

**A STUDY OF THE BARRIERS  
TO STRATEGIC PLANNING  
FACED BY GOVERNING BODIES  
IN SELECTED INNER LONDON STATE  
SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

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## ABSTRACT

The statutory responsibilities of governing bodies have increased greatly since the 1988 Education Reform Act, yet unresolved issues persist concerning how well governing bodies have adjusted to their new role. This thesis focuses on one such issue: the discrepancy between policy and practice regarding the statutory responsibility of governing bodies to 'provide a strategic view'. After reviewing the existing literature and presenting the research design (comprised of five qualitative case studies and a quantitative survey), this thesis poses three questions about the strategic planning processes of inner London state-maintained secondary school governing bodies: First, do governors in these schools perceive their role as strategic? Second, is there an evident absence of strategic planning within these governing bodies? And third, if there is such an absence, then why?

The research begins by providing affirmative answers to the first two questions. Evidence demonstrates that it is possible to outline a definition of strategic planning based on governors' own beliefs, and that governors did *not* believe that this definition of strategic planning was being fulfilled in practice. In relation to the third question, this thesis argues that two sets of 'barriers' impede governing body strategic planning. The research explores these barriers in detail, identifying four main institutional-level barriers to governing body strategic planning (a 'monitoring culture', varying levels of governor involvement, an emphasis on 'tangible' tasks, and extensive delegation to staff) and six main central governmental-level barriers (time constraints, paperwork, legislation and regulation, the current financing system, communication, and trust).

Finally, a fourth research question asks whether identifying these 'strategic planning barriers' has any practical policy relevance; 'business involvement in education' is selected as the policy lens through which to examine this proposition. Governors' opinions about business involvement in education are explored, and this research confirms that governors believed strategic planning on this issue was desirable yet absent. The thesis then illustrates that the heuristic application of these barriers provides a robust explanation for the absence of governing body strategic planning on business involvement issues, thereby illustrating the practical policy relevance of these barriers. The thesis concludes by outlining the contributions of this study, offering policy recommendations, and suggesting avenues for further research.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Conservative and Labour governments alike have placed a significant emphasis on institutional-level responsibility and accountability in education and other public services. Because of these policies, and in particular because of the 1988 Education Reform Act, school governing bodies have become statutorily more important than ever before. Comprised entirely of volunteers and required of every state-maintained school in England, governing bodies now possess a wide range of responsibilities and duties, from balancing budgets to adjudicating appeals over pupil exclusions. Yet while the list of governing body responsibilities continues to grow, so too do serious questions about how well governing bodies fulfil the three fundamental tasks set for them by central government: providing a strategic view, acting as a critical friend, and ensuring accountability (DfE/Ofsted 1995). The aim of this study is to investigate the potential discrepancy between policy and practice on first of these three fundamental responsibilities – the governing body's responsibility to provide a strategic view. By employing a combined qualitative and quantitative research approach, this study seeks to provide answers to the following four main research questions:

1. Do governors in inner London state secondary schools view their role as a strategic one, and if so, how do they themselves define strategic planning?
2. Is the lack of strategic planning implied by the existing literature actually evident in the governing bodies of inner London state secondary schools?
3. If the lack of strategic planning implied by the existing literature is actually evident in the governing bodies of inner London state secondary schools, why is this the case?
4. Can it be demonstrated that the identification of these strategic planning barriers has practical policy relevance and importance?

In order to establish the general context and specific aims of this study, **Chapter Two** reviews the existing literature on school governance and on strategic planning in education, respectively. After briefly outlining the history of school governance, Chapter Two analyses the literature in the six main categories of existing school governance research. This review and analysis will establish the absence of existing



research on the first three main research questions. The fourth research question, posed as a logical exploratory extension of the first three, will then propose that the policy issue of business involvement in education be employed as the illustrative lens through which the ‘practical policy relevance’ of any potential strategic planning barriers be studied. The suitability of this proposition is then justified through a further review of the literature on business involvement. With the four main research questions thus established, **Chapter Three** presents the design of the research study itself. This chapter explains the methodological decisions made regarding the format, scope, and content of the study, describe the implementation of the qualitative-quantitative research design and the methods used to analyse the resulting research data, and describe the characteristics of the qualitative and quantitative research samples.

Having established the context of the research (Chapter Two) and the methods employed in its execution (Chapter Three), Chapters Four through Eight present the research data gathered to answer the four main research questions. Where possible, qualitative and quantitative data are presented together, enabling the reader to construct a more complete picture of a given issue than might be possible if these data were presented separately. The first of these data chapters, **Chapter Four**, presents the evidence that addresses the first two main research questions:

*Do governors themselves in inner London state secondary schools view their role as a strategic one, and if so, how do they themselves define strategic planning?*

*Is the lack of strategic planning implied by the existing literature actually evident in the governing bodies of inner London state secondary schools?*

Chapter Four employs qualitative evidence from the governor interviews to outline a three-point definition of strategic planning. The chapter then presents qualitative and quantitative evidence to demonstrate that governors in this study did *not* believe that their own definition of strategic planning was being met. Finally, this chapter addresses the role of the School Development Plan in the strategic planning process of governing bodies.

Having established the lack of strategic planning amongst governing bodies in the study area, Chapters Five and Chapter Six present the evidence that addresses the third main research question:

If the lack of strategic planning implied by the existing literature is actually evident in the governing bodies of inner London state secondary schools, why is this the case?

These chapters present two distinct yet related sets of ‘barriers’ that, it is argued, impede governing body strategic planning. It is proposed that one set is created at the institutional level, while the other set is created at the central governmental level. **Chapter Five** outlines the theory behind taking this barrier-based approach to the data presentation and analysis, and then presents the overall quantitative evidence regarding governor opinions about different potential strategic planning barriers. Chapter Five then provides the detailed evidence for the first set barriers to governing body strategic planning: the four main barriers created at the *institutional* level. Before moving to the second set of barriers in Chapter Six, a coda to Chapter Five presents the evidence for why this research focused on the institutional and central governmental levels while devoting less attention to the local authority level. **Chapter Six** then provides the detailed evidence for the second set barriers to governing body strategic planning: the six main barriers created at the *central governmental* level. It is argued that these six barriers, in conjunction with the four institutional-level strategic planning barriers identified in Chapter Five, provide a robust answer to the question of *why* there is a lack of strategic planning amongst the governing bodies in inner London state-maintained secondary schools.

Chapters Seven and Eight then present, in two stages, the evidence that addresses the fourth main research question:

Can it be demonstrated that the identification of these strategic planning barriers has practical policy relevance and importance?

First, **Chapter Seven** presents the research evidence confirming the suggestion made in the literature review: that business involvement provides an appropriate lens through which the practical policy relevance of the strategic planning barriers (identified in Chapters Five and Six) can be examined. Chapter Seven then provides the contextual background necessary for interpreting the findings that are to be presented in Chapter Eight. In particular, evidence is presented to illustrate governors’ perceptions of business involvement in education, and outline governors’ views regarding the potential advantages of including business involvement issues in the strategic planning process. Having thus established the suitability of business

involvement as a policy lens, **Chapter Eight** then provides the research evidence to illustrate that the systematic application of the strategic planning barriers identified in Chapters Five and Six *does* provide a robust explanation for the absence of governing body strategic planning on business involvement issues. As such, it will be argued these barriers *do* help to explain the absence of governing body strategic planning on a specific issue of practical policy importance, thereby demonstrating their practical policy relevance as a tool for understanding strategic planning problems in inner London state secondary schools.

Finally, **Chapter Nine** draws together the evidence and arguments of the first eight chapters in order to provide a final analysis of the value of this research study. This chapter summarises the empirical research findings and illustrates how these findings answered the four main research questions. This chapter then discusses the implications of the research findings, their contribution to the existing research literature, and the extent to which these findings can be generalised. A set of substantive policy recommendations emanating from this research are proposed, and further avenues of potential research in this field are suggested. A final set of reflective observations then concludes this thesis.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE EXISTING LITERATURE**

#### **2.0 INTRODUCTION**

In order to establish the general context and specific aims of this study, this chapter reviews the existing literature on school governance and strategic planning in education. Section 2.1 provides the context for this study by presenting a brief history of school governance. Section 2.2 then turns to the two main types of literature on school governance: advice literature and research literature. After briefly examining the former, it will be argued that there are six main categories of the latter: theoretical research on governance, demographic research on governance, research on specific categories of governors, research on governing body relationships, research on the normative role of governors and governing bodies, and research on governing body operation. The remainder of Section 2.2 surveys the state of the literature in the first four of these categories. Due to their particular relevance to this research study, the final two categories will then be discussed individually, with research on the normative role of governors and governing bodies explored in Section 2.3, and research on governing body operation explored in Section 2.4. Based on the results of this portion of the review, three main research questions about governing bodies and strategic planning will be proposed. Section 2.5 then poses the fourth research question, and it will be argued that this fourth question can best be addressed via the lens of an actual policy issue. The issue of business involvement in education will be proposed for this purpose, and the history and recent developments in this policy area will be examined. Finally, Section 2.6 summarises the chapter and outlines the benefits of the proposed study.

#### **2.1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF SCHOOL GOVERNANCE**

##### **2.1.1 The Early Years**

School governing bodies are a relatively new institution in their current form, although the concept of school governance has spanned several centuries – from the boards of trustees that ran church schools in the sixth century (Gann 1998:8), to the lay ‘town councils’ that fought for the right to appoint local schoolmasters in the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Adamson 1919:64), to the craftsmen who oversaw the guild schools of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Gillett 1966:68). However, the first notion of a *system* of school governance in England arose in 1833, when Parliament, not yet ready to commit to

funding its own state-run education system, voted a grant to assist in providing education through church-run schools. One major condition of this grant was that the schools receiving assistance were to organise local management bodies, thereby providing Parliament with an entity that could be held accountable for the expenditure of said funds (Sallis 1995:5).

This state of affairs continued until the passage of the 1870 Elementary Education Act, which legislated for universal – although not compulsory – primary education (Murphy 1972). Importantly, this new school system was to be administered by local school boards, and Section 15 of the 1870 Act legislated that the school board may delegate its powers to ‘a body of managers appointed by them, consisting of not less than three persons,’ thereby establishing the first system of state school governance in England. Unfortunately for these nascent local governors, there was no system for establishing ‘either a relatively uniform or coherent board system throughout the country’ (Bacon 1978:15), and as Baron and Howell (1968) observed, ‘most of the large boards...preferred to administer their schools centrally rather than delegate duties to bodies of managers as they were permitted to do under the Elementary Education Act’ (1968:19). London was a notable exception, with each of its board schools having its own ‘body of managers’ – although Gordon (1974) suggested that the quality of these boards was somewhat uneven, with London reporting problems in recruiting ‘suitable governors’ as far back as 1884 (1974:161).

The next step came in 1902, when the 1902 Education Act complemented the earlier provision of universal *primary* education by establishing universal *secondary* education. In order to administer this newly-expanded education system, the 1902 Act created Local Education Authorities – LEAs – and required secondary schools, like their primary counterparts, to have boards of governors. Through the establishment of governing bodies at the secondary level, the 1902 Act firmly ensconced local governing bodies in the hierarchy of the English educational system. In a few county councils, such as London, a great deal of authority was delegated to these local governing bodies; Baron and Howell (1968) noted that these secondary school governing bodies in London had extensive responsibilities, including:

‘[D]rawing up an annual report, checking school records, inspecting premises and equipment, advising on the appointment of staff, investigating complaints against teachers, promoting visits of educational value and helping in

arrangements for school meals, play centres, school savings banks and school open days' (1968:19).

However, the 1902 Act also empowered LEAs to set the regulations under which all of the governing bodies in their respective jurisdictions would operate (Gann 1998:14), meaning that governing bodies had no inherent autonomous authority of their own. Instead, the 1902 Act allowed the decision about how much authority governing bodies should hold to be made by each local council. Although some LEAs, like London, devolved considerable authority to their governing bodies, others LEAs were significantly more parsimonious. As such, although governing bodies were now established in law, the extent of their authority varied greatly in practice.

### **2.1.2 Post-War Changes**

However, the historic 1944 Education Act fundamentally overhauled the state education system, providing free primary and secondary education to all under the slogan 'A national service locally administered.' To provide the 'local administration' component, the 1944 Act required that each state-maintained primary school have a managing body, and that each state-maintained secondary school have a governing body (although the legislation permitted multiple schools to be 'grouped' under a single governing/managing entity under certain circumstances). These governing institutions were ostensibly responsible for running their respective schools in a manner that both reflected community desires and supported the interests of the schools themselves. However, while these governors had a role in appointing the head teacher, their influence was extremely limited in practice. Baron and Howell suggested that governors often had 'only a perfunctory interest in the curriculum, merely noting what the Head chooses to tell them' (1968:98), and that 'in practice governors' involvement in [financial matters] is very small and does not generally go beyond rubber-stamping estimates drawn up by the authority's staff...' (1974:118). This limited role came about because the bulk of the authority under the 1944 Act was vested in the Local Education Authorities (LEAs). First, LEAs controlled the appointments to county school governing bodies, a factor that led to significant party political influence at the local level (Sallis 1995:6). Second, LEAs had the authority to determine the organisation of the *system* of governing bodies within their jurisdiction, and the vigour with which school governing bodies were organised varied widely throughout the country in the decades following the 1944 Act. For example, the implementation of the Act's 'one school, one governing body'

mandate led to significant variation in practice, with some counties appointing a board for *every* school, and other counties appointing a single board for *all* their schools (Baron and Howell 1968:58)! The result of this LEA dominance after the 1944 Act meant that governing bodies had very limited power, leading observers to note that ‘for the most part, governors tended to be seen as having symbolic rather than actual authority...’ (Baginsky et al. 1991:1).

### **2.1.3 People Power**

For the next 30 years, governing bodies remained largely peripheral entities. Yet by the mid- 1970s, there was increasing interest in the state of the education system and the right of the public to have a voice in the way education was provided. Events such as the 1975 William Tyndale controversy demonstrated that governing bodies could potentially become outlets for such a discussion (see Gretton and Jackson 1976), and Prime Minister James Callaghan’s 1976 ‘Great Debate’ about the future of the education system further pushed education issues into the political foreground (Tomlinson 1992:43). In this context of renewed public interest in state education, in 1977 the Taylor Commission published its proposals for the first major changes to governing bodies since 1944. These proposals were viewed as both wide-ranging and radical; as Mahoney (1988) observed, the Taylor Report argued for establishing the position of governing bodies ‘in direct line of responsibility between LEA and school’ (1988:9). The Report, entitled *A New Partnership for our Schools*, recommended establishing a unique governing body for each county school, altering the composition of governing bodies to include *equal* numbers of teachers, parents, LEA representatives, and community members, and giving governing bodies shared responsibility (with the LEA) for appointing the head and deputy. Additionally, the Report recommended greater governing body responsibilities in the areas of staffing, curriculum, budget, and community relations (Taylor 1977). Yet the most important aspect of the Taylor Report was its focus on the importance of bringing public input and accountability into the school system via governing bodies; as Dean (2001) noted, ‘The Taylor Report suggested that people not involved in education had an important contribution to make to how schools were run...’ (2001:3).

However, the Taylor recommendations were implemented neither *en bloc* nor immediately. Although the 1980 Education Act eventually provided for parent and teacher representation on governing bodies, the provisions of the 1980 Act were not

applicable retroactively. Instead, the 1980 Act 'set the pattern for future developments in school government...but did not require existing governing bodies to fall in line' (Kogan 1984:2). These 'future developments' came in 1986, as the Conservative government, taking its first steps towards moulding a more locally-devolved power structure and parent-centred education system, passed the Education (No 2) Act of 1986. The 1986 Act formalised the organisation of governing bodies and implemented many of the Taylor Report recommendations in the process. Most important, for the first time parents and LEA appointees were represented in equal numbers on governing bodies, a swing in favour of parent representation that was a strong blow to local (often Labour) party political control over governing bodies (Earley and Creese 1998). Teachers received one or two seats depending on the size of the school, and governing bodies were encouraged to seek members from the business community if they felt their governing body would benefit from such representation.

