely a consensual appointment approach. So, I have not actually been involved in any power struggle with governors (governance). I know in other colleges, other principals have, but I certainly haven't here. I was fortunate that there has been good working relationship between the senior staff and the GB, and where we have had some disagreements, consensus on different ways to do things were agreed which positively worked on the strengths and weaknesses, wrong and rights on various positions and opportunities and come up with the answer there. Um, you know, (silence) you can answer that question using any relationship between members of the family-father, mother, son, it's just about the culture and environment. If there is a good culture and environment, the relative power positions do not come into play. If you have a dysfunctional environment then the appositive happens. Because the college employs 100s of people, they do not look for the GB for leadership. Why should they? They look for the principal's leadership. Every day, I do the staff meetings, I do the briefings, roll for the staff, I promote them, I discipline them – power obviously comes to me, executed by the people. So, the relationship in terms of the leadership of the college is with the principal/head teacher. If it's the governors doing that, then one wonders what's going wrong. If that happens, it means the Chair of the corporation is taking the role of the principal and making him

dysfunctional – which is wrong. But we do like our governors to be seen and the governors want to be seen, the chairs of the corporation will from time to time, address the teaching staff in their own conference – for example doing some welcoming stuff. That's because really we want the staff to know that, it's not only the principal, but behind the principal there is a critical powerful and supportive group. But the relationship between the staff (paid employees) is with the principal and senior team (R- Excellent stuff thanks for that.)

R- So, in terms of accountability, to whom are you accountable?

LW – I am accountable to the GB as a whole, not to the Chair. I am also accountable to the staff, students, the community and all the stake holders we serve. But on the whole, the principal can go to jail ...I am the Chief Accounting Officer, so financial improprieties here, the Chief Accounting Officer takes full responsibility. I don't consider the GB takes the role of my line manager as such, but I report to the board. So, ultimately, I am accountable to them for my performance, but I don't feel line-managed because you don't line manage a Chief Executive. You appoint a CEO, you make it clear strategically what you need to be done, you are clear about where he/she has the power to make decisions by themselves and the way decisions need to come back to the GB, you monitor the performance of the organisation and CEO – is it appropriate or is isn't appropriate, but you don't manage the person on a day to day basis. I have personal performance objectives and the Chair of the corporation I would use those ones, whether some people agree or disagree with it, but that's not line management (R- excellent)

R- Is there anything that you feel need to be changed for FE governance to be more effective?

LW- I mean, with the many freedoms that have recently been given to GB recently etc., I think it's good that governors should be paid, but probably the problem is that, there is too much complexity, too much bureaucracy around how the FE is managed – the SFA and various government departments etc. and the problem with that is that, this creates a whole industry of complexity, because sometimes the governors can't see the wood from the trees and it means we have got to prepare them quite complicated and time-consuming reports and sometimes this means rather than focussing on the core mission of strategy which they should be focussing on, they are churned elsewhere. That would make my life easier and make governance better. If the ways in which colleges work is not very complicated and a bit cleaner if that was the case, I think governors would focus more on strategy. I personally think it's not about structures and processes, it's about people. If you have got a skilled GB, with the right mind set, they will make manage well. If you have a poor GB with the wrong mind set they won't, no any changes to those Instruments and Articles of governance will make any difference. (R- Excellent stuff)

R- Is there anything else that you want to add to this discussion that you feel is not adequately covered?

LW – No, I think we have discussed everything (Yeah, nodding his head)

R- Thank you very much for taking your time in participating in this research. Your contributions are greatly appreciated.

LW – My pleasure.

Appendix 6

College B: Extract of Minutes of a Meeting of the Learning and Quality (SC) Committee

How governors challenge management		Impact of meeting on college	
06.13	Lengthy debate over college monitoring processes for Plumbing, why issues recently highlighted had not been picked up much earlier and how governors could be assured that they did not recur.	11.13	Approval of the Learning-Walk and Observation Policy.
06.13	Why Teacher education has not been graded as 1.	12.13	Approval of the Attendance and Punctuality Policy
08.13	What the criteria were for moving courses into the new 'intensive care' process.		
10.13	Why there were no timeframes for the targets in the CPD Plan.		
11.13	What was the purpose of Learning walks		
15.13	Request for further clarification on college B 'Graduate concept'.		

Adapted from College B Minutes of a Meeting of Learning and Quality (SC), October, 2012.pg.9

Appendix 7: Article on Education governance

http://mie.sagepub.com/content/27/4/176