

Questions about being a governor at Derwen College

Why did you volunteer your time as a governor at Derwen when there are so many volunteering options to choose from?

Derwen is local and I considered that I could utilise my knowledge and experiences of working in education and business development: the latter particularly in finance and HR, for the benefit of the college. However also, I recognised that Derwen college is a complex organisation and that being a governor would provide me with opportunities to learn more about not only issues related to my previous experiences, but also new ones, i.e. care and working with people with disabilities among others.

How have you found the experience of being a governor: the highlights and the challenges?

Over time, and it does take time, I have felt accepted and part of the college. As a retiree I missed this sense of belonging, as I was involved in most aspects of the company I worked in for several decades.

In addition, I particularly enjoy being invited to and attending events involving the students. It makes the hairs on the back of neck stand up when I see the joy on the faces of the students and carers. Also, a time for the staff to see the result of all their hard work and the appreciation of others.

This sounds as if I am doing it for myself and not for the benefit of Derwen. This is not the case, I like to think that I do support the staff, particularly the SLT and make their job a little easier and them more effective. However, sometimes I feel that I would like to input at an earlier stage on certain issues, and sometimes I perhaps have questioned something outside of my remit, but it is only because I am interested. However, a governor does need to recognise that, even though they may have held or hold senior positions where they work now, this is a different set up. They will have to earn the respect and trust of the people they are working with in their governance role.

What would be the main advice that you would offer a potential new volunteer?

I think the last point above re: giving time to earn respect and trust is important. Also, but this maybe a personal thing, it is important that you are interested in the development of Derwen as an organisation. You may have been a governor before, and it may have a school governor. Having been a school governor, I know the governance issues at Derwen are much wider and in many ways more interesting and challenging.

If you would like to be a governor for the status, don't do it. To be effective, as a governor, and what's the point if you are not effective, you have to put in time and effort to get to know a wide range of aspects of the college, the people that work there and the needs of the students.

What are your top tips for balancing the role with your work/life roles?

Firstly you need to be interested in Derwen and its development, otherwise it is unlikely that sufficient time will be given to the role anyway. As a retiree, although I am still busy doing many things, I will have more time to spare to commit to the role, than someone who is in full time employment. I suggest that it would be possible to focus on a particular aspect, e.g. curriculum or finance etc. Although I do accept that many of the issues are interlinked, and this contradicts what I have written above about getting to know a wide range of aspects of the college: but it still could be an acceptable introduction to the college.

I think the co-opted system could be useful too, in a similar way. As a co-opted member I was on several committees. However, if someone is unsure of the time element, they could be co-opted on to one committee only, and possibly invited to join the Board meetings. Discussions could follow later about the development of the role.

Barbara Court, 20th May 2020