#### **2.1.4 Devolution and Responsibility**

However, it was not until two years later, with the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA), that governors and heads received sweeping new responsibilities for greater school oversight. As Donnelly (1999) stated, 'In keeping with the broad ideology of the 'new public management', [the 1988] educational reform was based on the idea that parents and lay governors, as educational consumers, would be empowered to monitor the work of professionals' (1999:238). The ERA implemented a national curriculum (and national assessment systems), and charged governing bodies with the responsibility for overseeing its implementation. Most important, however, was that nearly every school received a delegated budget under Local Management of Schools (LMS), providing governing bodies with substantial direct control and accountability over both funding allocation and staffing at the expense (literally and figuratively) of the LEA. Governing bodies were also given the option (although later revoked in 1998) of severing their ties with their LEAs completely, if a majority of balloted parents agreed. By so 'opting out' of the state system and becoming 'grant-maintained', a school could acquire significant autonomy – and would receive its funding directly from central government. This rapid and thorough decimation of LEA authority and power fundamentally changed not only the direction of educational policy, but also the relationship between the local authorities and the schools. In quantitative terms, the effect of this change is clearly evident: whereas prior to 1988 school funding was controlled almost entirely by the LEAs, by the year



2000, 85 per cent of funding was going directly to schools, bypassing the LEA in all but an administrative sense (*Under siege* 2000:16). The qualitative evidence is equally as stark: as the preface to Field's (1993) study of governing bodies stated, 'Any current debate about the management of schools in England and Wales must focus upon where the power now resides.... therefore [this research] examines the shift of control away from the local authority to the governing body...' (1993:165).

In the wake of the ERA, there was substantial concern amongst education observers that governing bodies would be unable to cope with their new responsibilities, or that there would be confusion and chaos as governors tested the limits of their new role (see e.g., Knight 1988; Leighton 1989; Wilson 1990). However, the subsequent literature suggests that these new governing bodies performed neither as poorly as these observers had predicted, nor as effectively as government had hoped. For example, research into the role of governing bodies in dealing with LMS (Marren and Levacic 1994; Levacic and Glover 1997) suggested that governing bodies eventually learned to cope with their financial responsibilities. However, this and other literature also suggested that in many cases, head teachers had assumed the financial responsibilities of governing bodies, either by choice or by default (Shearn et al. 1995). Similarly, research showed that these 'new' governing bodies often struggled to find their 'niche' within the political and educational system in which they were deposited; for example, governors have usually avoided curriculum issues, and as Earley (2000) argued, 'Governors' involvement in the curriculum and its delivery – the school's core business – and its monitoring, is still seen by governors and others as predominantly a matter for the professionals and not for the lay governing body' (2000:200). These new responsibilities and the research into them will be discussed at greater length in Sections 2.2 through 2.4.

A flurry of additional education acts followed in the 1990s, each affecting governing bodies in various ways. The Schools Act 1992 created the Office of Standards in Education (Ofsted) as the agency charged with inspecting schools for their quality; governing bodies were given the task of writing the response to the inspection reports and taking the lead on making any post-inspection improvements. The Education Act 1993 incorporated governing bodies as legal entities and created the Funding Agency for Schools to administer grant-maintained funding. Additionally, the 1993 Act channelled more authority to governing bodies and central government, further

weakening the role of the LEAs and increasing the potential influence of governing bodies. A change of political control at the national level brought Labour to power in 1997 under the slogan ‘education, education, education,’ yet far from increasing the dwindling authority of the LEAs, Labour pursued its agenda for change at the national and institutional levels (see e.g., Riley et al. 1999; Power and Whitty 1999). Governing body responsibilities continued to change and expand in this new political climate. The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 charged governing bodies with setting overall achievement targets for pupils’ results on key assessments, while the Education Act 2002 gave governing bodies the ability to sponsor enterprises related to the school and reduced their responsibilities for staff hiring (yet increased their responsibilities in other areas).

### **2.1.5 The Current Situation**

At present (August 2003), each state secondary school in England has a governing body that varies in size between 14 and 21 members, depending on the number of pupils and the type of school. (New regulations, to be fully implemented by 2006, will permit governing bodies to determine their own size irrespective of pupil numbers or school type (see DfES 2003a)). The governing body must meet at least once a term, is chaired by a governor elected by his or her peers to the post, and has authority over issues including curriculum, health and safety, discipline, physical infrastructure, financial management, and strategic planning (DfES 2001). Some of these responsibilities are delegated to the headteacher for day-to-day administration, while others must (by statute) be exercised by the governing body. The headteacher is generally a member of the governing body; other members include teachers and parents (elected by their peers) and community members (some nominated by the local education authority and some ‘co-opted’ by the governing body). The minimum number of seats for each category is legislated by statute. In addition, voluntary aided, voluntary controlled, and foundation schools have seats allocated for governors who are appointed by the voluntary or foundation entity. While a small number of routine responsibilities can be discharged by the chair through a procedure known as ‘chair’s action’, governing bodies can, in general, exercise their authority only as a collective. Unless individual governors receive expressly delegated authority from the governing body as a whole, they cannot make binding decisions on behalf of the governing body. Furthermore, delegation is impermissible on a substantial number of issues (DfES 2001). The standard term length for a governor is four years.

## **2.2 THE GOVERNANCE LITERATURE**

Given this historical context, this section examines the two main types of literature on school governance. The first of these is the ‘advice’ literature, which will be examined briefly in Section 2.2.1, while the second is more traditional academic research literature. Sections 2.2.2 to 2.2.5 begin the examination of the research literature, which can be divided into six broad categories. For the purposes of this thesis, these categories are designated as: theoretical research on governance, demographic research on governance, research on specific categories of governors, research on governing body relationships, research on the normative role of governors and governing bodies, and research on governing body operation. The first four of these categories will be discussed in this section. The final two categories, due to their particular relevance to this research study, will be discussed separately in Sections 2.3 and 2.4, respectively.

Before beginning this review, it is important to bear in mind two key points about school governance literature. First, because of the radical changes instituted under the 1988 ERA, it is somewhat difficult to compare the pre-1988 governing bodies with their post-1988 counterparts. As such, the most relevant research literature on governance dates from 1988 onwards. Second, the government entity in charge of education has undergone several name changes since the 1960s: the Department of Education and Science (DES) from 1964 to 1992, the Department for Education (DFE) from 1992 to 1995, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) from 1995 until 2001, and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) from 2001 to the present. As such, government documents are cited according to the name of the entity as it was at the time of the document’s publication.

### **2.2.1 The Advice Literature**

Given that at approximately 300,000 strong, governors form ‘the largest volunteer force in the country’ (*Consultation on governors* 2000:9), and given the numerous responsibilities acquired by governing bodies since 1988, it is perhaps unsurprising that there is a vast amount of ‘advice’ literature that seeks to provide essential and important information to confused and overwhelmed governors on how to ‘govern well’. Besides the numerous advice articles in journals such as *Managing Schools Today* and the extensive array of official government guidance (see e.g., Ofsted 2001), a wide range of governance guides provide information about governing body

responsibilities, observations about governing body good practice, and suggestions about governing body improvement (see e.g., Bullivant 1988; Sallis 1994; Wragg 1995; Dean 2001). These guides often seek to cover the huge range of governor responsibilities, including: the annual report to parents, the head's report, special meetings, legal obligations, staffing and hiring, curriculum responsibilities, exclusion procedures, visiting the school, budget planning, meeting management, dealing with inspections, discipline and equal opportunities, admissions, delegation decisions, team working, cost management, vocational curriculum, staff pensions, special needs, and home-school agreements, among others. These contents are worth listing simply to demonstrate the breadth of issues with which governors are now expected to deal.

Yet this explosion in the advice literature on school governance has not been matched by a similar growth in academic research. As Scanlon et al. (1999) observed in their major study of governing bodies, although governing bodies have acquired substantial responsibilities since 1988, 'surprisingly, issues of governance...have attracted relatively little attention by researchers' (1999:13). This concern about the prevalence of advice literature at the expense of solid research is echoed more generally by Ozga (1992) and Bush (1999), respectively. Ozga protested over a decade ago that while there were a 'seemingly limitless supply of books on 'how to manage' the post ERA system,' these books were inadequate due to the 'missing dimension...[of] the external policy context – almost never discussed, and if briefly reviewed then taken for granted' (1992:278). Similarly, Bush complained that many education management texts were 'descriptive or prescriptive, 'manuals' on how to become better managers.... [Yet] while books providing 'tips for teachers' may be useful for busy practitioners, they oversimplify the issues and underestimate the importance of analysis' (1999:248). Given the relative absence of research on school governance in the context of its increased importance, it seems unfortunate that a large amount of the literature on school governance has focused on what Ozga termed the 'how to' questions rather than on the 'why do' ones. However, the academic research that does exist on school governance provides a solid base upon which to expand, and it is the aim of this portion of the literature review to outline the trends and findings of this work.

### 2.2.2 Theoretical Research on Governance

The first category of academic research concerns the *theory* surrounding school governance – the broad general themes about how governing bodies and their actions should be conceived. Unfortunately, the number of theoretical works on the dynamics of contemporary governing bodies is limited, with a particular dearth in output since the mid-1990s. Early theoretical work on governing bodies tended to emanate from the sociological school of ‘power theory’, which sought to explain governing bodies in strongly structural terms. For example, Bacon (1978) offered a simple theoretical treatise on public accountability in state education, arguing that governing boards were rather passive policy institutions whose function was to act as an independent façade, defending and legitimising education policies proposed by professionals within the school system. Taking a more active view of governing bodies as political entities, Kogan (1984) explored the power dynamics within governing bodies in the context of organisational behaviour and regime theory. After conducting fieldwork with four governing bodies, Kogan suggested four main models of governing body types – accountable, mediating, advisory, and supportive – and suggested that most governing bodies tended towards one of the latter two models. These four models were re-evaluated (and confirmed) in light of the 1988 ERA by Dodds (1991), and have been used as the standard template by many subsequent researchers for interpreting governing body actions (see e.g., Levacic and Glover 1998; Thody 1999a).

However, one shortcoming of power-based models of governance is that an over-reliance on strict structuralism can imply that the models are deterministic, suggesting that the power hierarchy is an ‘unalterable given’ that can only be changed by completely restructuring the system itself. Such a view therefore tends to portray other potential change factors, such as individual motivation, as either minor or irrelevant. However, Kogan’s limited use of organisational theory suggested a potentially more dynamic and nuanced theoretical model for governance. One such area was the theory of ‘policy networks’, which argued that patterns in governance could be explained by the interaction of actors at the local level as well as by ‘macro’ decisions at the state level. As Raab (1994) argued, theorising the governance of education required taking:

‘[A] bottom-up view of action in the policy networks even where there is a dominant, ostensible ‘policy’ decision taken at the top that sets the

framework for action lower down.... [This approach is] especially conducive to exploring the interactive networks that function as implementation structures, in which actors and organisations wherever located may in fact take part' (1994:9).

This 'bottom-up' approach was pursued by Thody (1994a), who employed organisational theory in an attempt to create a theoretical framework for explaining governing body actions and motivations. Thody proposed a theoretical schema in which governing bodies performed their main functions – including representation, democracy, and management – either covertly or overtly. In applying this theory, Thody argued that governing bodies 'are not performing effectively their overt functions of democratic representation [or] the direction of managerial effectiveness and efficiency. The covert functions of providing illusory democracy and managerial legitimisation are being performed' (1994a:210). While Thody's model leads to some conclusions similar to those of Bacon (1978), the advantage of Thody's organisational approach is that it provides for a more dynamic and less deterministic view of governance than does Bacon. Indeed, Thody concluded that 'as governing bodies mature and learn how to assert their role and authority in selected educational and political spheres, they may evolve into a more potent force for educational change and partnership' (1994a:225).

In exploring *how* governing bodies might evolve in this way, Walters and Richardson (1999) provided a new theoretical contribution on school governance through their notion of 'governing through policy.' Although Walters and Richardson intended to provide a practical guide for governors, the theoretical model they proposed was a tailored adaptation of broader theoretical work on the effective governance of non-profit organisations undertaken by Carver (1990). Arguing that 'policy clarification is the central feature of board leadership' (1990:23), Carver suggested that governing boards were most effective when they focused on determining the ends to be achieved, while leaving the processes for meeting those ends to the organisational staff. In adapting Carver's theoretical construct of non-profit governance specifically for English school governing bodies, Walters and Richardson provided a new operational-theoretical perspective on governance: one which extends upon the organisational model set forth above, while implicitly arguing against a more static and deterministic model of governance under which change is perceived as both difficult and unlikely.

Finally, the most recent academic research on governing body theory came from Deem et al. (1995), who combined power theory, organisational theory, and decision-making theory in their broad-ranging attempt to construct a theory of governance centred on the notion of active citizenship. Although earlier work by Viant (1992) sought to determine the extent to which governorship could be perceived as a 'democratic and participatory activity, undertaken as a public service through 'active citizenship' (1992:2), Deem et al. conducted an extensive four-year multi-site qualitative study of governing bodies, aimed at determining whether governors should be perceived as 'active citizens' or 'state volunteers'. By arguing that the activity of governance should be viewed as a trade-off between democracy and efficiency, Deem et al. sought to situate school governance in the wider political context of the 'new managerialism' approach to public service provision. In this way, Deem et al. contributed to the theoretical literature on governance by adding the political aspect of governance to the structural and organisational aspects provided by previous theorists. In summary, although the theoretical work on governors is limited, it does provide sufficient competing perspectives to both encourage an open evaluation of the dynamics of contemporary governing bodies and to provide the background for further development of theory concerning the actions of governors and governing bodies.

### **2.2.3 Demographic Research on Governance**

The second category consists of research that has sought to provide a better understanding of who these 300,000 governors are. Immediately following the ERA, a small-scale study by Thody (1989) found that the newly-reconstituted governing bodies were populated by more 'professionals' than many observers had expected, as well as by fewer retirees and fewer church vicars – two traditionally (or possibly anecdotally) popular sources of governors. Another smaller scale demographic study conducted by Buckby (1992) found that governors were generally middle class, older, and male. Additionally, the then-Department of Education and Science (DES) commissioned larger-scale studies into governing body demographics from both Streatfield and Jeffries (1989) and Keys and Fernandes (1990). The former examined governor recruitment patterns following the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA), while the latter obtained demographic information on governors as part of a broader study on the adaptation of governors to their increased delegated responsibilities post-ERA.

The first comprehensive attempt to build upon and update the work of Keys and Fernandes came from Earley (1994a), who, as a part of a larger survey-based study on the progress of governing bodies, sought to determine who became governors and why. Earley examined factors such as age, ethnic origin, length of service as a governor, educational qualifications, occupation, and governors' stated reasons for becoming governors, and his more extensive research confirmed the demographic findings of both Keys and Fernandes (1990) and Buckby (1992). Earley's 1994 model was utilised again by Scanlon et al. (1999), who found that although percentages for governors' ethnic origin, age, gender, and educational qualifications were similar to those reported by Keys and Fernandes (1990) and Earley (1994a), a much higher percentage of governors reported being from professional occupations than was the case in previous studies. In addition to this broader demographic research, a small amount of more specialised demographic research has been conducted on the role of gender and race in governance (Deem 1989; Deem et. al. 1995), and on the implications of having governing bodies that are comprised overwhelmingly of individuals from the middle socio-economic classes (Eiles 1989; Dodds 1994). However, most of the demographic research of the type discussed here is generally uncontroversial, due largely to the straightforward factual nature of the evidence being presented.

