

A CLERK'S STORY (Written by a current Clerk)

4½ years ago my interview was over, the job was mine and then what?

A very good training programme, delivered at the right pace by key members of our governor services team, ensured that I was equipped, ready and confident to begin my journey as a governing body clerk. I'd had the opportunity to shadow experienced clerks and to clerk a meeting with some support. They had shared their wisdom, understood my uncertainties and offered reassurance. It was good to see their familiar faces at the twice termly 2.5 hour governor training briefings that are held at Sherwood Energy Village, Ollerton. The briefings are packed with updates and presentations to ensure we are adequately prepared for the forthcoming term. Initially, they were a complete mystery to me as I tried to make sense of the information but gradually, as I settled into the job, all became clear. Sitting with other new clerks was great because we were all in the same boat!

Some of the challenges of the role:

Not all schools are based within city centres or the suburbs; some are small rural schools and whilst the journey might be lovely in the summer, it's not so good when the nights close in and the weather is less than kind. Clerks are expected to arrive on time, be prepared and ready to clerk. Governing body meetings can last from 1½ hours to 3 hours or more but a good meeting can be achieved in 2 hours. Travelling home from a morning or afternoon meeting is fine but the journey home from a long evening meeting is difficult sometimes. I work hard with the Chair, Headteacher and Governors to achieve time efficient meetings. Most governing bodies do hold meetings in the evenings with a typical start time of 6.00pm, but others have an earlier start time or are held during the day.

Governors and their meetings:

I clerk for a governing body with 10 governors whilst another has 14 and, depending on how many schools you take on, you can get some idea as to how many individuals you will be supporting. You'll be given good tips on how to remember who is who. Governors come from all walks of life and for some of them it will be the first time they have been actively involved in supporting a school. A new governor will be facing new challenges and will look to their clerk, chair and fellow governors for guidance. Sometimes a governor might not understand the context of what is being discussed or, they might put the clerk 'on the spot' and ask for advice or guidance on some quite technical issues or regulations. The first time it happened to me was a very daunting experience. Clerks don't know everything but it is our job to investigate and report back; you will be given guidance and support on how to handle these situations. Governors come with a wide range of experience and knowledge and so governing bodies are never the same. Occasionally, a clash of personalities or difficult differences of opinion might develop but it's satisfying to be able to work with the chair to resolve any discord. Top tip: speak up and seek clarity if you are minuting an item that is ambiguous. If you are confused then it's a certainty that some governors will be but they don't always speak up. They'll be glad you did!

Some of the best bits:

I can work flexibly from home to fit around my home and social life. Clerks do work to deadlines that are linked to governing body meeting dates. You will have an opportunity to liaise with your governing body to change a meeting date, but sometimes the date will be fixed and you will have to attend. Some of our duties include; liaising with the chair and headteacher (via email) to set a final agenda; typing and sending the draft minutes for approval to the chair; uploading the agreed minutes to GovernorHub; dealing with correspondence on behalf of the governing body. Governor services provide clerks with IT equipment and send out termly templates for agenda's, minutes and action sheets. They are the fountain of all knowledge and the 'power house' for our work. They are a great team, very friendly and supportive. You will use GovernorHub, the fantastic on-line Hub that clerks, governing bodies and governor services all work within. I wouldn't want to be without it.

Final thought...

The work of a clerk is stimulating, satisfying and rewarding and I love every minute of it (*well almost!*).