

# **OXFORDSHIRE GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION**

## **Notes of the Autumn Term Open Meeting held at Northern House School at 7.15pm on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> October 2015**

### **Welcome**

Carole Thomson (CT) extended a warm welcome to the 37 governors present. Minutes of the OGA Annual General Meeting would be published separately.

Apologies had been received from: David Eaton, Rosemary Fiander, John Howson, Lucy Katz, Rebecca Moore and Ellie Payne. Also from Frank Newhofer and Simon Bissett who would be late.

### **An Education System that works for All**

CT was delighted to introduce Neil Carberry (NC), Director of Employment and Skills at the CBI. Neil was Vice-Chair of Governors of an academy primary school in Oxfordshire. He had a passion for education and the importance of building relationships between schools and business, not only in the interests of equipping the future workforce but in the development of young people of all ages and abilities.

NC thanked everyone for the invitation to speak at this Open Meeting. He would outline the current thinking of CBI and explain what is being done to help improve the education system in the country. Plenty of time would be allowed for questions.

Neil told the meeting that for the past 50 years there had been constant complaints about the quality of education, which had suffered under too much short-termist interference. He accepted the job at the CBI only on the understanding that the CBI would no longer whinge, but would offer positive solutions. It was no surprise that there was a general feeling of dissatisfaction – Heads had been asked to achieve frequently changing goals set by DfE, Ofsted, LAs and Governing Bodies. There were considerable variances between types of school, groups of pupils, location and environment. There was no joined up, holistic idea of what the sustainable goal that schools were being asked to achieve actually was.

In 2012 the CBI decided that there was an urgent need for business to engage on education reform. There was a critical shortage of STEM skills, opportunities for apprenticeships had fallen, career advice was unsatisfactory. It was thought that the concept of 'Quality Assurance' should be put on the agenda to replace the 'Inspection' regime of Ofsted. There had been an emphasis on passing examinations alone and a lack of clarity in setting of the skills needed by school leavers in order to take their place in the workforce and as citizens. Was the need for well rounded and grounded young people who would become 'good citizens' being overlooked?

Michael Gove created a revolution in education, but devolution of power to schools without clear guardrails had led to some success, some failure and some confusion. As a throwaway line NC asked, 'If anyone in the room knew what was the role of Regional Schools Commissioners?' He drew a comparison with Margaret Thatcher's successful campaign to reduce the power of trade unions, where she had placed clear laws on the statute book to replace their role. The CBI had campaigned for a new Ofsted framework to deliver this clarity and long-termism.

Many heads were looking for signposts for the future and CBI was pressing Government to provide clear signs, particularly focusing on strong educational pathways for young people of different

interests. Industry wanted people with level 4 or level 5 skills qualifications, which could be obtained through apprenticeships or university routes. For years there had been a lack of clear consistent policies for apprenticeship schemes and too many changes and tinkering with existing schemes. Compare this with Governments' focus and determination to retain GCSEs and A levels as the route to university education. This has resulted in an increased number of graduates looking for employment in areas for which they had not received any vocational training.

There had been an improvement in the number and quality of apprenticeship schemes. Government was considering some central funding for schools to promote apprenticeships.

Some strides had been taken in improving co-operation between schools and businesses, for instance the success of careers' fairs. However, industry and commerce needed to be advised on how they could assist schools.

CT advised that Rebecca Moore of O2i apologised for her absence but had provided some details of O2i which is funded through Oxfordshire County Council and OxLEP:

'Opportunities to inspire' is a resource hub for education business links in Oxfordshire ... O2i hosts a simple website offering teachers the opportunity to post a request for ANY professional in any sector to interact with their students. Perhaps teachers want a finance whiz to talk to their students about the applicability of maths and accounting in the 'real world' or they'd like a biologist to offer a group lab visit. Whatever they ask, O2i volunteers from across the county receive the request and respond directly to the teacher – together they set the date and interaction takes place.

Additionally, O2i had been chosen as the local delivery partner for a pot of Government money for which they are recruiting Enterprise Advisers – who could be school governors wanting more input into careers and enterprise education in their school. Advisers will work at a strategic level within the school to create an activity plan so that ALL students from as early an age as possible are informed and inspired by engagements with employers. The Adviser will call on O2i volunteers and their own networks to increase the number of student interactions.

A handout would be available at the exit, at the end of the meeting.

Contacts: website: [www.O2i.org](http://www.O2i.org) email: Rebecca on [info@O2i.org](mailto:info@O2i.org)

Enterprise Adviser programme website: [www.O2i-advisers.org](http://www.O2i-advisers.org)

NC confirmed he was aware of O2i and that he welcomed the involvement of the LEP.

NC advised that the Secretary of State for Education, Nicky Morgan, would be attending the forthcoming CBI Annual Conference and the discussion would centre on what was needed to enhance school/business relationships. NC commented that the labour market had grown in complexity – large companies were tending to downsize, but there had been a significant increase in the number of medium and small businesses.

Questions from the floor were invited.

