The December meeting of the Clerks’ Advisory Group was invited to comment on the DfE’s draft Governance Professionals’ Competency Framework, as Rani Kaur explains.

It was a fabulous endorsement of the group that officials from the DfE brought a very early version of the Governance Professionals’ Competency Framework (for clerks in all state-funded schools) for our views and comments. The development of a framework for those working as clerks follows on from the recent Competency Framework for Governance.

Attendees welcomed the framework and thought it was a step in the right direction to help professionalise the clerk’s role. It would also be a useful tool for professional development and training.

Priorities
The DfE asked what the priorities for clerking should be and what role the government should play. Responses split into three main areas: consistency among clerks and what they do; training; and the professionalisation of the role.

The roles and responsibilities of clerks vary greatly, with some only taking minutes and carrying out basic administrative duties while others keep comprehensive records, organise parent governor elections and provide advice on governance functions. It was therefore felt necessary to clarify what the roles and responsibilities of a governing board clerk are and to distinguish this role from that of a ‘minuting clerk’.

The roles and responsibilities of clerks vary greatly

The levels of support offered to clerks also varies greatly. Some have a high degree of support such as one-to-one mentoring, while others are given very little and expected to learn ‘on the job’. It was suggested that the DfE should, wherever possible, set national expectations to eliminate these inconsistencies.

Continuum of training
Those present thought there ought to be more of a continuum of training, with different programmes available for new and more experienced clerks. It was also agreed that in order to help professionalise the role, the importance of having an effective clerk should be incorporated in training for governors/trustees, chairs and headteachers.

Attendees felt that the government is well placed to help professionalise the role of clerking. There were suggestions that remuneration should be based on roles outside school governance where similar duties are undertaken. Some attendees also felt that an expectation that clerks are performance managed and given an annual appraisal would place the role of governing board clerk on a similar footing to clerking roles in other sectors.

Specific comments concerned clarifying language around expectations. For example, the draft talked about clerks ensuring that a governing board had done something, whereas clerks could only advise a board to do it. Likewise, the document should be clear that clerks are expected to be able to provide advice on governance functions, but not legal advice on all things governors/trustees are responsible for (eg HR).

The framework included a basic description of the clerk’s role, although some attendees felt that if the framework itself was clear, governing boards would be able to draw up a bespoke job description and person specification.

Attendees also said that it would be helpful if there was a distinction between what clerks absolutely needed to know now and what they could learn over time.

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