#### **2.2.4 Research on Specific Categories of Governors**

The third category of research investigates the issues pertaining to specific categories of governors. Since the 1986 Education Act, governing bodies have included representation from parents, teachers, local authorities, and the community, while governing bodies of voluntary sector and foundation schools have included spaces for foundation governors as well. In the late 1990s, legislation created a seat for a non-teaching staff governor. Much of the research into specific categories of governors has been devoted to micropolitical issues: determining the roles played by governors from these respective constituencies and examining the extent to which their opinions are either influential or important. Notably, very little research has been conducted in reference to the categories of either LEA or foundation governors, with the exception of a survey by Farrell and Law (1999) that found LEA governors felt 'somewhat accountable' to their local authorities. Additionally, there is little research on the role of the staff governor; this is likely because this position is relatively new, and because there is also a degree of uncertainty about its future.



There is a modestly wider range of research on several other categories of governors. The category most comprehensively researched has been that of parent governors, since there was considerable interest in the role of parent governors once parents became the most numerous single component of governing bodies after the reforms of the 1980s. Early research into parent governors identified the diverse set of roles that parent governors had carved out for themselves (Brigley and Golby 1989; Golby and Wrigley 1989), while simultaneously noting the difficulties of engaging parent governors in terms of both experience and commitment. Subsequent research raised similar concerns about whether parent governors were able to fulfil these expanded responsibilities (Morgan 1990; McCallan 1993; Munn 1998), as well as whether parent governors were merely ‘window dressing’— as Stanton (1989) argued, ‘Does the Education Department have real respect for parents’ views? Or will [the Education Department] do whatever suits themselves?’ (1989:5). However, much of the research on parent governors has been on a very small scale – often examining only a single governing body. It is therefore difficult to determine the extent to which the findings of the existing research in this area can be generalised, leaving a substantial gap in the current literature. The question of how parent governors are meant to ‘represent’ their ‘constituency’ has also featured in the *non-research* normative literature (Sallis 1994; Thody 1992), as has the question of whether parents are too ‘one school-minded and short term’ (Sallis 1997:17); however, these issues have not yet been fully examined in a more rigorous research context.

Significantly less research has focused on other specific categories of governors. In relation to teacher governors, research in the early 1990s found that teacher governors’ views on non-curricular issues were often discounted by other governing body members, and that teacher governors felt that they were frequently perceived as representing the ‘union line’ (New 1993a; 1993b). Although Deem et al. (1995) addressed the role of teacher governors briefly, the research by New was the only examination of teacher governors until Earley and Creese (2001), who sought to determine how teachers perceived their role and their effectiveness. Combining survey and interview data, Earley and Creese confirmed New’s findings that teacher governors were often uncertain about their role on the governing body, and suggested that teacher governors fell into three broad categories: watchdog (protecting teacher interests), communication link (liaising between teachers and the governing body), and minimalists (fulfilling a largely symbolic role).

Turning to co-opted governors, the only significant research in this area has been on the impact that ‘business’ governors have had on their governing bodies, specifically in terms of their positive contributions to school management and planning. While Opie (1993:177) posed several ‘key questions for industrial governors’ based upon a convenience sample research design, Thody (1994b) conducted the first formal study of business governors. This study examined three companies who encouraged their employees to become governors, and concluded that in addition to bringing specialist knowledge to their schools, ‘the experience of school governorship appears to contribute to the management experience of governor-employees’ (1994:354). Subsequent research into the value of business governors by Punter (2000) and Thody and Punter (2000) employed an experimental design, in which thirty-five schools with governor vacancies were ‘matched’ with willing prospective governors from the business community. After tracking these matches for eighteen months, Thody and Punter reported that the most valuable contributions of business governors were ‘the outsider role adopted by these governors, their objectivity, their strategic non-operational approach to governance and their clear understanding of the distinction between governance and management...’ (2000:196). However, as Punter (2000) observed, such contributions were ‘more obviously and more immediately [apparent] in schools where there were few other governors with business expertise or management experience’ (2000:208).

Finally, there has been very limited research into the unique function and role of the chair of the governing body. While there is a great deal of research on the interaction between the chair and the head, and the chair and the governing body (see Section 2.2.5 below), only recently has research focused primarily on the chair alone (see Grady 2000; Watson 2001). Again, this research has been quite limited in scope, and has reached the generally unsurprising and uncontroversial conclusion that the chair is an important factor in determining how well a governing body operates. As should be clear from the overview above, research into issues pertaining to specific categories of governors generally addresses such issues on a micropolitical level – that is, examining the operation of a specific category of governor within the context of the governing body as a political entity. Although this type of research is important because of the contribution it makes to the understanding of the structure of governing bodies, its application to policy is somewhat less than direct, particularly as the authority of governing bodies is *collective* rather than *individual*.

Having touched upon the micropolitical approach to governance research, it seems appropriate to now explore research into issues facing governing bodies as a whole.

### **2.2.5 Research on Governing Body Relationships**

This fourth category of research concerns the relationship between governing bodies and the other key actors in the school governance equation. Possibly the most well-developed strand of research on governing bodies is that which examines their relationships with heads. Without exception, the research into the governing body-head relationship has described this rapport as ‘crucial,’ ‘critical,’ or ‘fundamental’ to determining the effectiveness of the governing body. In addition to the strong face validity of these claims, the research evidence also provides strong support for this contention (see e.g., Earley 1994a; Scanlon et al. 1999). Underpinning this common conclusion are three main interconnected themes – the negotiation of the boundary between the role of the head and the role of the governing body, the power relationship between the two entities, and the part that information dissemination and acquisition plays in the manifestation of that power relationship.

Turning first to the boundary between the roles of the head and the governing body, the existing research suggests that the absence of a well-defined *statutory* boundary leads to different interpretations when negotiating this boundary in *practice*. Immediately following the ERA, research by Hellawell (1990) suggested that there was substantial underlying tension between heads and governing bodies, with some governing bodies seeking to test the extent of their newfound powers at the expense of the authority of the head. Subsequent researchers agreed that the prevalence of this type of ‘open’ boundary dispute declined as the ERA reforms bedded down, yet disagreed to some extent about the reasons for this decline. In their qualitative study of chairs and heads, Esp and Saran (1995) examined the process of role differentiation in over 20 governing bodies, and argued that the boundary between the head and governing body roles needed to be (and had in practice become) a flexible one, actively negotiated to fit the needs of each individual school. In contrast, Shearn et al. (1995) argued that conflict had decreased simply because heads had moved to take either *de facto* or *de jure* control over issues (such as finance) that might otherwise have been grounds for negotiation.

This leads to the issue of the power relationship between the head and the governing body, since Shearn et al. argued that the early concerns of those who worried that governing bodies would either dominate the head or seek to engage in day-to-day management appeared to be largely unfounded. Instead, as Shearn et al. observed, although the statutory powers of governing bodies increased post-1988, the actual power arrangements remained as they were pre-ERA, and that 'for most schools, the governor's role seems to be very limited' (1995:187). While there is certainly merit in this argument, it also neglects the fact that simply by virtue of their existence, statutorily stronger governing bodies may provide a level of procedural accountability that acts as a check on the actions of heads. As Deem and Brehony (1993) argued, heads and governing bodies have the capacity to control each other's actions, the latter through either the use of statutory powers (including budgetary authority and the right of dismissal) or the threat of use thereof, and the former through the provision of information.

It is on this practical point of 'information provision' that much of the existing research in this area has focused. Most studies agree that, in the absence of any independent and systematic way to obtain substantial information about their schools, governing bodies have been forced to rely on the information provided to them by their heads (see Esp and Saran 1995; Creese and Bradley 1997; Earley 2000). As the main information conduit to the governing body, heads therefore have the considerable ability to influence the perceptions and decisions of governors, leading those like Deem et al. (1995) to argue that if knowledge is indeed power, heads will always retain the advantage over their governing bodies. Some have therefore implied that this control over information could be used malevolently – as Hellowell (1990) argued, 'The most striking general feature to emerge from the heads' comments...was the extent to which they were ready to admit that their reports to governors revealed only 'what the head wants [governors] to know'' (1990:74). Others point out that such a 'pruning' approach is necessary, if only in order to avoid overwhelming governors with non-essential information (Baker et al. 1995). However, while there are open questions as to how this information balance might be redressed, these debates should not overshadow the fundamental finding that trust and support between heads and governing bodies provides the most solid foundation for a strong governing body (Scanlon 1999:62).

The relationship between governing bodies and LEAs has been less extensively researched, possibly due to the perceived decline in importance of the LEAs in the overall education equation. As was noted in the Section 2.1.4, many education researchers have shifted their focus away from the LEA locus and towards either the central governmental or the institutional level (although research on the latter is usually directed towards school staff rather than towards the governing body). After the 1988 ERA, the education system took what Thomas and Levacic (1991) described as ‘two contrasting thrusts – one towards increased centralisation and the other to greater managerial decentralisation...’ (1991:401), a sentiment echoed by numerous other researchers (see Field 1993; Gann 1998; Riley et al. 1999). While some researchers have argued that LEAs retain a level of relevance in the current educational schema (Cordingley and Kogan 1994; Lee and Derrington 2000), in 2000 the then-DfEE confirmed that the era of the powerful LEA was over, remarking in its report *The Role of the Local Authority in School Education* that ‘Education Authorities have precise and *limited* functions [emphasis added]’ (2000a:3). The few pieces of research that do exist on the LEA-governing body relationship reflect this new, more pragmatic, political arrangement, focusing on the value governing bodies place on engaging LEAs as service providers (Radnor et al. 1997; Riley et al. 1999). As Radnor et al. (1997) concluded:

‘With increased organisational autonomy and responsibility, there is a disinclination [for schools] to look to the LEA for strategic educational and professional guidance, and rather [an inclination] to treat the authority as business partners or providers’ (1997:212).

In short, the research evidence suggests that neither governors nor researchers perceive LEAs as commanding either the authority or the relevance that they once did.

Yet beyond the topics of head teacher and LEA relations, there is a surprising dearth of research into the relationships between governing bodies and other major policy actors. For example, very little research focuses on the relationship between governing bodies and teaching staff, despite anecdotal observations from practitioners suggesting the importance of building and maintaining good relationships between staff and governors (see Cleland and Brockman 1990; Sallis 1991a). When mentioned in the research literature at all, the governor-staff relationship is usually discussed in the broader philosophical context of where governance should end and implementation should begin. Only Creese (1993; 1994;

1995; 1998; 1999) has investigated thoroughly the importance of the governor-teacher relationship, and pointed to the importance of this relationship in governing body effectiveness. Similarly, there is no research on the relationship between governing bodies and the pupils whose schooling they govern, and there is very little research on the relationship between governing bodies and the wider school community – geographic, parental, or otherwise. Both omissions are equally surprising, although the latter more so if only because of the numerous normative opinions from those who believe that governing bodies provide an essential bridge between the school and the wider world (see e.g., Glatter 1991; Thody 1992; Naybour 1993).

However, one of the most fundamental yet under-explored relationships is that between governing bodies and central government. Much of the research in this area has focused on central government in the form of the non-ministerial government department Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education), and has examined the liaison role governing bodies play between their schools and Ofsted in implementing post-inspection improvements (Earley 1997; 1998; Gray 1999). Yet other research on the Ofsted process has raised deeper questions about the relationship between governing bodies and Ofsted – and by extension, central government. For example, Creese and Earley (1999) asked whether the inspection process is *of* the governing body or *for* it, while Creese (1999) suggested that Ofsted perceives governing bodies ‘as an instrument of central government, with the governors as part of a system which monitors the school’s compliance with national policy’ (1999:243). This kind of research suggests important broader questions about the dynamics of the governing body/central government relationship, yet there does not seem to have been any significant pursuit of these questions in the literature. With education researchers shifting their focus away from the local authority level, it might be presumed that *increased* attention would be focused on the relationship between the two entities that were the major recipients of the authority relinquished by the LEAs. Certainly, a number of studies have concluded that this redistribution of authority has been unequal in practice, with central government acquiring a larger measure of *de facto* authority than governing bodies (see Deem et al. 1995; Glatter 1999; Glatter 2001). Indeed, as Brehony (1994) argued in his study of governing body accountability, ‘Of all the contradictions surrounding the conduct and place of school governing bodies in the school system, none is greater than that between the rhetoric of local decision making and the reality of expanded state power’ (1994:62).

However, neither these studies nor other existing research have investigated the *dynamics* of the relationship between governing bodies and central government, leaving an opening in the literature surrounding questions such as how governing bodies' perceptions of central government influence this relationship.

## **2.3 RESEARCH ON THE NORMATIVE ROLE OF GOVERNING BODIES AND GOVERNORS**

The next two sections examine the final two categories of governance research: research on the normative role of governing bodies and governors, and research on governing body operation. This section examines the research into the normative question of what the role of the governing body *should* be, while Section 2.4 examines the research into how governing bodies operate in practice.

### **2.3.1 Perspectives on the Normative Role**

While there has been no shortage of popular commentary about the 'best' role for the governing body, there has been substantially less *formal* research into the role that governing bodies should play. A crucial starting point for research in this area is the official view of central government as to the role of the governing body, yet central government has provided only a general tripartite definition of how it perceives the governing body role: that governing bodies should provide a strategic view, act as a critical friend, and ensure accountability (DfE/Ofsted 1995). Unfortunately, this broad definition is not extremely helpful for governors on a practical level. Indeed, the existing research suggests that in the absence of a definitive lead from central government, many of the more practical aspects of the governing body role remain hazy. As MacBeth (1990) argued:

‘Without prior articulation of the purposes of governance, it is impossible to plan the governing body’s functions and priorities in a coherent and cohesive way [and] *ad hoc* governance results...’ (1990:18).

While it is therefore important for the role of the governing body to be well-articulated, doing so in practice has proved more difficult than doing so in theory. For example, there are numerous varying opinions about how governors should approach their responsibilities in practice, although not all of these opinions are mutually exclusive. Wragg (1995) argued that the role of governors should be to ‘influence the general direction of policy and practice, and get the best possible deal

from outside agencies' (1995:3). Elkin (1996) believed that the role should be to provide equal parts policy making and staff support, while Sallis (1999) believed that the role of the governing body is to provide 'a strong lay voice in the running of schools, accountable to parents and the community and seeking accountability from professionals' (1999:10). Even more confusing, there are numerous opinions regarding the *model* that best describes the governing body role. Baginsky et al. (1991), in the first major post-1988 study of governance, found that most governors saw themselves as 'a board of directors, a support, a consultant, [or] a helper' (1991:8), and each of these aspects have been championed by various authors. Some have promoted the 'boards of directors' analogy (Adams 2001), whereas others have suggested that this business-based model is incompatible with the public sector. Such observers prefer a model in which ideally, governing bodies would operate as a sort of democratic town meeting (see Thody 1994a). Further complexity ensues with suggestions by Golby (1992) that *both* of these models are deficient, and that governing bodies should actually approach their responsibilities as though they were jurors – called upon to form a 'political fora with occasional decisive judgements to make' (1992:172).

Yet at their base, these divergent opinions are manifestations of a more fundamental question about the governors' role, posed by Saran and Taylor (1999): 'should governors lead schools *or* should they ensure that schools are effectively led?' (1999:10). The absence of a definitive answer to this question from central government illustrates the crux of a more specific problem: the apparent lack of clarity in the governing body role, which becomes evident when governing bodies attempt to fulfil that role in practice. Existing research suggests that at minimum, most governing bodies have attempted to draw a line between day-to-day management and governance, while also attempting to support their school by acting as what government terms 'critical friends'. Thody (1994a) argued that 'the division needs to be made between what constitutes the proper sphere of the school staff in the day-to-day running of the school and of the governors in the effective oversight of school activities' (1994a:219), and research suggests that most governing bodies have accepted the validity and necessity of this general division in the abstract (Scanlon et al. 1999:21). Yet the literature also suggests that the apparent clarity of this division often dissipates when governors seek to move beyond the generalities and attempt to clarify the *specific* extent of their responsibilities in practice. The literature contains numerous studies that reveal, to varying extents, the desire of



governing bodies to have the practicalities of their tripartite role better delineated by central government (see e.g., Baginsky et al. 1991; Creese and Bradley 1997; Scanlon et al. 1999), yet as Creese has argued, ‘While the responsibilities themselves may be clearly stated, far harder to define is what governors are actually to *do* in carrying them out’ (1995:9).

