

Institution: University of Bath		
Unit of Assessment: 23 Education		
Title of case study: Enhancing Policy and Improving Practice in School Governing in England		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2008-2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Chris James	Professor of Educational Leadership and Management, previously Senior Lecturer	January 2006 to January 2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact <p>Before 2008, English schools faced a shortage of competent governors. James's research conducted at the University of Bath between 2008 and 2018 has contributed to significant improvements in school governance policymaking, quality assurance, and governors' recruitment and professional development. Since August 2013 it has impacted upon:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an increasing acknowledgement of governors' roles and responsibilities; • widespread take-up of a new nationwide training programme by governing body chairs; • the enhancement of school governance through Ofsted's inspections of all local authority schools, academy schools, Multi-Academy Trusts and free schools since 2014; • better recruitment routes through a GBP1,000,000 government-invested on-line volunteer matching service. Since 2015, 12,000 volunteers have signed up and over 3,000 governors have been appointed; • a new Competency Framework for Governance published by the Department for Education (DfE) in 2017; • improved skill levels and diversity of newly appointed governors since 2017. 		
2. Underpinning research <p>School governors are important in overseeing and making school leadership accountable to their communities and wider society. Success requires that governors represent the communities they serve and are sufficiently trained to support leaders and teachers in local authority schools and the emerging Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) schools. However, Professor James' research indicated that there was a lack of understanding of the state of school governing in relation to policy and practice. Between 2008 and 2018, James' University of Bath research has identified core problems, effectively enhanced policymakers' and professional associations' understandings of school governing, and contributed to resolving the governor recruitment, training and inspection problems in the English school system.</p> <p>His research project, <i>School Governance Study</i> (R1 and R2), was the "<i>first substantial national inquiry</i>" into the nature of school governing [A]. Funded by Business in the Community (BITC) and Centre for British Teachers (CfBT) Education and Development Trust, this robust study entailed a national survey, expert interviews, and case studies of primary and secondary schools. It revealed the unclear and contradictory policies on school governance and the lack of appreciation of governors' work. Responding to these challenges, policymakers adopted the following recommendations proposed in the study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • raising the profile of school governing; • clarifying governors' roles and responsibilities; • strengthening Ofsted's inspection of school governing; • placing greater emphasis on governors' skills and capabilities; • improving recruitment routes; • enhancing training. 		

Collaborating with the National Governance Association (NGA); the Education and Employers Taskforce, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and other sector leaders, James conducted the Second National Survey of School Governors and published the 'State of School Governing in England 2014' report. This report underscores that "*the effectiveness of individual governing bodies is hampered by difficulties recruiting governors, necessitating coherent recruitment strategies*" and "*governing bodies frequently prioritise short-term core functions (e.g., scrutinising current educational and financial activities) over long-term strategic issues (e.g., defining school ethos, vision and future strategy)*" (R3 p.2). This stimulated the next phase of research that proposed solutions to governors' recruitment and competence development.

Between 2011 and 2013, James led another CfBT Education Trust funded project to explore effective recruitment paths and training for governing board chairs (R4). The findings advised schools to recruit chairs who can enable teamwork and cooperation, facilitate productive interpersonal relationships, manage differences of opinion and conflict, make decisions and solve problems. This project also advised Ofsted to scrutinise school governance.

In 2013, the DfE funded a mixed-method project exploring the relationship between the governing board chair and the headteacher (R5) which provides solutions to building a shared understanding of the performance management process in schools. The final report (R5) provides 10 case studies and 12 vignettes illustrating governing board chairs' and headteacher collaboration.

Between 2016 and 2018 James worked with the NGA to investigate the role of governing board chairs in recruiting headteachers (R6). This cutting-edge research illustrates the roles and responsibilities of the governing board chair in the headteacher recruitment process and post-decision activities in both local authority schools and academies and MATs. This study "*gives further insights into the work of school governors in England and, in identifying the most challenging aspects of a crucial leadership and management 'moments' for a school, enabling resources to help school governors to focus on the most difficult aspects*" (R6 p.492).

3. References to the research

R1 Balarin, M, Brammer, S, James, C & McCormack, M 2008, *The school governance study. Business in the Community*, London

R2 James, C, Brammer, S, Connolly, M, Fertig, M, James, J & Jones, J 2010, *The 'hidden givers': a study of school governing bodies in England*. CfBT Education Trust, Reading.

