



Governance Advisers Support Needs Analysis
Building the effectiveness of Voluntary and Community Sector Boards through better support for their advisers
April 2006

1. AIMS

The overall aim of this project, funded by the Governance Hub, was to establish a coherent and sound basis for the Governance Hub's Adviser Support Programme, rooted in the development and support needs of governance advisers themselves. The consultation was also an opportunity for those working in the field of governance advice/support to comment on Hub priorities.

2. HOW WE CARRIED OUT THE CONSULTATION

Over one hundred people from all over England, working as advisors (trainers, facilitators, consultants, legal and accounting professionals etc.) to Boards of Trustees and Management Committees, took part in this study during the months of March and April 2006.

Some 92 were engaged via focus groups lasting up to two hours, whilst a further 21 contributed by agreeing to be interviewed over the telephone and six people contributed via questionnaires only. Both the Governance Hub's Core Group and Advisory Group were included in the consultation.

Decisions concerning the composition of the focus groups were guided by findings from a previous Hub inquiry¹. These suggested that governance advisers operate from a wide range of institutions and professional backgrounds, reflected in the following table. Within the groups, and amongst the interviewees, were advisers working with black and minority ethnic groups, faith organisations, social enterprise organisations, rural organisations, and the whole range of organisations that make up the English voluntary sector.

Group	numbers involved	location
Governance Hub Advisory Group	12	London
Governance Core Advisory Group	4	London
Independent Consultants	8	London
Lawyers, accountants , academics	7	London
National Federated Voluntary Orgs	9	London
Rural Field Workers (from all regions)	10	Derbyshire
Open Regional events		
North East Region	18	Middlesbrough
South West Region	9	Cirencester
North West Region	10	Manchester
London/South East Region	5	London
Telephone interviews - Local Authority staff	3	Hertfordshire
Telephone interviews - mixed	18	national
Questionnaire only	6	

¹ *Williams and Herbst, 2006*

Each focus group was led through a similar debate based on a specially devised 'aide memoire'; objective information about participants was gathered through self-completed questionnaires. The questionnaire also allowed for contributions from those unable to take part in any other way. The response rate for the questionnaires was variable and only sufficient to guide the results.

Thematic analysis of the results of the focus group and telephone interviewing was carried out post hoc using the topics suggested by the aide memoire, issues that arose during the consultation and a 'taxonomy of social need' (Bradshaw, 1972). This last was done in order to impose a theoretic framework on the study and compare and contrast the needs of different stakeholders.

The NACVS's SKiLD survey that was running during the same period as this study, has informed our work and we are grateful to the organisers of SKiLD for their kind co-operation.

3. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The views of governance advisers and trainers can be grouped together around two broad themes:

1. strategic actions that they feel the Governance Hub should take in order to improve the quality and quantity of governance advice in the voluntary and community sector (VCS);
2. practical actions that the Governance Hub should either deliver or coordinate to meet the training and support needs of governance advisers and trainers now and in the future.

4. STRATEGIC ACTIONS

Strategic Issue 1: Capacity building not direct service provision

An overwhelming view from the governance advice and training field is that the Governance Hub should act in a strategic manner; that is, coordinate and commission in partnership with key stakeholders, rather than create new direct services and materials.

The reasons given for this were:

- to avoid duplication of effort and products
- to add value to existing materials and services
- to avoid unproductive competition with business and services which might damage longer term sustainability

There may be a few product gaps that the Governance Hub could fill, and strategic services such as a Help-line for Trustees and Advisers that it could establish, but even in closing those gaps, it should look at the longer-term sustainability of the services and their impact on existing agencies.

Strategic Issue 2: A 'body of knowledge' on Governance

The Governance Hub should establish a 'body of knowledge' concerning the whole field of governance advice. Participants in the consultation variously called it:

- a 'syllabus', or 'curriculum', setting out everything that advisers (and trustees themselves ultimately) need to learn
- a catalogue and collection of governance materials and research – as in a library.