### **2.3.2 The Normative Views of Governors Themselves**

This situation therefore suggests an interesting question. As has been argued above, central government holds a broad normative position about how governing bodies *should* operate: that they should provide a strategic view, act as critical friends, and ensure accountability. This position has subsequently been elaborated upon at the practical level by the ‘advice literature.’ However, there has been little research into whether the role that central government *expects* governing bodies to play is, in practice, the same normative role that governing bodies (and governors) actually see for *themselves*. This normative issue is therefore slightly – but crucially – different from the operational issue of how *well* governing bodies fulfil their responsibilities. Furthermore, research on the alignment of central government and governing body perceptions regarding the governing body’s role is uneven, having been conducted in some areas of responsibility while being noticeably absent in others. Creese (1998) succinctly highlighted the issues at the two ends of this spectrum, arguing that governing bodies ‘have often failed to address in any meaningful way the main business of their schools – which is teaching and learning – and have rarely discussed strategic issues’ (1998:120). It is to these two issues – curriculum and strategy – that the remainder of this section is devoted.

#### *The Curriculum*

The area in which research *has* been conducted is on the mismatch of perceptions regarding the governing body’s role as a ‘critical friend’ in relation to curricular issues. On one side, central government has stated that governing bodies have the duty to act as supportive yet ‘critical’ friends in order to ensure that the curriculum is implemented effectively by school staff. Researchers have argued that ‘teaching and learning should become the major issue for governing bodies, replacing their current administrative tasks’ (Thody 1999b:40), and that it is vital for governors to have a grasp of curricular matters if they are to understand the broader issues facing their schools (Baginsky et al. 1991; Creese 1995; Downes 1996). Yet despite these pleas,

there is substantial research evidence suggesting that many governing bodies do *not* view involvement in curricular matters – in the active manner suggested by the ‘experts’ – as an important or desirable aspect of their role. Rather, this research suggests that governors seemed content to receive information about the curriculum on a general level, while perceiving any more extensive involvement in curricular matters as a potential encroachment upon an area of professional expertise. To wit, Shearn et al. (1995) found that governing bodies ‘invariably delegate curriculum matters...[since governors] feel they do not have the expertise to become closely involved with decisions in this domain’ (1995:176), and almost identical findings have been reported by Baginsky et al. (1991), Esp and Saran (1995), and Earley (2000). Although these findings may be disheartening, the value of this kind of research is that by identifying such discrepancies in interpretation, such research highlights important issues that require reconciliation.

### *The Strategic View*

However, the other area mentioned by Creese (1998) is one on which research is noticeably absent – the interpretation by governing bodies of central government’s position that governing bodies should ‘take a strategic view.’ In particular, there has been almost no research into a) whether governing bodies believe they *do* have a strategic role to play, and if so, b) how governors themselves define that strategic role. As with the curricular involvement issue, there is no shortage of normative opinions from either central government or governance experts. Both central government and governance experts alike view strategic planning as an important governing body responsibility, as well as one that has acquired increased importance in light of the decline in LEA authority over the past decade. Indeed, the *Education Regulations 2000* clearly assert that setting a strategic framework is the *primary* responsibility of governing bodies. Under the heading ‘The Role of the Governing Body’, the Regulations state:

‘The governing body shall exercise their functions with a view to fulfilling a largely strategic role in the running of the school. The governing body shall establish a strategic framework for the school...monitor and evaluate progress in the school towards achievement of the aims and objectives set, and regularly review the strategic framework for the school in the light of that progress’ (2000:3).

This statutory responsibility for strategic planning is reinforced in the guidance that the then-DfEE and now-DfES provides to governors. For example, the DfES states in its *Guide to the Law* that ‘A good governing body will take a mainly strategic view, through setting suitable aims and objectives, agreeing policies, priorities, plans and targets and monitoring and evaluating results’ (DfES 2001:5/2). Similarly, the main heading of the November 2000 DfEE consultation paper on governing bodies – ‘A More Strategic, Less Operational Role’ (2000b:2) – clearly indicated the desire of central government to steer governing bodies in this direction. Numerous governance experts also concur with this position: Pounce stressed ‘the importance of the governing body being actively involved at the strategic level’ (1996:ii), Creese argued that ‘the strategic role of a governing body [includes]...planning for the future, deciding on policies [and] monitoring progress’ (1998:124), and Holt observed that ‘the essence of governing is to provide thoughtful, strategic leadership that is accountable to the children, their parents, and the wider community’ (2002:27). In addition, the ‘advice literature’ has recently begun including sections on the strategic planning role of governing bodies (see Gann 1998; Dean 2001; Martin and Holt 2002). However, it should be noted that these advice compilations often present strategic planning and development planning as synonymous, rather than as related but distinct. While this juxtaposition is common, nearly all scholars of strategic planning in education (see e.g., Davies and Ellison 1996; Bennett 2000; Fidler 2002) have argued strongly for distinguishing between strategic planning (focused on longer-term policy creation), and development planning (focused on short-term policy implementation).

In any event, researchers during the early to mid- 1990s were optimistic that, as with the issue of curricular involvement, research into governors’ own perceptions of their strategic responsibilities would soon be forthcoming. As Corrick (1996) opined:

‘[R]esearch should begin to indicate whether governing bodies do in fact define their tasks in such [strategic] terms, whether such notions are the currency of their discussions, [and] whether they are in any real sense the parameters against which they assess their own work’ (1996:145).

Yet this research has not transpired. While there *have* been numerous research studies on perceptions of strategic leadership in education, almost all of them focus exclusively on the role of the head (see e.g., Busher and Saran 1994; Lawlor and Sills 1999; Harris 2000; Day et al. 2001). Only two pieces of research give even

minimal attention to this question, and even then only in the context of broader issues. The case studies conducted by Scanlon et al. (1999) found that governors *agreed* that their role included strategic planning, but a closer analysis of this work indicates that the respondents were actually referring to their short-term school *development* planning processes as strategic planning. Otherwise, the only research in this area comes from Earley et al. (2002), whose broader study on school leadership focused briefly on the strategic role of governing bodies, and suggested that the governing body ‘was not generally seen as playing a leadership role in strategic planning’ (2002:7).

Given the obvious importance that central government has placed on the governing body’s strategic role, it therefore appeared that there was an opportunity for further research that would build upon these preliminary findings. Furthermore, the existing literature does not contain any research on how governors themselves *define* ‘strategic planning’. Given the amorphous nature of the term and the numerous competing definitions in the strategic planning literature, it seemed reasonable to suggest that if governing bodies *did* perceive their role as incorporating strategic planning, a greater understanding of how governors ‘operationalised’ this term would be of significant public policy importance. For methodological reasons outlined in Chapter Three, it was decided to limit the scope of this research to inner London state secondary schools. As such, these openings in the literature formed the basis for the first research question of this thesis:

Do governors in inner London state secondary schools view their role as a strategic one, and if so, how do they themselves define strategic planning?

## **2.4 RESEARCH ON GOVERNING BODY OPERATION**

The final category of governing body research addresses operational issues: the ways in which governing bodies actually work. This particular category appears to hold substantial potential for new contributions, since while the structure and organisation of the governing body has been fairly stable for over a decade, the responsibilities of governing bodies have continued to expand. As Creese and Earley (1999) observed, ‘the demands made upon schools and their governing bodies will not decrease – indeed they will almost certainly increase! Only those governing bodies that are well-organised and well-led are likely to be able to meet the new challenges’ (1999:112). The existing research on governing body operation can be loosely

grouped into three sub-areas: organisation, training, and effectiveness. As the issues regarding the governing body's strategic role are best situated in the third of these sub-areas, the first two areas will be addressed briefly in section 2.4.1. Section 2.4.2 will then provide a general overview of the research into governing body effectiveness, and will argue that research into the 'planning' component of effectiveness in relation to governing bodies can be divided into 'development planning' (section 2.4.3) and 'strategic planning' (section 2.4.4.), the latter of which is examined extensively. Finally, the limited existing research into the reasons for the absence of governing body strategic planning will be addressed in section 2.4.5.

### **2.4.1 Organisation and Training**

Research into how governing body organisation affected its operation was most substantial during the first few years following the ERA. Given the new responsibilities and composition of governing bodies, such research sought to determine whether governing bodies were finding it necessary to meet more frequently, ascertain how the meetings themselves were being run, and answer other administrative questions (see e.g., Baginsky et al. 1991; Curtis 1994). Additionally, the work of Deem et al. (1995) provided a wealth of micro-level information on how governing bodies organised themselves during the early 1990s, and how their organisational decisions influenced their operation. Yet the existing research suggests that after this initial post-ERA period of change, most secondary school governing bodies adopted a relatively common organisational format – holding several meetings per term (including those of committees), establishing a set of committees, and formalising procedures for conducting their meetings (Earley 1994a; Scanlon et al. 1999). Given this state of affairs, any additional research on governing body organisation would likely be most valuable in the context of its influence on governing body *effectiveness*. This issue will be discussed in Section 2.4.2.

The second operational issue, in the sense that it is intended to provide governors with the skills and perspectives necessary to fulfil their responsibilities in practice, is that of governor training. Research into governor training has led to two somewhat contradictory conclusions; that while governors apparently desire increased and more comprehensive training, many governors do not actually participate in the training that is on offer. First, there is substantial evidence that governors often feel that they do not have a sufficient grasp of the issues they are being required to address, a

finding that has led to calls for better training (e.g., Schlechte 1995; Jones 1998; Phillips 2002). Furthermore, while governors may feel overwhelmed by the breadth of their responsibilities, there is also evidence that the quality of training has improved since the early 1990s (Scanlon et al. 1999; Thody 1999a). Yet despite governors' apparent desire for training, there is less agreement on whether training actually achieves its goals. The first obstacle is attendance; as Scanlon et al. (1999) pointed out, only 51 per cent of non-chair governors in their study actually attended formal training after induction. Indeed, other research has shown that governors often *decline* to engage in the training that is on offer. As Earley (1994b) observed:

‘The take-up [of training] amongst the case study governing bodies was patchy. Some governors, having attended training courses ‘in the early days’ no longer felt they needed or had the time for further course attendance, whereas others simply refused to be trained, regarding participation in governing body meetings or ‘on-the-job’ training as sufficient’ (1994b:159).

Yet the research indicates further discrepancies even amongst those governors who *do* attend training. For example, both Earley (1994a) and Scanlon et al. (1999) found that the majority of governors who attend such training courses find them helpful, while others, like Evans (1998), have found that ‘chairs were critical of the largely irrelevant content of the courses they had attended and described a creeping disillusionment with training’ (1998:11). Although few researchers have gone as far as to argue that training has an *adverse* impact on governors who attend (Burt 1991; Waring 1992), it is evident that there are still issues surrounding training that merit additional research. However, it is also important to put these issues into perspective, as the issue of training is arguably less central to the understanding of governing bodies than is the issue of how well governing bodies perform their responsibilities. It is this issue, therefore, to which this review now turns.

#### **2.4.2 Examining Effectiveness**

The research into how well governing bodies perform their responsibilities has generally been categorised under the heading of ‘effectiveness,’ although research into this issue has been somewhat limited to date. For example, while Ofsted (2002) conducted research on the *advantages* of an effective governing body, (finding that there was a high correlation between ‘effective’ governing bodies and successful schools), Ofsted also admitted that ‘it is not possible to prove that good governance *leads* to good schools, as the cause and effect evidence is impossible to isolate

[emphasis added]' (2002:11). One reason for the limited amount of research on governing body effectiveness may be the significant emphasis that has been placed upon defining the term 'effectiveness' itself. As is evident from the existing literature, the term is somewhat ambiguous, as the standards of effectiveness – and the components by which it is measured – vary depending on the researcher. In general, as Creese and Earley (1999) observed, 'there has been much less research into what constitutes an effective governing body than there has been into the effectiveness of schools' (1999:7). For example, while Baginsky et al. (1991) sought to define the principles behind 'effective governance', their work focused on governing bodies during the period of substantial change immediately following the ERA. Earley (1994a) provided the first perspective on governing bodies after their adaptation to the 'new' system, finding that although governors felt that effectiveness was 'largely a matter of good fortune' (1994a:6), effective governing bodies usually shared tasks well, offered commitment, and had complementary skills, among other attributes. However, as Corrick (1996) pointed out, there is no reference by the respondents in Earley's work to *policy making* as a component of governing body effectiveness. Creese (1995) remedied this omission by including strategic planning in his list of effectiveness criteria (indeed, calling it 'the major activity of the governing body' (1995:12)), a factor to which this review will turn in Section 2.4.4. More recently, Scanlon et al. (1999) proposed several broader definition of effectiveness, including 'whether or not the governing body is actually performing the functions as outlined by recent legislation and in official publications' (1999:13). One such official publication is the most recent Ofsted school inspection framework (Ofsted 2003a), which provides yet *another* variation by requiring inspectors to evaluate effective governance in terms of – amongst other criteria – 'the extent to which the governing body helps shape the vision and direction of the school' (2003a:41).

However the limited empirical research into governing body operational effectiveness has found that governors generally believe that they *are* operating effectively. Indeed, Scanlon et al. found that 78 per cent of heads, 85 per cent of governors and 94 per cent of chairs felt that their governing bodies were either 'effective' or 'very effective' (1999:29). Yet the value of such findings is somewhat muted, since as is evident from the variety of definitions provided above, the components of 'effectiveness' can vary considerably. Although Earley (1994a) provided a starting point by identifying the *factors* that governors and heads believed

constituted an effective governing body, it is somewhat difficult to determine from the existing research whether governors believe that their governing bodies are *uniformly* effective, or whether they believe their governing bodies are effective simply in engaging in a smaller number of self-defined *components* of effectiveness (such as good teamwork and strong delegation). As Earley (1994a) observed, there are 'basic or 'bottom line' factors [necessary] for governing bodies to achieve minimal effectiveness,' including conduct of meetings, clerking, regular attendance (1994a:105); it should therefore be apparent that competence in these basic factors should in no way imply effectiveness in the broader sense. In particular, there has been little specific research into the 'planning' component of governing body effectiveness, a factor that forms part of the effectiveness *definitions* of both Creese (1995) and Scanlon et al. (1999). It is to this particular issue that this review now turns.

### **2.4.3 Governing Bodies and Development Planning**

Two main types of planning – development planning and strategic planning – need to be distinguished from one another. As was noted in Section 2.3.2, scholars agree that in general, development planning should be concerned with short-term planning, while 'by contrast, strategic planning is concerned with the medium- and long term future of the school...' (Creese and Earley 1999:40). In relation to governing bodies, research into involvement in development planning is the better developed of the two. This is likely because the widespread emphasis on the value of school development planning immediately following the ERA (see Bromley Education Department 1988; Smetherham 1989; Hargreaves 1991) was sustained and institutionalised during the 1990s, while the focus on strategic planning has been comparatively both less consistent and more recent (Levacic and Glover 1998).