R3 James, C, Goodall, J, Howarth, E & Knights, E 2014, *The state of school governing in England 2014*. National Governance Association, Birmingham.

R4 James, C, Brammer, S, Connolly, M, Eddy Spicer, DH, James, JS & Jones, J 2013, *The chair of the school governing body in England: roles, relationships and responsibilities*. CfBT Education Trust, Reading. <https://www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com/our-research-and-insights/research/the-chair-of-the-school-governing-body-in-england>

R5 Eddy Spicer, DH, Crawford, M, Earley, P, James, C, Bubb, S, Furniss, R, Jones, J, Nelson, R & Wood, E 2014, *Effectively managing headteacher performance: final report*. Institute of Education, London. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307358/HTPM_Final_Report.pdf

R6 James, C, Fitzgerald, S, Fellows, T, Goodall, J, Costas Batlle, I & Jones, J 2019, 'Primary school headteacher recruitment and selection in England: the processes and the problematic aspects', *School Leadership and Management*, vol. 39, no. 5, pp. 478-495. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2018.1525699>

4. Details of the impact

School governors play a critical role in overseeing school leadership work, financial management and strategic directions. Between 2008 and 2020, James has continuously advised education policymakers (e.g. DfE), professional associations (e.g. National Governors Association, Education and Employers Taskforce, and the CBI), Ofsted, and schools to regulate school governing work, raise the status of governors, diversify recruitment routes, and enhance the importance of school governing in England, drawing upon his research.

The Education and Employers Taskforce Director confirmed that James School Governance study (2008-2009) *“had a significant influence on policy and practice... raised awareness that it [governance] had been overlooked and created a focus on the importance of skills and recruitment amongst policymakers”* [A].

The National Governors Association Research Manager acknowledges that since 2014 James has brought *“vital expertise in governance and independent thought”* and his research *“contributes substantially to all the work that NGA does. He is a leading and influential voice within the field of school governance and a highly valued partner for NGA”* [D].

4.1. Improved recruitment routes

As the Education and Employers Taskforce Research Advisory Group member, James successfully advised DfE on school governing and recruitment based upon his research. In 2014, the DfE launched ‘Inspiring Governor’s Alliance’ to *“inspire more high-calibre people to volunteer as governors”* and to encourage governing bodies to recruit governors based *“on their skills”* [C]. In 2015, as *“a response to [James’] findings”* [D], the government invested GBP1,000,000 in the ‘Inspiring Governance’ online governor recruitment service [C]. Nearly 12,000 volunteers signed up and over 3,000 governors have been matched and recruited [A].

4.2 New requirement for skills-based recruitment

James directly responded to the DfE School Governance Unit leader’s request for research findings to inform policy and practice, and suggested a) a capability, motivation and opportunity model to guide governor recruitment; b) enhancing the diversity of governors to mirror student and local community demographics; c) a competence-based governor recruitment and training framework [S1]. These recommendations informed the DfE’s 2014 Memorandum on the Role of School Governing Bodies on the recruitment and retention of governors [B].

Informed by James’ governance research since 2008 and NGA’s initiation, *“the DfE released a new Competency Framework for Governance”* in 2017. This framework is the milestone in the history of school governance development, which *“sets out the competencies required of governors [E] and guides recruitment, self-evaluation and Ofsted inspections”* [F p.17].

In 2019, Education and Employers Taskforce published *Governing Our Schools: 10 Years On* that tracked the impact of James’ initiation of skill-based school governance [F]. After 10 years, *“respondents reported an increase in recruitment of governors from professional backgrounds”*, and *“that governing boards consider soft skills such as community engagement, communication and teamwork as important as legal, HR and other professional skills”* [F p.18-19].

4.3. Strengthening Ofsted regulation and inspection

Recognising the value of the recommendations made by James’ research regarding school governing, Ofsted hired James as a consultant to sharpen their focus on governance in its updated Inspection Handbook (2014). James’ work influenced the view that an external review of any ineffective governance and additional training for inspectors on governance should be mandated in England [B p.7].