The 'Governance: thematic map and resources' (currently in production by the Hub) could clearly be the starting point for this. The 'body of knowledge' should cover not just the

narrower roles and responsibilities of trustees but the widest range of issues that Boards have to deal with, and the processes and challenges that advisers and trainers meet when working with Boards – team-building, managing tensions and conflict, etc.. This 'body of knowledge' would need to address the differing situations facing advisers to small, medium and large voluntary and community organisations

This 'body of knowledge' would develop over time, and would benefit from research and support from academic institutions as well as practising advisers and their agencies/sectors. It would have a number of functions:

- as a reference point for advisers and trainers to explore topics and themes;
- as a knowledge management tool to frame part of the Governance Hub's website to enable advisers to access materials, publications and training;
- as a framework for induction into a 'career' or job in governance advice and training;
- as a basis for National Occupational Standards (or similar) in governance advice;
- as one of the means of setting standards to assess the training, materials and information on governance.

Strategic Issue 3: Managing the 'market' in governance advice and training

There is a market in governance advice, training and support with very particular characteristics. The Governance Hub and its key stakeholders in national infrastructure bodies need to 'manage' this market.

The larger, better resourced, charities can choose and purchase from a wide range of businesses that offer the full range of services – from essential legal and financial expertise to creative away-days. The vast majority of the sector is at the other end of the spectrum, however, with few resources and limited choice. Voluntary and community sector infrastructure bodies variously attempt to meet the needs of smaller organisations using funds they have secured from public bodies, sponsors and trusts. There is other 'pro bono' governance support activity, both nationally and locally.

The diversity of 'suppliers of services' and the diversity of demand makes for difficulties and tensions – for example between professional firms and pro bono activity, and between VCS infrastructure agencies, public sector workers and commercial services.

The Hub and its key stakeholders in national infrastructure bodies need to 'manage' this market – though this is a massive challenge.

- Find ways for competing types of governance service providers to collaborate appropriately and refer Boards to appropriate expertise.
- Foster understanding and respect for each others' knowledge of governance – perhaps through sharing skills, approaches and knowledge - again so that Boards get appropriate advice.

Strategic Issue 4: Setting standards for governance advice - people, services, publications, materials and training

The key 'market management' activity that was asked for from the Governance Hub was that it should be the agent of regulation of the governance training market by setting standards and building a sustainable quality control framework.

Markets work best where there is good information for 'purchasers' on the range, price and quality of services available. Where purchasers are not able to spend adequate time and resources in doing this they look to an authoritative body that can point to high quality service providers and weed out unscrupulous or poor quality providers.

Respondents suggested quality controls of various sorts:

- accrediting governance courses and materials;
- creating lists of 'approved' consultants and trainers, with assessment against standards backed up by customer references;
- setting up web-sites that reveal customer's views of services they have used;
- establishing a sub-profession with qualifications and accreditation for continuing professional development ; and
- creating an Institute of Governance with service providers' membership linked to 'professional' standards.

Existing schemes, such as the NCVO and NACVS 'approved consultants' listings could serve as models, or perhaps be expanded to meet some of the field's requirements.

Published materials are clearly easier to approve than are people and their services. Courses can be accredited both educationally (e.g. via NOCN) and in terms of their governance accuracy and relevance.

Strategic Issue 5: The funding of governance advice and training

Outside that part of the market where organisations have the resources to purchase advice and training to meet their needs, there is a major funding issue. As part of its overall strategy to raise the profile of governance, the Governance Hub should press all funders to pay for Board development and governance support (e.g. through full cost recovery funding from public sector commissioners) The training and advice needs of the Board or management committee need to be seen as an essential part of the needs of every organisation – with a line in every budget.

The field of advisers and trainers expect the Hub to press strategic funders - Capacity Builders, Futurebuilders and local authorities - to see Board development and governance support as a key part of VCS infrastructure investment. Some infrastructure bodies are exploring how to deliver better governance in their sub-sector, region or locality, through coordinated adviser and trustee training over a sustained period.

Better funding at individual organisation and infrastructure agency level would have the effect not only of serving the sector's trustees, but also of expanding the governance support 'market' and providing more of a career structure for specialist governance advisers. It would in turn help to resource the training and development of governance advisers and trainers.

Strategic Issue 6: Support for advisers and trainers working with black and minority ethnic groups and faith groups

Training and support for governance advisers and trainers working with black and minority ethnic groups and faith groups should be developed in partnership with specialist second tier organisations and aimed at generic infrastructure bodies such as CVSs locally, and also local authority and Primary Care Trust staff.