While most researchers now agree that 'a well thought out and agreed school development plan is at the heart of the work of every effective school' (Creese 1995:62), research has demonstrated that governor involvement in the development planning process has often been both varied (Creese and Bradley 1997) and somewhat controversial (Cuckle et al. 1998). Both of these aspects are likely to be attributable to the fact that in practice, the school development plan is often a short-term implementation plan, usually designed to cover one academic year (see e.g., Davies and Ellison 1996; Fidler 2002). While early post-ERA commentators argued that it was essential for governors to be involved in the development planning



process (Glover 1990; Baker 1991), it was also acknowledged that school staff should have a strong role in the design of the plan itself. Yet despite this collaborative ideal, Creese and Bradley (1997) suggested that governor involvement in the development planning process was often limited by governors' perception that school staff had both more knowledge about the issues that such a plan should address, and more time to devote to its design. As Cuckle et al. (1998) observed, 'far from helping provide an overview of what was required for improving the school, the most that was said in several schools by governors and headteachers alike was that governors 'could suggest items if they wanted'' (1998:30). At its extreme, governing body involvement in the development planning process has been limited to nominal approval of the finished document, thereby clearly placing governing bodies 'on the margins of the development planning process' (Martin and Bullock 1997:3).

However, the other end of the governor involvement spectrum yields similarly unsatisfactory results. Cuckle et al. (1998) suggested that there is often significant tension surrounding the active involvement of the governing body in the development planning process, a tension that they attribute to staff concerns about micromanagement. Similarly, Scanlon et al. (1999) found that when asked about a wide variety of governing body responsibilities, the highest level of head-governor *disagreement* was in regards to the statement 'the governing body works with staff in an on-going monitoring and evaluation of the development plan' (1999:23). Given that governing bodies are, in theory, supposed to set the policies while the school staff are supposed implement them, the existing research suggests that conflict often ensues when governor involvement in the development planning process is perceived by staff as an incursion into issues of implementation.

Therefore, despite the nominal importance of governing bodies in determining school policies, many observers felt that neither of the above options regarding the relationship between governing bodies and the planning process appeared to be even vaguely ideal. On one hand, too little involvement by governors suggested an abdication of responsibility, while on the other hand, too much involvement suggested meddling. Since some researchers have implied that this dilemma might stem partly from the perception that the development plan was the *only* lever by which governors could influence school policy (e.g., Glover 1997), others (e.g., Davies and Ellison 1990) have suggested that while governing bodies still require an

*understanding* of the school development plan, a more suitable responsibility for governing bodies might be in longer-term strategic planning. These researchers believe that this approach would permit governors to engage in policy making whilst largely avoiding conflicts over issues of implementation. This review therefore turns to strategic planning, the issue which is at the very centre of this thesis.

#### **2.4.4 Governing Bodies and Strategic Planning**

The concept of strategic planning has been discussed in the educational context for a number of years, although the interest in and emphasis on strategic planning in education has increased substantially since the mid-1990s. This section begins by outlining the evolution and definition of strategic planning in the education literature, and then moves to an evaluation of the existing research into how governing bodies have approached their strategic planning responsibilities.

##### *Defining Strategic Planning*

While research into the nature and value of strategic planning in business had been conducted since the mid-1960s (see e.g., Ansoff 1965; Steiner 1979), it was not until the mid-1980s that the business community demonstrated a sustained and substantial interest in research that proposed systematic approaches for improving business strategic planning (see e.g., Johnson and Scholes 1984; Minzberg and Waters 1985; Quinn et al. 1988). It was from this business-based research into issues of strategic planning that interest in strategic planning arose in the education community, beginning in the early 1990s. Before examining this literature, it should be noted that achieving consensus on a precise definition of strategic planning within the educational context has always been elusive. Writing in 1996, Fidler noted that ‘strategy is...beginning to appear in the education management literature, but often as a word which is not clearly defined and [which] appears to [be] little more than a general reference to the longer term’ (1996:13). This semantic ambiguity still remains quite problematic; writing in 2003, Davies and Davies lamented that ‘there is not always a common understanding of what strategy and strategic planning [means] in schools’ (2003:79).

Yet initially, the use of the term ‘strategic planning’ in education was largely confined to issues pertaining to the long-term management of finance. This limitation is understandable, as much of the existing literature on and thinking about

strategic planning in the early 1990s was focused on the financial needs of businesses. For example, in 1990 Davies and Ellison made one of the first references to strategic planning in the education context, arguing that ‘senior managers and governors have to view immediate financial decisions within a longer time frame’ (1990:27). Similarly, Murgatroyd (1991) sought to explore the role of strategy in what he termed ‘school wide quality improvement’ (1991:7), outlining potential approaches to strategic planning that schools might pursue. However, Murgatroyd’s aim in presenting these four options was also fiscally-based, as he perceived strategic planning primarily as a way to eliminate waste and duplication, make better use of scarce resources, and ensure systematic management of costs (1991:18).

By the mid-1990s, as interest in the education community about strategic planning was beginning to increase, the traditional conception of strategic planning as a ‘linear process’ was fading from acceptability. The most prominent critic of this traditional model was Minzberg (1994), who (based upon his observations of the business world) proposed that an ‘emergent’ model of strategic planning – based on flexibility and an emphasis on ‘strategy’ over ‘planning’ – was more valuable and realistic than was the traditional linear model (whose rigid determinism over time often led to conflicts with practical realities). While adapting Minzberg’s new approach for use in educational strategic planning, education researchers further suggested that the concept of strategic planning should be applied not simply to school financial management, but to other aspects of school management as well. For example, Hargreaves (1995) drew upon Minzberg’s ‘emergent’ model in order to argue that strategic planning in education was most effective when it was accompanied by both appropriate monitoring schemes *and* clearly-defined agreements about who was responsible for making adjustments to the strategy (1995:221). In other words, Hargreaves was arguing that strategic planning in education required flexibility, not rigidity.

Similarly, Fidler (1996) adhered strongly to Minzberg’s model in constructing his own definition of strategic planning for school improvement, incorporating the ideas of Johnson and Scholes (1993) in order to construct a whole-school definition of strategic planning: that such planning should involve 1) the long term, 2) the future of the whole school in an integrated way, 3) taking account of future trends in the world outside the school, and 4) taking account of its present, and likely future, resources (1996:1). The importance of Fidler’s definition was that it provided one of

the first education-specific strategic planning models, as up until this point many educationalists were simply borrowing definitions and models that had been designed for business needs. Furthermore, Fidler's model provided the first education-specific model that a) applied to more than the financial planning sphere, and b) proposed planning on a timeframe that exceeded that of the standard School Development Plan. It should also be noted that the increasing interest in educational strategic planning was not limited to schools, but extended to central government as well. As such, schools engaging in strategic planning (or simply those who sought to achieve good inspection results!) needed to accommodate central government's own 'definition' of strategic planning, which Glover et al. (1996) suggested was 'highly rational and technicist':

'Rational in regarding good practice as the informed selection of the best allocation of resources...[and] technicist in expecting a complex and analytical decision making process, involving the schools' stakeholders, which is formally documented' (1996:136).

More recent work from the late 1990s sought to further identify and define the key components of educational strategic planning in this new broad-based and non-linear world. For example, Knight (1997) argued that strategic planning should be subdivided into 'strategic positioning' and 'systems analysis', with the former examining a school's current internal and external contexts, and the latter being an examination of the school's objectives and means of attaining them (1997:13). Alternatively, Middlewood (1998) sought to define strategic planning as an integral sub-component (along with a concept he termed 'strategic thinking') of a *broader* approach labelled 'strategic management.' Under Middlewood's model, strategic planning draws upon strategic thinking in order to create a blueprint for strategic management; for Middlewood, effective strategic planning consists of enabling adaptation in changing circumstances, 'environmental scanning', and formulating generic strategies (1998:11).

Yet the most substantial and sustained research on strategic planning in education has come from Davies and Ellison; in their 1998 study, Davies and Ellison sought to create a more subtle sub-division of the term 'strategic planning' than had Knight (1997), arguing that a tripartite model of 'futures perspectives', 'strategic intent', and 'operational target setting' was more precise and robust than was the single term 'strategic planning' (1998:465). Davies and Davies (2003) then further clarified this

tripartite model, echoing Middlewood in stating that ‘strategic planning and strategic thinking are not the same’ (2003:79). In elaborating upon the ‘Davies’ model, Davies and Ellison (2003) presented their own set of four components of what they believe constitutes ‘strategy’: that it deals with 1) the medium to longer term, 2) fundamental or important key issues, 3) broad aggregated data, and 4) acts as a template against which to benchmark current activity (2003:36). In summary, although the existing literature contains numerous semantic differences about precisely what is meant by the phrase ‘strategic planning’, the practical definitions of the term have been largely similar: emphasising the long-term nature of strategic planning and the importance of focusing such planning on key issues facing the whole school. Indeed, as will be seen in Chapter 3, this thesis drew upon these similarities in creating the definition of strategic planning used in the quantitative survey: ‘future planning beyond the current and next school year’.

### *Governing Bodies and Strategic Planning*

Having outlined the ways in which strategic planning has been perceived in the existing education literature, this review now turns to the relationship between governing bodies and strategic planning. While Sallis argued as early as 1993 that ‘The main thing wrong with governing bodies...is that their focus is on the *past* rather than the *future*’ (1993:29), it is only relatively recently that any substantial attention has been paid to the concept of strategic planning as a *governing body* responsibility. As was noted in Section 2.2.5, governing bodies have been charged by central government with a primarily strategic role, and most observers believe that this role is one for which governing bodies are well suited. For example, Fidler (1996) built upon the proposition that governors needed to ‘provide a strategic view’ (DfE/Ofsted 1995), by arguing that that the role of the governing body in strategy formation ‘need[s] to be considered’ (1996:79). Gann (1998) expanded upon this observation, urging governors to engage in what he termed ‘strategic governance,’ defined as ‘planning, monitoring, and evaluating’. In Gann’s schema, ‘planning’ consisted of setting the aims and objectives of the schools, and then devising and overseeing policies and procedures (1998:46). More recently, Martin and Holt (2002) observed that ‘creating strategy is the essence of the governing body’s role’ (2002:17), and Earley (2003) argued that ‘for governing bodies to become more effective...the[ir] role clearly needs to give greater emphasis to strategy...’ (2003:364).

In light of these arguments that governing bodies *should* engage in strategic planning, there have been several attempts to provide governors with practical assistance in achieving this goal. For example, Burt (2001) has championed the use of an self-evaluative tool for governing bodies called the 'Index of Governance,' in which strategic planning is one of four key components of effective school governance (the others being ensuring progress, real partnership, and sound practice). Burt's model provides a template against which governing bodies can measure how well their current strategic planning processes shape a clear direction, decide a strategy for improvement, have clear documentation, ensure timely decisions, and allow governors to fulfil their statutory responsibilities (2001:2). Alternatively, Walters and Richardson (1999) have proposed a planning model based on Carver (1990) specifically designed for governing bodies (see section 2.2.2), in which governing bodies 'govern through policy' by setting the broad policy aims, while allowing staff to decide how those policies can be best implemented.

Unfortunately, the limited existing research into the *actual* involvement of governing bodies in strategic planning suggests that in practice, governing bodies are not embracing this responsibility. In the spring of 1998, Ofsted asked its inspectors to give particular attention to how well governing bodies fulfilled their strategic role; three quarters of governing bodies inspected were rated satisfactory or better (Creese and Earley 1999:7). However, the Chief Inspector remained critical of the minimal involvement of governing bodies in strategic planning (Ofsted 1999), and as Adams (2001) has argued, despite central government's position, 'the vast majority of work that governing bodies become involved in would in no sense be described as 'strategic'' (2001:35). For example, researchers have pointed out that making the leap from development planning to strategic planning requires acknowledging that *strategic* planning and *development* planning are not synonymous (see e.g., Fidler 1998; Middlewood 1998), yet as Davies and Ellison (1998) argued, 'what [many] schools have, of late, been calling strategic plans are, in fact, detailed operational plans' (1998:471). This was confirmed by the survey research on governing bodies of Scanlon et al. (1999).

Similarly, Earley (1994a) found that strategic planning was one of the primary areas in which heads sought *more* governing body involvement (1994:40), while Giles (1995) found a 'growing concern at the lack of strategic planning taking place in

what is now a relatively experience decentralised school system' (1995:5). However, research conducted by Giles three years later suggested that little had changed in the interim; governing body planning was still '*ad hoc* and incremental, with...schools reacting to change rather than assuming the strategic responsibility for planning...' (1998:409). While Giles' work was based on a convenience sample (which may raise questions about the validity of the results), her general conclusion is also supported by Creese (1998), who drew on the preliminary large-scale data of Scanlon et al. (1999) in one of the only analyses to specifically examine governing bodies and strategic planning. As Creese concluded, 'There is a clear expectation that governors will be involved in school improvement and yet, at present, many are not' (1998:30).

This apparent paradox, of governing bodies having a strategic planning role but failing to exercise it, leads to the second research question. The first research question, noted in Section 2.3.2, seeks to determine whether governors themselves view their role as a strategic one. The second research question seeks to expand upon the first and determine whether these findings from the literature – that governing bodies often fail to engage in strategic planning – are applicable to the specific circumstances of this project. This second question therefore asks:

Is the lack of strategic planning implied by the existing literature actually evident in the governing bodies of inner London state secondary schools?

#### **2.4.5 Reasons for the Lack of Strategic Planning**

One final interrogation of the existing literature, however, reveals what appears to be an important question that has only been addressed in passing: given the apparent relative lack of strategic planning by governing bodies, *why is this the case?* The answer cannot be found in the advice literature, despite the fact (noted above) that recent advice literature has increased its coverage of strategic planning issues. Indeed, the advice literature frequently takes a pragmatic approach, implying that many of the circumstances in which governing bodies currently find themselves cannot be substantially changed. As such, this literature often limits itself to providing governing bodies with valuable 'stop-gap' advice for correcting the *symptoms* of poor strategic planning – such as suggesting better teamwork, more efficient meetings, and improved procedures for school visits – rather than investigating potential systemic causes. As Ozga (1992) argued:

“‘How to’ texts create a false and unreliable impression that, if the correct procedures are followed, education is manageable. This both exaggerates the impact of tidy systems, and distracts managers from their obligation to establish direction and purpose as a preliminary to efficient system operation’ (1992:279).

Turning then to the research literature, there has been limited work on the reasons for why governing bodies may not operate effectively in *general*. Both Earley (1994a) and Scanlon et al. (1999) asked governors about the factors preventing governor and governing body effectiveness; this query elicited a wide range of responses – from a lack of time, to concerns over the adequacy of governor knowledge, to complaints about their heavy workload. However, in both of these studies, these findings were quantified from responses to an open-ended qualitative survey question. While this type of research provides an excellent indication of the factors preventing effectiveness, this type of research does have three drawbacks. First, it does not offer (nor does it claim to provide) a systematic or methodologically rigorous attempt to identify such factors. Second, it does not offer an assessment of the overall impact of these factors (although it does provide an indication of the *relative* impact of factors in relation to one another). Third, this research was limited to examining the broader question of governing body ‘effectiveness,’ rather than the more specific question of strategic planning. While it may be true that some of the factors identified by Earley and Scanlon *also* explain the absence of strategic planning, their research neither claims nor attempts to do so. The only other research-based attempt to identify factors inhibiting governing body strategic planning is that of Earley et al. (2002), which, as was noted in Section 2.3.2, was part of a broader study on school leadership that focused briefly on the strategic role of governing bodies. Earley et al. suggested that governing body leadership was limited by ‘the extent to which it depends on the head and leadership team for information; the restricted time governors can spend in the school; and their lack of ‘professional’ knowledge’ (2002:43), all of which appear to be valid criticisms. However, these findings are somewhat limited in their scope, as they concentrate on institutional-level issues to the exclusion of potential external factors that may impede governing body strategic planning.

