

# Role and Utilisation of Staff Governors

## Findings from the FTN staff governors study

Hannah Jameson  
IPA

[hannah.jameson@ipa-involve.com](mailto:hannah.jameson@ipa-involve.com)

# About the staff governor study

- Commissioned by the FTN, undertaken by the IPA

## Semi-structured interviews with

- Chairs, chief executives, company secretaries and staff governors
- 8 trusts, mostly from the 2004 cohort, and two mental health trusts
- Final report to the FTN in November 2009

# The big picture

- **Trusts are on a development journey; institution building takes time**
- **Trusts are facing common challenges in making governance work**
- **There is plenty of innovation and commitment; trust leaders know now is the time to get this right**
- **But how do you turn governance into something done by a few at the top, to a whole organisation approach?**

# Governor statutory duties

- If necessary, chairing or attending relevant sub-committees;
- Appointing the non-executive directors, including the chair of the trust;
- Appointing the trust's auditors;
- Working with the board of directors to produce plans for the future development of the trust;
- Receiving, at a public meeting, copies of the trust's annual accounts, auditor's reports and annual reports; and
- If concerns about the performance of the management board cannot be resolved at a local level, informing the independent regulator for the NHS foundation trusts.
- **Monitor and the Department for Health in their guidance state that governors are also required to:**
- Represent the interests of NHS Foundation Trust members and partner organisations in the local health economy in the governance of the NHS Foundation Trust;
- Regularly feeding back information about the trust, its vision and performance to the 'constituency' they represent;

# But how? Challenges and opportunities

- How do governors ‘represent the interests’ of members?
- How do governors feedback to members?
- What is the value of investing in governance? What are the advantages of taking the high road?

# The foundation trust ambition

**‘Staff feel that they have a productive personal stake in the organisation. In turn this enhances communication between the management team and staff and between staff and their patients and changes the relationship between the organisation and the people who use it to one in which members are an integral part of the organisational fabric. Staff are more likely to be better motivated, more efficient and less inclined to leave – and that is critical to successful service delivery.’**

**NHS Foundation Trusts; A guide to developing HR arrangements, (DoH: Feb, 2006), p. 18**

# What they said...

- **“One can suffer from...a level of uniformed interest. So, for example, here the governors are very enthusiastic, very hard working, very engaged, but coming into the organisation, from my perspective, they have missed huge questions, which if they were more discerning, they would have been focussing on.” CEO, Trust B**
- **“What are the boundaries for staff governors? Am I a representative of the staff? Am I a delegate, am I my own person and I don’t need to talk to anyone because I’m giving my own views and I’m a member of staff?... Greater clarity about some of those issues will be the absolute prelude to issues of skills, time, resources and so on.” Chair, Trust B**
- **“I was getting a bit despondent really; thinking I was supposed to be doing something, but not knowing what it was.” Staff Governor, Trust C**
- **S Governor 1: “I don’t get any issues to raise as a governor. I’ve had one in three years.”**  
**S Governor 2: “In 6 years, I think I’ve had three, and all about things that have nothing to do with the governor role. If we say I’m confused (about the governor role) 6 years into the job, you can’t really expect the vast majority of staff to fully understand what the governors role is.” Trust D**

# How are trusts making the most of their governors?

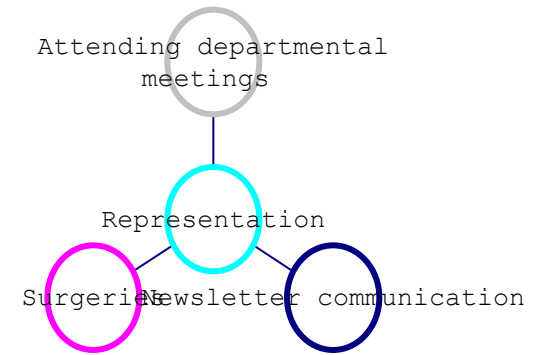
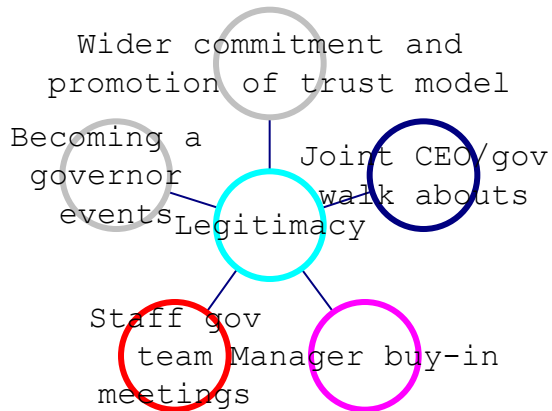
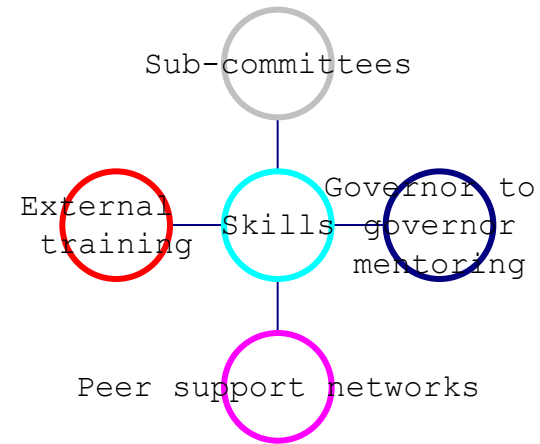
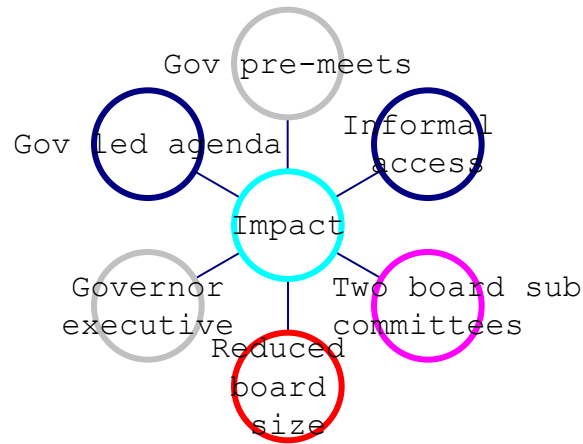
## Ambitions