Resources and training that are developed for use with smaller black and minority ethnic groups and faith voluntary and community organisations need to inform and be informed by similar work aimed at those who support the Boards of small voluntary and community organisations generally. Larger black and minority ethnic groups and faith organisations' governance support needs are more convergent with those of larger charities.

Support for advisers and trainers working within these sub-sectors also needs to inform

and be informed by the Governance Hub's work on promoting diversity on Boards, both in terms of common values and an integrated approach.

Clear and simply written guidance and other materials are essential. Specially drafted messages are needed to communicate to people involved in the governance of churches, chapels, mosques, temples and synagogues. Choices of legal structures should be explained and the benefits of registering as a charity and taking advantage of VCS infrastructure services.

The forthcoming model documents for faith communities from the Charity Commission may be valuable and the Governance Hub could help spread the word to generic advisers and others.

Consulting with advisers in these subsectors revealed that there are sub-sector issues that need to be reflected in case studies and training-for-trainer materials, For example one of the special features of governance in faith groups, is the supervision and support of their religious leader. Each sub-sector has its own special governance issues, and the Governance Hub might want to look at building or coordinating a range of materials and case studies that cover those particular governance challenges.

5. PRACTICAL ACTIONS

Practical Issue 1: The coordination of published materials for Boards and their advisers

With regard to published materials – good practice toolkits and guides, CD-ROMs, magazines, supplements and web-based information – the overwhelming view was that there exists a wide range of materials. Some of them are good – even very good. But, the field wants help in knowing what exists and knowing when and how specific materials work best. Advisers and trainers want to access these materials in ways that help them find easily the things that are most useful to them, for example which work best with smaller or larger organisations, and where necessary engage with others on tailoring and trying out these materials.

The Charity Commission and the larger national infrastructure bodies together are producing regular contributions to the governance literature, as are other organisations - even the more local or specialised organisations. Then there is the raft of material that every local or in-house project has created for their own use – unpublished but potentially of great interest to others.

Governance advisers and trainers asked for the Governance Hub to:

- catalogue, review and signpost these materials – rather than to create new ones;
- weed out poor materials and out-of-date advice;
- compile digests and perhaps quarterly up-dates of what has been produced, with very brief summaries and web-links - rather similar to the briefings that the DfES produce for school governors.

The *Governance: thematic map and resources* that is under development will provide a good basis for the Hub to demonstrate its awareness of these needs expressed by many advisers and trainers.

Practical Issue 2: Training and development frameworks specially for governance advisers and trainers

In terms of training aimed specifically at trainers and advisers, there is a very little currently on offer, and this represents an area where the Hub may need to take the lead – but to

ensure sustainability and relevance, it will need to act with and through key partners such as NACVS, NCVO, ACEVO Community Matters, Bassac, BTEG, ACRE, LGA etc..

There is, it was agreed, a lot of useful training for trustees that advisers can use to improve their knowledge and skills, and also to which they can refer the voluntary and community organisations they are working with. However governance advisers and trainers want easier and more complete access to information about what is happening – in good enough time to access it for themselves or appropriate Boards. Training events and initiatives need to be systematically recorded, publicised and even accredited.

Many went a step further and commented on the need for a training and career framework for governance advisers, including semi-structured qualification routes into recognised competence. A few suggested a Workforce Development Strategy - clearly a VCS-wide project, requiring strategic partnerships with other infrastructure bodies and the other Hubs.

Practical Issue 3: The content of training for adviser and trainers

Advisers and trainers needed steering in the consultation to keep focused on their own needs, rather than the needs of Boards, which is their professional focus. They are waking up to their own development needs, and from the wide range of things they asked for the following issues and priorities emerge:

- All training and materials for governance advisers and trainers should promote inclusion and diversity on Boards.
- Training needs to support the development of a range of skills, as well as provide the underpinning knowledge advisers need in order to advise or train boards. Communication, facilitation, mediation (small p political skills), creativity and facilitating enjoyment, team building, coaching and advising – all these skills are also essential for people working with Boards.
- Governance trainers need to be trained and probably qualified in adult learning – just as trainers in other sectors have had to become.
- All training materials and courses should distinguish between the support needs of Boards of large, medium and small voluntary and community organisations.
- There should be training that offers complementary study in organisation development, the management of change and a range of performance improvement techniques relevant to trustees.
- The anxieties and fears of trustees in the face of their legal responsibilities and the avalanche of new developments in the sector were referred to as one of the challenges that governance advisers and trainers have to deal with. Support via training, guidance or case-studies is asked for, on how to balance putting across the essential duties of trustees whilst motivating them in a positive way to achieve their vision/mission and reassuring them about what they can do to manage risks.
- Advisers asked for the ‘curriculum’ or necessary Board knowledge to be broken down into the ‘bite-size’ concepts so that 10 – 20 minute chunks of information about Governance could be delivered, for example, at the end of a Board meeting.
- Advisers asked for simpler materials and training in ways to take people from where they are in relation to the Code and NOS towards the standards - for example step

by step appraisal guides; also links to how others are using the Code and NOS with groups.

- A regularly up-dated 'anthology' or digest of Board audit materials and diagnostics were asked for - covering roles, skills, competences, contributions, performance, and much more. These materials should consider both self-audit formats and also formats involving an outside 'assessor/facilitator'.
- Advisers asked for guidance on how to introduce and support board diversity.
- Case studies were asked for frequently on a range of issues - from how to move people forward after appraisals and audits (mentioned above); to the difficulties and successes in achieving board diversity (also mentioned above) and many, many other situations.
- Guidance on a very wide range of topics was asked for, such as succession and renewal; writing and modifying governing documents; trustees and trading; public service contracts; compliance and much more besides.....

The consultation found few qualified lecturers/trainers. All Governance trainers need to be trained in adult learning, and more need to achieve qualification – just like trainers in other sectors.

Practical Issue 4: Help-lines, networks and other support services for advisers and trainers

The Governance Hub's role regarding other support services was seen as largely two fold:

1. to facilitate networking (personal face to face contact – in the first instance); and
2. to facilitate long distance contact via a help-line and web sites.

Networks of advisers and trainers would:

- help people keep up to date with information about governance law, practice and advice
- help advisers from different types of agencies communicate with each other, while recognising that they work in a semi-competitive environment
- co-ordinate specialists in e.g. small organisations, or rural VCS
- build contacts for referring Boards or questions as the need arises

Participants said they would very much welcome a help-line service for themselves – though it could double up with one for trustees. They were clear however that it must link them either directly or at one remove to real experts who could provide relevant, accurate, up-to-date answers.

Participants would also very much welcome web-sites and a search engine (with a focus on governance advice and training) that links to publications, people, projects, agencies and listings.

Finally, some participants said they would participate in adviser weblogs, news groups and any other ways of sharing problems and solutions electronically.

Currently there are many people and agencies offering support, advice and information, and many governance advisers said they look to the Hub to provide access to them through one site.

6. Analysing the types of need identified by the consultation

The consultation used Bradshaw's taxonomy of need to distinguish between different types of views expressed, but in fact a major characteristic of the findings was that there was a high degree of convergence. Most of those consulted were in agreement on how to improve governance advice and training.

That agreement was shared by the experts, the 'normative' group (the Advisory Group). Expressed need (identifiable through take-up of existing support services) was hard to identify as there has to date been so little supply. In spite of the lack of currently available support, the reported needs were strongly and consistently 'felt' by the advisers/trainers themselves. This is perhaps attributable to the extent to which the participants are familiar with what is available elsewhere – for instance in support for fund-raising and finance advisers/trainers.

With regard to 'comparative' need, a standard of some kind seems to be set by the governance advisers who work supporting boards of trustees in the national federated organisations. These organisations clearly express their expectations of trustees and follow up with advice, support and training – up to and including peer and independent and assessment of Board performance. Their systematic investment in Board effectiveness offers many learning points for others, although they do not claim to have 'got it sorted' and expressed many development needs themselves.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all those thoughtful people who helped us to set up the venues for the focus groups; we would like to extend our gratitude to Jon Taylor who valiantly facilitated the Manchester focus group and Victoria Labeodan who made sense of the questionnaires; but, in particular we would like to thank over one hundred people - trainers and advisers - who very generously, and freely, gave up their time to take part in the groups or talk on the telephonewithout their help this study would have been impossible.

References

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