There have been a few additional conjectures about reasons why governing bodies have not engaged in strategic planning, yet such arguments are derived from interpretations of the empirical research outlined immediately above. Corrick (1996) drew upon Earley (1994a) to suggest four factors that inhibited governing body



effectiveness: 'the hostility of teachers and educationalists; the inappropriateness of most governor training; the inherent deference of governors; and the difficulty of the task given to them' (1996:155). While a valuable list, these factors refer only to general governing body effectiveness and not to strategic planning in particular; additionally, Corrick's analysis is somewhat uneven, alluding to the 'difficulty' of governors' task while providing neither a definition of nor supporting evidence for this claim. As Gann (1998) observed, while Corrick argued that 'routine and relatively minor matters are evidently allowed to take precedence' (1996:149) in governing body operations, Corrick also appeared to hold an overly broad definition of 'minor' matters – including resources, staff appointments, the school development plan, curriculum issues, staffing structure, and – most notably for the context of this research – 'aims and objectives of the school.' As such, although Corrick contributed valuable general observations about effectiveness, he provided no new primary research evidence and leaves several major issues less than fully explored.

The only other piece of applied research comes from Creese (1998), who, as noted in Section 2.4.4, drew on the *preliminary* data of Scanlon et al. (1999) in analysing governing bodies and their specific role in strategic planning. Although the main thrust of this analysis was to highlight the important role of governing bodies in strategic planning, Creese suggested that the three main factors affecting governing body effectiveness in strategic planning were governor information, governor recruitment, and time. Creese's argument is more closely reasoned than is Corrick's, yet the limited number of factors (particularly in relation to the broader list of factors outlined in by the research of Scanlon et al. (1999)) suggests that there is room for a broader exploration of these factors than such a brief outline could reasonably be expected to provide.

This state of the existing literature suggests a number of opportunities for further research, for the following reasons. First, the existing research has identified a number of concerns, including the time governors need to spend (Deem et al. 1995; Creese and Bradley 1997; NAGM 2001), the amount of information governors receive (Brehony 1992; Mahoney and Riley 1996; Creese 1999), the complexity of the financing system (Marren and Levacic 1994), and the uneven commitment of governors (Earley 1994a; Sallis 2001). However, these research studies have generally sought to *identify passive complaints*, rather than to determine whether (or

how) these (or other) situations *create active barriers* to governing bodies becoming more engaged in strategic planning. Second, as was noted earlier, none of these particular studies were designed to focus specifically on strategic planning. As such, the research into barriers to governing body strategic planning has been remarkably *ad hoc*, with no attempt to collect research evidence specifically related to strategic planning in any systematic or heuristic manner. Finally, existing research on governing body strategic planning has tended to focus solely upon institutional-level factors. However, research on a single level is of little use to governing bodies in the real world, who are operating at the ‘sharp end’ of the system and who, as such, interact not only the institutional level but other levels as well. As was noted in Section 2.2.5, there has been little research into the relationship between central government and governing bodies, and particularly on the issue of strategic planning.

Given this state of the existing literature, there therefore appeared to be value in research that would build on the contributions of Earley, Scanlon et al., Creese, and Corrick, and offer a systematic and heuristic approach to identifying and interpreting the *barriers* that make governing bodies *less* effective in terms of their strategic planning. The underlying rationale for this approach is that identifying and eliminating these structural barriers can be just as valuable as proposing short-term solutions for circumventing them, and that a systemic understanding of these barriers is preferable to the existing *ad hoc* approach. As such, the third main research questions for this thesis, building upon the previous two questions, is:

If the lack of strategic planning implied by the existing literature is actually evident in the governing bodies of inner London state secondary schools, why is this the case?

## **2.5 POLICY RELEVANCE AND BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION**

Finally, in the event that the first three research questions prove answerable, a fourth and final research question is proposed:

Can it be demonstrated that the identification of these strategic planning barriers has practical policy relevance and importance?

If the strategic planning barriers identified via the first three questions are merely theoretical or abstract, and do not adequately or accurately reflect the main reasons for the absence of governing body strategic planning on real policy issues, the

practical value in identifying such barriers is clearly reduced. The purpose of posing this final question is therefore to address two issues. First, whether the systematic application of these barriers in the context of a policy issue of practical importance *does* provide a robust explanation of the reasons for the absence of governing body strategic planning on that substantive policy issue. Second, whether the systematic application of these barriers can provide a valuable heuristic analytical tool for understanding the absence of governing body strategic planning on *other* substantive policy issues, which in turn could offer policy makers new perspectives on how to better remedy such absences.

Demonstrating the practical policy relevance of these barriers requires applying them in a policy context where governing body strategic planning is desirable yet currently absent. The policy context chosen for this purpose is ‘business involvement in education,’ and the remainder of this chapter outlines the history of this issue and presents the literature that explains its relevance to the strategic planning question. Section 2.5.1 provides a history of business involvement in education, followed by an examination of the renewed interest in this issue by both the previous Conservative government (Section 2.5.2) and current Labour government (Section 2.5.3). Finally, Section 2.5.4 will turn to the limited literature regarding the role of the governing body in relation to business involvement. It will be argued that the state of this literature indicates first, the suitability of business involvement as a lens through which the applicability of the strategic planning barriers can be examined, and second, the value of further research in this field.

### **2.5.1 A Brief History of Business Involvement in Education**

There has been business and industrial involvement in English education for many years, from the guild schools of the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the Mechanics Institutes of the 19<sup>th</sup>, the latter of whom used apprenticeships to promote ‘links between practical training and extended education for young workers’ (Miller 1995:35). However, business involvement in the state education system has historically been accompanied by a mutual antipathy towards such connections – both on the part of businesses and on the part of educational institutions. Many historians trace this suspicion to the ambivalent attitudes of the traditional Victorian social and intellectual elite (see Reeder 1979; Sanderson 1999:40-54). On one hand, while most of the Victorian elite acknowledged the importance of the Industrial Revolution

in maintaining the status and pre-eminence of Britain on the world stage, these same elite often viewed industry and business with a level of aristocratic disdain. In order to maintain and perpetuate the class boundary that separated the historically aristocratic from those whose wealth had been acquired through business and industry, these aristocratic elite sought refuge in their elite halls of learning. As Watts (1983) argued, 'the elite educational institutions from the Victorian era tended to propagate a particular academic and cultural heritage, which was associated with a gentlemanly disdain for vocational application and particularly for industrial manufacture' (1983:3).

Yet on the other hand, the Victorian elite were also great social reformers. From the decision in 1839 by Lord John Russell to arrange for a Committee of the Privy Council to 'distribute grants for education' (Armstrong 1964:113) to the eventual creation of the system of universal state-funded schooling, these reformers sought to bring wholesale reform to the education system. However, these reformers also imbued this new system the same anti-industrial ethos that had shaped their own public school education (Wiener 1981:18-24). By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, industry began to demand that the education system recognise the realities of the post-schooling employment that most working-class schoolchildren were facing (Roderick and Stephens 1981:243). Similar sentiments were expressed by various governmental education committees during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, whose reports indicate that the divide between schools, government, and industry was neither as intractable nor as longstanding as some contemporary observers might now believe. In 1926, the government's Hadow Report on the state of compulsory schooling made the following observation concerning education-industry links:

'A number of headteachers have established relations with local employers and have attained useful results thereby. We think, however, that in general, there has not been sufficient contact between teachers and employers and that in future it would be desirable for Headteachers to obtain the views of local employers and employees before giving any trend or bias, particularly of an industrial character, to the curriculum...' (1926:117).

Two years later, the Malcolm Committee on Education and Industry (1928), commissioned to examine increasing complaints about the literacy standards of British students, made similar observations. The committee noted that 'industry must define their needs, and no other body can do it for them; but if such definition is

to be of any use, it should be based on a reasonably full and sympathetic knowledge of what schools are doing, and trying to do' (1928:10). However, although these reports suggest that there was room for negotiation and cooperation between the two sides, the unification of the education system under the 1944 Education Act and the growing emphasis on the professionalism and unionisation of teachers led to increased animosity between industrialists and educationalists. As was noted in Section 2.1.2, the 1944 Education Act consolidated state dominance over the education system, and in doing so largely excluded business and industry from a role in the state's new educational framework. Yet by decreasing the role of industry in the state educational framework, central government also freed industry from assuming any responsibility for educational outcomes. Without any responsibility or obligation to help *improve* educational standards, business and industry now felt free to criticise inadequacies in the state-run system, particularly on issues of work preparedness and training. If 'interdependence and mutual benefit form the basis of any partnership between business and education' (Marsden and Priestland 1989:1), the retrenchment of the two sides in mutual suspicion following the 1944 Education Act fostered a substantial break in any fledgling cooperation that may have existed.

This animosity became more pronounced through the 1960s and 1970s, with the growing debate about whether educational standards were declining. The Plowden Report (1967) on primary education was the first government report to voice concern over the condition of the state education system, while pointing to increased child-centred teaching and greater parental involvement as the solutions. In response, the Black Papers on Education (Cox and Dyson 1971), a series of Conservative monographs (supported by many industrialists) decried the failing state of the education system and laid the blame on incompetent teachers and education professionals (Male 1974:168). This debate over standards coincided with the increasing unease about the value of the new 'comprehensive' secondary system, which was implemented partly in order to remedy the academic-vocational divide that some felt characterised the previous system of grammar, technical, and secondary modern schools (Kerckhoff et al. 1996:266-73). This increased concern over the inadequacy of the school system was also accompanied by a precipitous decline in economic prosperity; although the latter was accelerated by the oil crises of the 1970s, the public began to link the poor economy with poor educational standards. As a result, by the early 1970s the public was becoming increasingly

worried that Britain was roiled in a 'low skills equilibrium, in which the majority of enterprises staffed by poorly trained managers and workers produce low quality goods and services' (Finegold and Soskice 1990:18).

The first concerted attempt to address this downward spiral came in Prime Minister James Callaghan's Ruskin College speech in 1976, in which he opened the 'Great Debate' on education. Tellingly, a major focus of this address was on the divide between schools and industry, as Callaghan proclaimed:

'I have been concerned to find that many of our best trained students...have no desire to join industry. Their preferences are to stay in academic life or to find their way into the Civil Service.... [As such,] there is the need to improve relations between industry and education' (1976:10-11, 19).

The Ruskin College speech was followed by the Green Paper on Education in Schools (1976), which, among other recommendations, formalised this desire for better links between education and industry. Yet while the Ruskin Speech and the Green Paper brought the connection between industry and education into the spotlight once more, there had never been a complete exclusion of business from education. For example, British Petroleum had sponsored a series of 'school links' since the 1960s, in which 'link officers' and 'link teachers' collaborated to provide work shadowing and curricular development for secondary school students (Marsden 1989; 1991). Most of the new education-business partnerships that emerged in the wake of Ruskin followed the British Petroleum model, focusing on school leavers and school-to-work transitions, with explicit emphasis on introducing students to the skills and attitudes that they would need to succeed in business or industry following graduation. Yet while this model led to a large number of independently designed work placement schemes for students, these link activities still 'tended to be *ad hoc* and dependent upon the mutual goodwill of local companies and the schools' (Miller 1995:35). By 1980 there were enough existing links for the Department of Industry to publish a 'review' of these initiatives (see Department of Industry 1980) – yet while a number of smaller private-sector ventures (such as Project Trident and Young Enterprise) were launched, 'neither they nor any more official efforts seemed likely to bring about the kind of redirection of the education system called for in the Great Debate and [1976] Green Paper' (Dale 1990:15). While the rhetorical promises of the Callaghan government therefore remained largely unrealised in

*practice*, the Great Debate had succeeded in heightening the prominence and awareness of education issues in the minds of both politicians and the general public.

### **2.5.2 The Conservative Approach**

It was in this environment of significant national consciousness regarding educational issues that Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government came to power in 1979. The Thatcher government echoed the charges that the failure of the education system was to blame for Britain's economic woes, yet unlike the previous Labour government, Thatcher resolved to redress this problem via legislation rather than discussion. Given the Conservative's link between education and the state of the workforce, it should not be surprising that Thatcher's first legislative attempt at reforming education system came in the form of the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) of 1982. Developed 'with the general intention of arresting 'national decline' by improving Britain's economic and industrial competitiveness' (Gleeson 1987:22), TVEI was a 'pilot scheme for new institutional arrangements for technical and vocational education for 14-18 year olds, within existing financial resources, and, where possible, in association with local authorities' (Thatcher 1982). In practice, TVEI created a great increase in demand for work placement spaces, and while TVEI initially met with some resistance from educators, it proved to be fairly successful in bringing together industry and education. Not only did students appear to benefit, but within only six years, every LEA in England and Wales was participating in TVEI to some extent (Dale 1990:169). The overall effect of TVEI was to both reassert central government authority over education and to re-establish connections between education and industry on a national level, even if only a limited scale. As such, TVEI not only altered what schools were supposed to teach, but also signalled a change in how the central government would go about enforcing those changes. No longer were the (predominantly Labour-controlled) local education authorities to be relied upon to make the changes necessary for reforming education. Instead, these changes could (and would, if necessary,) be directed by central government itself, and implemented at the local level with the cooperation and support of LEAs.

Yet despite this large-scale attempt to connect schools and industry, TVEI was not entirely persuasive in allaying the historic suspicion between business and education. On one side, business leaders continued to complain about the inadequacies of the

education system. For example, in 1984, the Director of the Institute of Directors argued that ‘for nearly two decades, large parts of the state system have been subject to mismanagement, general lack of clarity of purpose and the plummeting of standards...’ (Goldsmith 1984:25), while the chairman of the Alliance of Small Firms argued that teachers were ‘often hostile to enterprise and profit-seeking’ (Gorman 1984:80). On the other side, research by Dale (1990) found that educators believed initiatives like TVEI ‘emphasised what [such initiatives] could do for participating *firms*, rather than students and schools,’ and that these initiatives were designed ‘for firms to see what it was like participating in schools, rather than the other way around’ (Dale 1990:125).

However, efforts continued to bridge this gap, and in 1986, industry groups and government proclaimed the Industry Year, a year-long set of programmes aimed at strengthening these new but fragile connections between business and education.

Touted by Secretary of State for Education Kenneth Baker as ‘one of a number of ways in which we are working to correct the anti-industrial culture which has grown up in this country over the last 130 years’ (1986:7), Industry Year activities included attempts to link all British secondary schools with local companies and the organisation of Industry Weeks, where local businesses would give presentations and tours to pupils (Jamieson and Blandford 1986). This momentum continued into 1988, when the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) released its landmark report, *Building stronger partnerships between industry and secondary education*. This document was the first systematic study of the scope and effectiveness of different types of education-business partnerships, examining the resources and commitments necessary to meet what the authors termed the ‘pressing need to strengthen the partnership between companies and state secondary schools’ (1988:11).

However, the most substantial alteration of the business-education relationship came with the 1988 Education Reform Act, which introduced decentralisation through local management of schools (LMS), the option of Grant-Maintained (GM) status, and the expansion of the City Technology Colleges (CTC) programme, while retaining central control via a national curriculum and national assessment standards. The ERA provided several new avenues for business involvement in education. First, companies could now provide schools with curriculum products and programs with the knowledge that they would fit into the national curriculum framework



(Pearce 1992). Second, the ERA provided the opportunity for expanding the business-led City Technology Colleges programme, based upon an Industry Year experiment that was intended to create a new breed of technically-focused urban secondary schools, freed from the authority of LEAs and financed by partnerships between businesses and government (McCulloch 1989; Whitty et al. 1993). Finally, LMS was introduced in order to encourage schools to be run themselves 'more like businesses' by giving local schools increased authority over their budgets (and increased responsibility for their results). These three components were potentially a comprehensive step forward towards greater industry-education integration.