*Q1: Frank Newhofer, East Oxford School: FN agreed 100% with what had been said. Since 1975 CBI had been saying sensible things but governments had not taken heed of the issues raised. How closely do you work with government?*

*Reply: CBI works closely with government. Nicky Morgan appears to be sympathetic to our views and we are hopeful that a good working relationship will develop.*

Personally, I have become increasingly aware that politicians rarely have any experience of industry or commerce – many have graduated, become political researchers and then been elected MPs. The idea of 50% of school leavers going to university seems commendable to them and they have failed to understand the need for vocational training to level 4/5 skills. The introduction of UTCs offers some hope for the future but currently there is a prospect of schools aiming to produce attainment levels to get their pupils into university, more students going to university, followed by employers recruiting graduates into posts not requiring graduate qualifications.

*Q2: Linet Arthur, Rosehill Primary School: Picking up the picture you have just painted, is there data on school leavers entering vocational employment? What impact will raising the school leaving age have?*

Reply: I do not know what data is collected by DfE from the destination of school leavers returns by schools or what use it is put to. Recent moves to publish more of it are good – and the returns to doing many apprenticeships (in salary terms) are positive. Raising the school leaving age will result in the rapid growth of small V1<sup>th</sup> Forms.

*Q3: Katie Paxton-Doggett: Many schools are building up alumni records – Facebook makes this much easier than in the past. Will UTCs restore the balance of vocational qualifications required?*

Reply: UTCs are great, but they take a lot of resource to get right. We shouldn't rush to have a certain number, but rather to deliver a number of great schools. A young-person-centred approach is needed, designed to deliver what each young person needs and harnessing schools, FE Colleges, UTCs, local universities and local businesses to deliver it. DfE is already trying to make UTCs look more and more like standard 11-16 schools, which is a real disappointment.

*Carole Thomson Bicester Learning Academy/Fringford What do you think about the proposal that unless the EBacc is offered to all students, schools cannot meet Ofsted criteria to earn an 'Outstanding'. NC agreed this was inappropriate. CT confirmed that the Governing Board of which she is a member has agreed that, if this was carried through, they were prepared not to seek Outstanding status in order to best meet the needs of students.*

Reply: I think some thought is being given to the choices open at age 16 but this is too late – far better to have a plan for each young person 14 to 18 that balances specialism and core subjects, like Maths.

*CT suggested that UK should consider following Germany's lead in reserving the title of 'engineer' to appropriately qualified people. It had fallen into misuse e.g. motor mechanics, IT technicians.*

Reply: I agree, but I'm not sure that regulation is the answer rather than careers advice. For instance, there has been a considerable increase in the number of students studying Forensic Science at universities. But forensic science companies employ graduate Chemists . . .

*Q4: Sue Srawley, Wootton St Peter's. What are your views regarding on-line learning? For many people in rural areas access to learning institutions can be difficult and on-line is only practicable solution and it is not very expensive.*

Reply: On-line learning is a very valuable learning resource but will never replace the need for good teaching, access to tutors, advisers, etc. The Open University is an excellent facility. Today's young people have easy access to information, they need good guidance and teaching, however it is delivered.

Q5: What changes to the curriculum does the CBI recommend?

Reply: We need to be less process driven. Do away with GCSEs. Employers are seeking 16 -18 year olds with functional abilities – Will they fit in? Can they engage in a discussion? Do they look you in the eye? Will they be ‘good citizens’? Primary curriculum now provides more scope for teachers to make decisions on what is taught but is not precise enough in some areas and is still results driven. Schools need more space for teaching.

Q5: Stan Terry, Icknield Community College. *Many years ago I participated in ‘Enterprise Education’ a programme which provided teachers with placements for a year in a business environment. This provided a valuable insight into industry and commerce. Is there any possibility of the re-introduction of such a scheme?*

Reply: There is an appreciation of the value in broadening teachers’ horizons and providing practical experience in a business setting. It may return – we are looking at this with DfE at the moment.

Q6: Jean Carr, Northern House School. *Ofsted seems as if ‘the tail is wagging the dog’. Could you expand further on your comment that quality assurance should replace inspection?*

Reply: Quality should be driven by staff, not by external inspectors. There’s a danger that teaching follows a perception of what Ofsted wants. We must remove the fear of failure felt by Heads, teachers, Chairs and governors.

Q7 Governor from Cherwell School. *There appears to be a willingness among CBI members to support schools and most schools would appreciate help particularly with financial management, IT, HR and CPD. How can this be co-ordinated?*

Reply: CT suggested that this could be achieved by groups of schools and possibly the LA.  
NC: There is a lot of common ground between governing bodies and business. Companies find difficulty in providing experience for middle managers to prepare them for senior executive roles. Membership of a governing body would be very useful experience.

On behalf of all governors present, CT expressed sincere thanks to Neil for an enlightening and thought provoking presentation. It had been a great pleasure to hear views on education in schools from a different perspective from most of our speakers at Open Meetings, although Neil was, of course, a governor.

Meeting ended at 8.40 pm.