4.4. Enhancing training and guidance

The Chair of the National Co-ordinators of Governor Services (NCOGS) confirmed that James' research [R1] on school governing has informed the creation and content of the 'Chairs of Governors' Leadership Development Programme' in 2014. The Director of National College for School Leadership acknowledged that James' advice led them to "*designate over 100 National Leaders of Governance who are supporting school improvement across the country*" [G]. In NGA's School Governance 2020 report, over 9 in 10 governors/trustees had reported undertaking some form of training or development for their governance role (93%). This had varied by role, as 96% of chairmen and vice chairmen had reported having undertaken some form of training compared with 88% of those who had held no chairing responsibilities [K]. The NGA's 'Chairs Handbook' states "*we also want to acknowledge Professor Chris James and his team from the University of Bath whose research we have drawn on*" [I p.2]. Over 1,000 copies of Chairs Handbook are distributed every year, serving as an invaluable reference guide. It is rated 4 out of 5* in the NGA's annual survey [D].

The DfE website (R5) hosts James' 'Effectively Managing Headteacher Performance' report, which offers "*one of the main sources of guidance for governors and trustees on the subject*" [D]. Building on James' original findings, NGA further explored the leadership issue in governing work. The close collaboration between James and NGA "*feeds into the NGA's training materials and performance management guide*" [D].

Pathways to impact

James' research has exerted a significant and long-lasting impact on school governance policymaking and practice from 2008 to date. James' pivotal 2008 research stimulated emerging policy interest in governance prior to the current REF window. The report was submitted to the 2009 Ministerial Working Group on School Governance [A]. The findings were cited in the 2010 Schools White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching', which recognised that governors had been overlooked, recommended greater clarification of their roles and responsibilities, and high-quality training for chairs of governors [H]. Further commitments followed the Education Select Committees' 2013 report on governance, to which James gave evidence [J]. James' article published in the NGA's Governing Matters magazine has a readership of approximately 30,000.

Through engaging with policy makers and sector leading organisations James' research has had a lasting impact on Governance policy and practice from 2014 onwards. James research directly impacted Ofsted's Inspection Handbook 2014 and DfE's 2017 Competency Framework for Governance. The Education and Employers 2019 report 'Governing Our Schools: 10 Years On' detailed James' 10-year governance research impact on school governors' skills framework, recruitment, placement, recognition, clerking, induction and training [F].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

A: Testimonial letter from the Director of Education and Employers, previously Director of Education at Business in the Community, 10 February 2020.

B: 'The role of school governing bodies'. Department for Education Memorandum: Developments since the Education Committee's report.' (August 2014) This report summarises what steps the government has taken following the Education Committee's recommendations 2013 on school governing. <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/Education/School-governing-bodies-update-memorandum.pdf>

C: 2015 DfE press release '£1million [GBP1,000,000] to help schools recruit high-calibre governors'. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/1-million-to-help-schools-recruit-high-calibre-governors>

D: Testimonial letter from Senior Research Lead, National Governance Association, 22 January 2020.

E: Policy Paper '2010 to 2015 government policy: school and college funding and accountability'. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-school-and-college-funding-and-accountability/2010-to-2015-government-policy-school-and-college-funding-and-accountability> (May 2015)

F: Education and Employers (2019) 'Governing Our Schools 10 year on'. Independent review of what has changed in the sector since the 2008/2009 research. <https://www.educationandemployers.org/research/governing-our-schools-10-years-on/>

G: Testimonial from Director, Primary School Leadership, National College of School Leadership 14 December 2012.

H: 2010 Schools White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching'. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175429/CM-7980.pdf

I: 'The Chairs Handbook: a guide for chairs of governing boards of schools and academy trusts, (2017). <https://www.nga.org.uk/Membership/Publications/The-Chair-s-Handbook.aspx> [hard copy]

J: Screenshot of Education committee oral and written evidence, 30 January 2013. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmeduc/365/36512.htm>

K: "School governance in 2020: governance practice findings revealed", National Governance Association, September 2020. [https://www.nga.org.uk/Knowledge-Centre/research-\(1\)/Annual-school-governance-survey.aspx](https://www.nga.org.uk/Knowledge-Centre/research-(1)/Annual-school-governance-survey.aspx)