Throughout the early 1990s, a broad range of business involvement activities were designed, implemented, and praised by schools throughout the country – from projects in science and mathematics to those in physical education and food technology (see e.g., Lovelace 1991; Churchill 1994; Wallis 1994). Additionally, numerous organisations were either formed or expanded in response to this renewed interest, including the Technology Colleges Trust, Business in the Community, and Understanding Business and Industry (Neal 1991). The most widespread of these types of organisations were the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and the Education Business Partnerships (EBPs). TECs were local-level not-for-profit entities, designed to combine public and private resources in addressing local needs for workforce training and economic regeneration. While TECs focused largely on skills development, EBPs were designed with the broader aim of increasing 'the quality and quantity of links between education and business' (Hillage 1994:1). These various organisations and initiatives appeared to have a measurable positive impact on business-education interaction. For example, a 1990 survey of CBI members reported that 50 per cent of respondents had no links to education, and 37 per cent of schools surveyed had with no links with business (Campbell and John 1991:34). However, a similar survey only four years later found that 92 per cent of businesses surveyed were involved in work experience and 89 per cent sponsored company visits, while 79 per cent of business respondents were aware of their local Education Business Partnership (Bennett 1994:15).

Admittedly, some of these renewed attempts at linking business and education were less than successful. For example, despite the Thatcher government's hope that City Technology Colleges would 'cement the permanence of the link between education

and the world of employment' (Baker 1993:177), the CTC program in practice was 'ill-conceived and poorly implemented at the national government level' (Edwards et al. 1992:49), hampered by both an inability to find committed industrial sponsors and opposition from the education sector. Yet while there were still critics who were opposed to business involvement on principle, the tenor of the debate was changing during the 1990s. For example, after observing the development of education-business links post-1988, Warwick (1993) argued that overall, these activities were still diffuse, varied greatly in quality and commitment, and remained largely *ad hoc*. Similarly, Miller (1993) argued that 'The development of industry/education links in the past decade has been characterised by a focus on setting up and running activities rather than on evaluating them' (1993:255). Yet in making these criticisms, these observers were arguing for a more rigorous and integrated approach towards increasing business involvement. No longer was the main disagreement about *whether* businesses should be involved in schools; indeed, Vinten (1996) argued that 'the aim of cultivating closer links between education and business has become the accepted wisdom and practice in the UK over the past decade' (1996:27). Instead, the disagreement was over to what *extent* businesses should be involved and what *form* this involvement should take.

### **2.5.3 The Labour Approach**

With the election of a Labour government in 1997, it might have been expected that the emphasis on business involvement in education would decline, given the traditional suspicion on the political left of private involvement in the public services. Instead, this emphasis merely shifted. The Conservative reforms of the 1980s had emphasised role of the education system in both developing the future workforce and improving the image of industry. In contrast, Labour initiatives emphasised the greater integration of business *into* the education system, employing a 'new public management' philosophy that sought to bring the resources and skills of the private sector to bear in solving public sector problems (Power and Whitty 1999). Elected on a platform of 'education, education, education,' the Labour government made education reform its main focus during its first term, and many of its education initiatives were designed to incorporate business involvement into the reform process. These initiatives can be broadly divided into two sets – those focusing on increasing academic achievement, and those focusing on improving public sector efficiency – each of which will now be discussed in turn.

One of Labour's first education initiatives was to re-focus, re-launch, and rapidly expand a scheme initiated by the Conservative government in 1993, which allowed certain state-maintained secondary schools to compete for designation as one of a nationally-limited number of 'specialist schools' (DfEE 1998a). Under this initiative (as it stood at the time this study commenced), institutions that were awarded specialist status received additional funding from central government in order to specialise in a specific curricular area – technology, languages, sports, or the arts – in addition to delivering the national curriculum. In order to be designated as specialist, schools needed to submit bids to the DfES competition and raise £50,000 from outside sponsors – usually businesses. Successful schools would receive the 'specialist' designation, as well as associated additional funding, from central government (West et al. 2000:1). The sheer extent of the specialist schools programme (with over 500 specialist schools in operation across England by September 2000, and nearly 1,000 in operation by September 2002 (DfES 2003b)) makes this initiative one of Labour's most prominent forays into the arena of business-education partnerships. Another early Labour initiative was the statutory Education Action Zone (EAZ) scheme (DfEE 1998b), which then-schools minister Stephen Byers described as 'the test-bed for the school system of the next century' (Chitty 1998:79). Located in geographic areas identified as educationally and economically deprived, statutory EAZs were 'clusters' of schools that were to receive special funding from the central government after building local coalitions of schools, businesses, community groups and voluntary sector organisations. Designed 'in line with New Labour managerialism, [as] all EAZ bids contain[ed] very explicit and ambitious commitments about achievement targets' (Gamarnikow and Green 1999:13), statutory EAZs were almost immediately beset by both administrative problems and philosophical criticism. Administratively, numerous researchers revealed the failure of the Zones to garner widespread community or business support (see Clifford 1999; Ward 1999; Jones and Bird 2000), while philosophically, opponents seized on the argument that the statutory EAZ initiative entailed 'a conception of 'business-school' links that would have been anathema to any previous Labour administration' (Anderson 2001:66). Together, these combined weight of these criticisms meant that plans for expanding the EAZ programme were quietly dropped in 2001, while many existing statutory EAZs have since been modified substantially from their original design. In many cases these statutory EAZs have been largely subsumed by the broader education improvement initiative

known as Excellence in Cities (EiC) – although within EiC, the government has retained the option of creating smaller ‘EiC Action Zones’ where and if the demand for such structures arises.

Bolstered by other initial successes in education reform, however, and undeterred by criticisms of the ill-fated statutory EAZs, Labour continued to pursue connections between education and the private sector. Then-schools minister Charles Clarke argued in 1999 that ‘the government is seeking to stimulate a wide variety of means [for]...much stronger relationships and working partnerships between schools and the economic community’ (1999:19), and the initiatives continued to flow. In 2000, Labour revived the legislation that created the CTCs in order to create a similar programme of ‘publicly funded independent secondary schools with sponsors from the private or voluntary sectors’ (Technology Colleges Trust 2001:3) under the label of ‘City Academies’ – this despite Labour having been *opposed* to the original CTCs during the 1980s. Furthermore, these new City Academies require external funding of ‘around twenty per cent of initial capital costs, or up to about £2 million’ (West and Pennell 2002:214), making substantial private sponsorship crucial to their success. The recent government Green Paper entitled *Schools: Building on Success* (DfEE 2001) further confirmed the vigour with which the Labour government has pursued a broad range of business involvement initiatives and programmes for education, implying that such involvement was not only valuable, but also *vital*:

‘What matters is that all schools break out of isolation and introversion and constantly work with and learn from others, as many already do.... Many schools are now working closely with businesses. Examples include the specialist schools and Education Action Zones which have business sponsors, the business mentoring programme for headteachers organised by Business in the Community and the Adopt-a-School arrangement that Nottingham City Education Authority has developed with its local business community’ (DfEE 2001:85).

Labour also broadened the scope of business involvement in education, seeking to improve public sector efficiency by both supporting and encouraging limited forms of privatisation. This was done through the introduction of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and through the introduction of policies allowing for the for-profit management of failing state schools and local authorities. Under PFI, the private sector ‘builds, designs, finances, and sometimes operates a capital asset which the public sector pays a charge to use’ (Ball et al. 2000:96). The private sector is meant

to assume the development 'risk' on the project, and in exchange the public sector 'leases' the asset over an extended period (often 20 to 30 years), after which time the asset reverts to public control. Under the for-profit management scheme, LEAs (and more recently, individual schools) deemed to be failing can be taken over by private companies, who are expected to reverse this decline by applying private sector management principles. Although the initial results of these two initiatives have been mixed (see Audit Commission 2003; National Audit Office 2003), both initiatives have, like the statutory EAZs, met with intense political criticism. Critics have argued that initiatives like PFI and for-profit management blur the lines of public responsibility, weaken attempts at ensuring social justice through education, and undermine democratic accountability (see e.g., National Union of Teachers 1999; Lushington 1999; Hatcher 2001).

What is not in dispute, however, is that the range of business involvement initiatives outlined in this section indicates the extent of the current Labour government's desire to increase business involvement in education. In its 2000 report *The Role of Private Sector Organisations in Public Education*, the parliamentary Education and Employment Committee examined the range of programmes described above, and recommended that 'the Department for Education and Employment and local authorities [continue to] consider ways in which the involvement of private sector organisations could support and enhance the quality of education services' (2000:11). Such encouragement provides a clear sign of the importance and emphasis that the current government is placing on the prospect of business involvement in education. Similarly, a 2001 editorial in *Managing Schools Today* provided a striking cumulative quantitative assessment of these programmes, observing:

'The extent to which private investment in education has developed over the past five years is extraordinary. In February [2001] the figure was put at £120 million over the five years of the previous government. This global total covered education action zones (£37 million), specialist schools (£28 million), the City Academies programme (£7 million), Maths Year 2000 (£30 million) and the National Year of Reading (£20 million). It is estimated that outside investment is running currently at around £30 million a year, [and] that overlooks intervention in local education authorities and incidental sponsorships...' (*Private funding of public education* 2001:24).

A second *Managing Schools Today* editorial provided the broadly accepted political analysis of these figures, arguing that 'The government's desire to encourage the

private sector to take a more active role in state education was already known. The fact it has pushed it to the forefront of its agenda shows just how strongly Tony Blair believes in business, business, business' (*Times are changing* 2001:7). Indeed, in the DfES's own press release on the 2004-05 Budget – entitled 'Budget shows government means business when it comes to education' – Education and Skills Secretary Charles Clarke accentuated this emphasis, arguing that 'It is vital we get schools working more closely with business' (DfES 2003c). In short, since the election of New Labour in 1997, business involvement has become substantially more central and important to the government's education agenda than it has been at almost any point in the past one hundred years.

#### **2.5.4 Business Involvement and the Fourth Main Research Question**

As was noted in the introduction to Section 2.5, illustrating the practical policy relevance of any identified strategic planning barriers requires applying them in a policy context where governing body strategic planning is desirable yet currently absent. This final section seeks to demonstrate that business involvement meets the three necessary criteria: that it has practical policy relevance, strategic value, and a currently undeveloped strategic role for governing bodies in its regulation.

The first criterion is practical policy relevance. Given the historical literature outlined above, it seems uncontroversial to suggest that business involvement, particularly under the current Labour government, meets this criterion. In addition to the clearly positive governmental endorsement of business involvement, other research supports the notion of current policy relevance. For example, Davies (1999) noted that between 1995 and 1999, there was a 70 per cent increase in the number of businesses involved in business-education activities, and a 90 per cent growth in the number of participating secondary schools (1999:38). The second criterion is that of strategic value; here again the literature is limited but convincing. The idea that business involvement should be addressed in a strategic rather than an *ad hoc* manner is raised by several researchers, and there is little (if any) research suggesting the contrary. After examining a number of business-education partnerships, Antelo and Henderson (1992) concluded that effective partnerships must include both strategic and operational components, and that the strategic dimension needed to be 'concerned with the long term decision making process about the nature and direction of the collaborative effort between schools and businesses' (1992:56).

Research by Chambers (1996) led to similar conclusions, as did work by Nuttall (1994), who observed that:

‘[A]ll too often, schemes are piecemeal and lack coherent strategy or clearly defined outcomes.... Quality links make a valuable contribution to the teaching of the curriculum and the management of schools [but] to be effective, *they must be part of an agreed policy*...[emphasis added]’ (1994:36).

In a more general sense, a number of commentators have implied that such a strategic approach needs to include setting boundaries on the extent of business involvement in education. Looking objectively at the issue of boundaries, Cornforth (1999) proposed dividing business involvement activities into four categories: ‘total, partial, peripheral, and no [involvement]’ (1999:20). Cornforth suggested that ‘total’ would include privatisation, ‘partial’ would include outsourcing, ‘peripheral’ would include sponsorship, and ‘no’ would indicate ideological opposition. While Clarke (1999) might suggest that Cornforth’s schema implies four discrete entities, arguing that ‘contracting out certain educational services [and]...building local employer, industrial, and commercial partnerships with the education service’ are ‘qualitatively different types of involvement’ (1999:18), many other observers view Cornforth’s schema as a more seamless continuum. As Hatcher (1998) argued:

‘Business defines the purposes of school, shapes its curriculum, provides placements for its students and models for its management. It is vital that we clarify, in each of these areas, what boundaries we want to draw between what is acceptable on educational terms, and what is not’ (1998:16).

Support for this notion of setting boundaries is offered by Beckett (1999), yet Beckett also argued that such a boundary should not be drawn so tightly as to create a *de facto* exclusion of business involvement. ‘Once we have drawn a line, we need not fear bringing the private sector into education and drawing on its expertise,’ he argued; ‘What we must not do is allow the private sector to dictate the curriculum...or allow schools to become dependent on its handouts’ (1999:52). Yet the crucial practical question in this abstract discussion about boundaries is: *who should draw the line*. The existing literature suggests that those best equipped to do so are the governing bodies.

This touches upon the third and most important issue: whether there is an undeveloped strategic role for governing bodies in regulating business involvement

in education. The suggestion that governing bodies play an active role in business involvement issues is not new; indeed, the Taylor Report (1977) noted that ‘another matter of considerable concern...[is the] gap between schools and the wealth-producing sector of the economy. *We recommend that governing bodies should do what they can to narrow this gap* [emphasis in original]’ (1977:46). Furthermore, the early issues of *School Governor* magazine ran regular columns urging governors to acquire knowledge of the advantages and drawbacks of business involvement (see e.g., Stevens 1987; Hancock 1990). More recently, there have been calls for governing bodies to not just become informed, but to take a much more active role in regulating the level and extent of business involvement in their schools. In 2000, the Education and Employment Committee stated that when it came to the determining the principles surrounding private sector involvement in education:

‘Although...a pragmatic approach to raising standards of achievement is necessary...the underlying principles of public accountability should [not] be disregarded by the DfEE, by local education authorities *or by school governors* [italics added]’ (2000:11).

Clearly governors are implicitly being expected to play an important role in this area, although precisely what that role entails is often unclear. For example, although Thody (1994a) suggested that some business governors ‘contributed to the curriculum...through facilitating industrial contacts and through participating in education-industry links’ (1994a:364), Thody also acknowledged that governors and heads viewed such contributions as ‘bonuses’. Similarly, Punter (2000) argued that although the *skills* of business governors generally appeared to be valuable to schools, the precise role of these governors in relation to education-business relations was left undefined. ‘There has been no national rationalisation or consistency of purpose in any [business involvement programmes],’ claimed Punter, ‘except to agree that links between businesses and schools are beneficial, particularly to schools’ (2000:273). However, the recent rapid expansion of the specialist schools programme – with its requirements that schools (and their governing bodies) both acquire substantial outside funding and create a four-year school and community development plan – suggests that the connection between governing bodies, business involvement, and strategic planning is increasingly crucial in the current educational climate, particularly when such involvement carries potential financial incentives. Indeed, the first major study on the impact of the specialist schools programme by West et al. (2000) found that around half of the



chairs of governing bodies surveyed stated that the 'additional funds available were a reason for seeking specialist school status' (2000:1).

Yet despite these recent policy changes, both the existing research literature and the academic commentary on this connection is extremely limited. Given the financial management role of governing bodies, Thody (1992) argued that it was incumbent upon governing bodies to understand the advantages and disadvantages of all potential sources of income, including 'business activities, fundraisers...[and] industrial sponsorships' (1992:114). In a similar vein, Glegg (1997) argued strongly for increased governing body involvement in setting strategies and policies about business involvement, writing:

'School-business partnerships raise fundamentally serious questions which much be answered by school administrators.... Merely claiming that such [business involvement] strategies ought not be *necessary* does nothing to ease the situation, and closing ones eyes to reality is a notoriously unsuccessful tactic' (1997:33).

Extending upon this position, Tulloch (1999) argued that the responsibility for setting a school's strategy and boundaries regarding business involvement should rest *primarily* with governing bodies. Suggesting that governing bodies should view this task as an increasingly important obligation, Tulloch asserted:

'[When] it comes to drawing the line about sponsorship and fundraising or whether the school bids to be a specialist school and thereby to raise money from private sponsorship, *the governing body ultimately is responsible*. If lines are to be drawn about how far a school enters the market place, *it seems only the governing body can do it* [emphasis added]' (1999:37).