- Able to do business
- More effectively linked to their constituencies
- Governors as critical friends
- Governors looking out to constituencies, not in to board
- Developing governors into leaders/partners

## Barriers

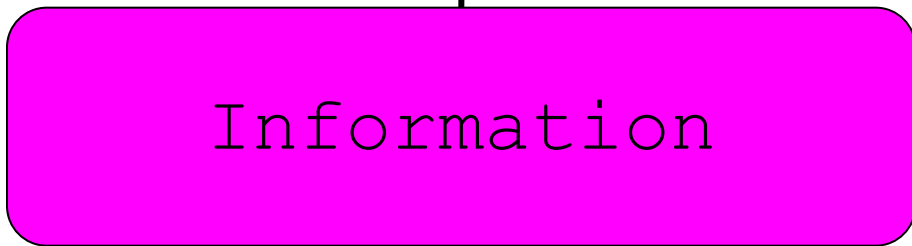
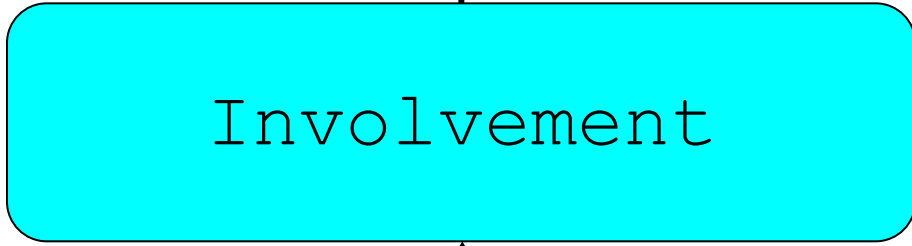
- Representation
- Awareness of SG role
- Clarity of role
- Empowerment
- Time
- Skills

# What are trusts currently doing to meet these challenges?



# The staff governor journey

participation/partnership



- Engages members independently
- Communicates with staff membership on strategic issues
- Can explain board decisions and processes
- Confident of influence, beyond statutory powers
- Acts as board member, not just staff governor
- Access to leadership outside formal setting

- Good trust relationships with leadership and members
- Informed voice
- Raises issues in advance of meetings
- Involved in agenda setting
- Takes on leadership positions
- Participates fully in sub-committees
- Forms governor to governor relationships
- Confident of meeting behaviours and participating in large group

- Able to raise critical issues
- Receives and understands information in meetings
- Attends governor meetings 3-4 times per year
- Responds to questions on staff issues

# And when it works...

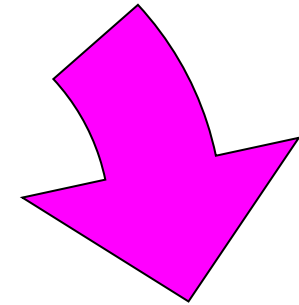
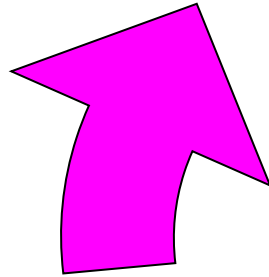
**“I think the staff governors themselves have worked hard to understand the whole organisation and not just the bit they do their day job within, and I value that, and we have worked hard to accommodate that and facilitate it. So I think what they’re able to do now is to represent what the organisation is thinking, they’re able to take the temperature of the organisation, they’re able to feed an objective view into the council of governors, to seek clarification from me, and to challenge me...I value that.”**  
**Chief Executive, MHFT**

# So what can trusts do?

- **No 1: Raise awareness of governors and trust governance among staff members**
- **Supporting governors to improve communication, and by doing so, creating better links between governors and constituents**
- **Improving clarity of role, and by doing so, giving governors more confidence to carry out their remit**
- **Considering time provision to enable governors to participate more fully, particularly in building links with their constituency**
- **Considering expanding skills training to widen the intake of governors**

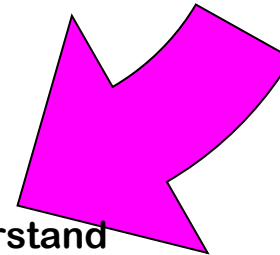
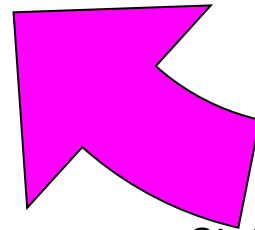
**SG understand members' interests**

**SGs understand role and remit**



**Staff members can ask understand strategic issues,  
ask questions and input into trust governance  
through SGs**

**SGs can ask the right questions and  
Deliver high quality communications**



**Staff members understand  
SG role and the strategic  
issues**

# The IPA

The only organisation in the UK focused on employee involvement participation and engagement for the purpose of improving employee wellbeing and increasing competitiveness through releasing the potential of all employees

- Not-for-profit, registered charity – based on dissemination of best practice
- The lead body providing training and support for companies and organisations on employment relations, consultation, partnership and engagement – extensive client list and good practice networks
- Delivering better work, better workplaces and better outcomes through research and policy development
- Nita Clarke carried out review of partnership in the NHS (2009) and co-chaired Macleod Review of employee engagement 2009