Given both the state of the existing literature and the pressing practical policy importance, it appeared that business involvement was an issue on which there was a potential yet undeveloped strategic role for governing bodies. As such, it is concluded that having met the three necessary criteria of policy relevance, strategic value, and undeveloped potential for governor involvement, the issue of business involvement is an appropriate context through which to pursue the fourth main research question.

Furthermore, such applied research would provide an additional contribution to the existing literature. While there have been a small number of studies on how business

involvement is perceived by both employers (Bennett 1994, Hillage 1995) and educators (Bloomer 1985), there has been almost no research on the opinions of governors in relation to this topic. While Baginsky et al. (1991) made a brief reference to governors' ambivalence about increasing business involvement in schools, and while Punter (2000) discussed the role of governors who *worked* in the business sector, there has been no subsequent critical research regarding either governors' views of business involvement in general, or their strategic approach towards its management in particular. As such, the research proposed herein not only provides the context for illustrating the influence of the strategic planning barriers, but also provides potentially new information regarding governor opinions and perspectives on the issue of business involvement.

## **2.6 CHAPTER TWO SUMMARY AND THE PROPOSED STUDY**

In order to establish the context and aims of this study, this chapter reviewed the existing literature on school governance, strategic planning in education, and business involvement in education. After presenting a brief history of school governance, this chapter examined the two main types of literature on school governance: advice literature and research literature. After briefly examining the advice literature, this section identified six main categories of research literature. Of these six categories, this chapter focused mainly on the existing research into the normative role of governors and governing bodies, and the research into governing body operation and strategic planning. From this review of the literature, the first three main research questions were proposed. A fourth main research question, which seeks to determine whether the answers to the first three research questions have practical policy relevance, was proposed as the logical extension of the first three. After arguing that business involvement in education would be a suitable policy issue for providing the context for such an analysis, the literature on business involvement in education was reviewed, as were developments in this area of policy under the most recent Conservative and Labour governments.

### *The Proposed Study*

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that the state of the existing literature suggests the opportunity for a research study that would provide answers to the four main research questions identified herein. In specific, it is argued that this proposed study would be beneficial for the following seven reasons, as it would:

1. Contribute to the understanding of how governors perceive their own role;
2. Provide evidence that a systematic framework of strategic planning barriers can be used to better analyse and understand the absence of governing body strategic planning;
3. Demonstrate that these barriers have practical policy relevance, and in doing so provide new insights into the opinions of governors about business involvement in education;
4. Contribute new evidence on the role of central government in governing body activities, the exploration of which has been limited to this point;
5. Provide a more detailed understanding of inner London state secondary school governors and governing bodies, as there is no existing research literature with this specific focus;
6. Update the existing literature on school governance, as much of this literature is between five and ten years old; and
7. Provide independent research on school governance and business involvement, not sponsored or supported by the governmental agencies or industry groups who may have a direct interest in its outcome.

Having thus outlined the value of a study that would answer the four main research questions identified herein, the next chapter describes the methodology and research design of the study itself.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH DESIGN, AND RESEARCH SAMPLE**

#### **3.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the methodology, research design, and research sample employed in this study. Section 3.1 outlines the scope and parameters of the study, and presents the three major components of the research design: a preliminary study of local authority officers, an institution-level qualitative interview study of school governors, and a quantitative mail survey of chairs of governors and head teachers. Each component is then discussed in detail. Section 3.2 presents the justification, design, and lessons of the preliminary study itself. Section 3.3 presents the design of the qualitative phase of the main study and the protocols that regulated the conduct of the qualitative interviews. Section 3.4 presents the methodological and analytical issues surrounding the quantitative portion of the research, and Section 3.5 addresses how this research design meets the tests of construct validity, reliability, and external validity. Finally, Section 3.6 provides descriptions of the qualitative and quantitative research samples. Section 3.7 summarises the main points in this chapter.

#### **3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN OVERVIEW**

Given the state of the existing research and the opportunities identified in Chapter Two, this thesis sought to build upon the existing literature in order to answer these four research questions:

1. Do governors in inner London state secondary schools view their role as a strategic one, and if so, how do they themselves define strategic planning?
2. Is the lack of strategic planning implied by the existing literature actually evident in the governing bodies of inner London state secondary schools?
3. If the lack of strategic planning implied by the existing literature is actually evident in the governing bodies of inner London state secondary schools, why is this the case?
4. Can it be demonstrated that the identification of these strategic planning barriers has practical policy relevance and importance?

The research design, therefore, needed to maximise the potential for answering these four main questions thoroughly and convincingly, whilst remaining viable within time and resource constraints.

### **3.1.1 The Research Parameters**

In order to remain within these constraints, it was decided to limit the research parameters in four main areas. The first limitation was in the *scope* of the research, the second limitation was in the *location* of the research, the third limitation was in the *school type* being researched, and the final limitation was in the *academic level* being researched. The rationale for each of these four limitations is discussed below.

#### *Scope*

For theoretical and practical reasons, it was decided to limit this research to the direct study of governors and head teachers, the latter of whom are full-fledged governors in their own right.<sup>1</sup> First, it was felt that strategic planning and school governance were best studied from the perspective of the governors themselves, as it is at the governing body level where abstract policies and regulations on issues like strategic planning must prove viable in practice. Focusing on governors' *own* perceptions of these issues was also felt to be important, since regardless of the factual *accuracy* of such perceptions, it is often such perceptions that determine whether policies succeed. This limitation also provided logistical advantages, as the relatively small size of governing bodies (about 20 governors) meant that it was possible to interview a large percentage of the 'population' in each case without exceeding time and resource constraints.

Second, it was decided that this research would not focus on the 'catastrophic' reasons for strategic planning failure – for example, a complete breakdown in the relationship between the head and the governors, or a debilitating ideological split in the governing body that prevented decisions from being made. Clearly, such situations will fundamentally impede not only strategic planning, but also almost every other functional task of the governing body. Instead, this research was limited to determining why governing bodies that appeared to be operating normally (i.e., those that did not exhibit manifestly obvious signs of dysfunction) did not seem to engage in strategic planning to the extent that might be expected.

### *Location*

There were three reasons for limiting this research to inner London. First, the problems of urban schools have received considerable attention from both central government and the general public in recent years. As such, it was felt that focusing on urban schools would generate data and conclusions that would be of both academic and policy value. As King et al. argued, 'A research project should pose a question that is 'important' in the real world [and] consequential for political, social, or economic life...' (1994:15). Second, in order to maximise the time and resources, all case study sites were drawn from one city – London. It was felt that this restriction would permit comparisons of governing bodies that were operating under (broadly) similar general political and economic conditions. Third, the geographic limits were restricted to *inner* London, as the density of schools in inner London provided a high number of potential sites within a reasonable travel area. Additionally, inner London schools provided substantial variation in levels of academic achievement, socio-economic deprivation, and other key indicators. For the purposes of this study, inner London was defined as the boroughs of the former Inner London Education Authority,<sup>2</sup> plus the borough of Newham. The City was excluded because it has no state maintained secondary schools. Newham was included both because of its geographical contiguity within the 'ring' of Inner London boroughs (see map, Appendix A) and because its schools shared a number of key demographic characteristics with many of those in inner London boroughs.

### *School Type*

For practical reasons, this study focused only on mainstream state-maintained schools. Although comparisons of state-sector governing bodies to those in the independent sector (or to those in state-sector special schools) would be valuable, doing so would have required resources beyond those available. It was felt that the variety of institutions within the state-maintained sector meant that sufficient breadth and depth could be obtained without compromising either the quality of the data or the overall research design.

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<sup>1</sup> Although head teachers retain the statutory right to decline a place on the governing body, this right is rarely invoked in practice – Scanlon et al. (1999) reported that of the head teachers surveyed in their quantitative research, 87 per cent had 'opted to become governors of their schools (1999:43).'

<sup>2</sup> Camden, Greenwich, Hackney, Hammersmith & Fulham, Islington, Kensington & Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth, and Westminster.

### *Academic Level*

For practical and theoretical reasons, this study focused only on *secondary* schools within the state sector. Not only do primary and secondary schools focus on different *aspects* of education, the governing bodies of secondary schools are almost inevitably required to deal with a more complex array of issues – concerning a greater number of pupils – than are those of primary schools. It was also apparent from the literature that if business involvement were to be used as a lens for examining the theoretical findings of this research, a problem might arise in that there are qualitative and quantitative differences in the business involvement activities of secondary and primary schools, respectively. Quantitatively, the literature shows that businesses are much more likely to target secondary schools than primary schools (Iredale 1996). The literature also shows that the approaches made by business to secondary schools often differ *qualitatively* to approaches made to primary schools (Warwick 1993; Hillage 1995). As such, it was felt that any advantage gained by covering both sectors would be outweighed by the added complexity of analysis, and compounded by the difficulties of making clear cross-sector comparisons.

### **3.1.2 Previous Research Designs for Governance Research**

Previous research designs for governance research have generally relied upon observation, interviews, surveys, or a combination of these three methods. As a conscious decision was made (for reasons of time and resources) not to make the examination and observation of governing body meeting dynamics a central component of this study, meeting observation – although done on occasion – was not a key component of this research. Therefore, the choice of methods was between interviews, surveys, or a combination of the two. Previous interview-only approaches include Kogan's seminal study (1984) of eight governing bodies in four different authorities, and Deem et al. (1995), who combined individual governor interviews and governing body meeting observations in their study of ten separate governing bodies. In contrast, the survey-only approach has been employed by Streatfield and Jeffries (1989), who surveyed governors at 500 schools in ten LEAs following the 1986 Act, and Keys and Fernandes (1990) who conducted a national-level survey of primary and secondary school governors.

However, the majority of studies on school governance have combined interviews and surveys, with the earliest examples being the studies of Baron and Howell (1968;

1974), and Bacon's intensive study of governors in a single authority (1978). More recently, Baginsky et al. (1991) conducted an in-depth survey of governors in 41 primary and secondary schools across eight LEAs, followed by nine case studies in selected primary and secondary schools. Earley (1994a) surveyed head teachers, chairs of governors, and governors in 500 schools nationwide, and drew upon the results of that survey to conduct six detailed case studies (comprised of governors, teachers, and heads) of seven to nine interviews apiece; this research design was also employed by Scanlon et al. (1999). Additionally, Esp and Saran (1995) focused on 'elites' by both surveying and interviewing pairs of head teachers and chairs of governors from 21 primary and secondary schools.

### **3.1.3 The Final Research Design**

Given this range of available research options and the parameters outlined in Section 3.1.1, four potential research options emerged. The first was to follow Bacon's approach (1978) and conduct in-depth research at several schools in a single local education authority. However, it was felt that the ability to generalise from such a study would be extremely limited, outweighing the advantages of 'rich description' that such a study would provide. The second option, mirroring the approach of Esp and Saran (1995), was to retain the interview format, but sacrifice depth for breadth. This option would entail selecting approximately ten schools from different boroughs, yet interviewing only a selected few 'elites' at each. However, it was felt that this approach alone would not provide sufficient depth, nor would it would be easy to ascertain the veracity of the qualitative data based upon only two interviews per site. The third option was to avoid qualitative research entirely, and focus on conducting one or more quantitative surveys. However, this option was eliminated because it was felt that a quantitative approach alone would fail to capture the subtlety and depth afforded by interviews. The final option was to combine the interview and survey approach in a manner that most closely reflected the approach of Earley (1994a) and Scanlon et al. (1999). While the final research design was tailored to meet the needs and demands of this specific study, the overall structure of the design most closely resembled this final option. This approach is also endorsed more generally by Cohen and Manion (1994), who argue that 'multiple methods are suitable where a controversial aspect of education [policy] needs to be evaluated more fully' (1994:240). In general, it was felt that this research design (summarised below) offered the best combination of breadth and depth while remaining both financially and logistically viable.



- a) ***Preliminary study interviews with Governor Services and Education Business Partnership directors*** in the thirteen inner London boroughs. These interviews provided opportunities for testing potential interview and survey questions, collecting valuable contextual background information, and evaluating the feasibility of the proposed main study. This particular cohort was chosen because of its ability to provide broad expert and up-to-date knowledge of the issues being studied without being influenced by the particular circumstances of any one individual school.
- b) ***Five qualitative case studies*** in five schools in five different boroughs, with each case comprising semi-structured interviews with seven to nine governors. These interviews were conducted with the full range of governor types, including parent, teacher, staff, co-opted, and LEA governors. This range also increased the robustness of the research by providing perspectives from throughout the governing body membership.
- c) ***Supplementary qualitative interviews*** with eight chairs of governors from eight *additional* secondary schools. Esp and Saran's approach (1995) of interviewing 'elites' suggested that chairs (and heads) have the greatest influence in guiding the general direction of the governing body. By interviewing additional chairs, it was possible to explore the broader generalisability of patterns and themes identified in the five case studies without the increased logistical difficulties of pursuing additional full case studies at numerous additional sites.
- d) ***Documentary analysis*** of written governing body policies and reports, school newsletters, full governing body and committee minutes, and other materials. Such documents provide important contextual information about organisational goals and policies, as well as a longitudinal perspective on issues with which interviewees may have only limited experience. Although rarely highlighted in the data presentation portions of this thesis, documentary analysis nonetheless played an integral role in establishing the context and focus of this research.
- e) ***A quantitative mail survey*** sent to the chairs and heads of all 139 inner London state secondary schools, which received an overall response rate of 57 per cent. This component provided a quantitative balance to the issues that had been investigated through the qualitative case studies. The survey provided triangulation data on governors' perceptions of business involvement, created a picture of how governing bodies perceive their strategic role, and most significantly, covered the entire population of the research area. By combining the qualitative component of

this research with this quantitative survey, this study was able to pursue the most robust research design possible given the stated resource constraints.

### 3.1.4 Research Time Line

Although the overall research design reflects the combination qualitative-quantitative approach taken by Earley (1994a), it is important to point out that the methodology used in this research differs from that used by Earley in one significant respect. In this research, the interviews were conducted first, and followed by the survey. In contrast, Earley employed the survey first, followed by the case studies. Because the specific issues being studied in the current research were already highly defined (strategic planning and business involvement), the survey was employed in current research in order to *verify* whether trends observed in the case studies were reflected in the wider population. In Earley's work, the survey served to *identify* those issues that merited more in-depth study, and the case studies were then used to investigate the themes that had been raised by the survey.

As Table 3.1 illustrates, the bulk of the data collection phase of this research was conducted within a single academic year (September 2000 to July 2001). This table provides a visual breakdown of when the main data collection stages of this research were undertaken, as well as the length of those stages.

**Table 3.1: Main Data Collection Stages**

	Preliminary Study	Case Study Interviews	Mail Survey
September (2000)			
October			
November			
December			
January (2001)			
February			
March			
April			
May			
June			
July			
August			

The length of the data collection phase was determined by two main factors. First, as both the school governance and business involvement in education are becoming

increasingly important public policy issues, it was felt that there was an urgent need for a thorough yet timely analysis of these issues. As David Blunkett noted during his tenure as Secretary of State for Education, the usefulness of social science research to government policy rests on 'the focus, relevance, and timeliness of much of the research which is currently undertaken [as well as] the accessibility and intelligibility of the lessons of research to potential users beyond the research community itself' (Blunkett 2000:6). While there are certainly circumstances in which a longitudinal design is preferable, the value of this research was in its ability to provide more rapid insight into several under-researched yet important areas of public policy.

Second, if a set of comparative case studies are carried out *sequentially* over a long period of time, the possibility arises that intervening factors will prevent the data gathered from the first cases from being compared accurately to the data gathered from the last cases. Such a scenario might occur if changes in external conditions (such as the impact of new central government regulations) influenced the data collection in *final* case study, but which did not exist during the data collection for the *first* case study. By conducting the fieldwork stage of this research in a relatively compact time span, the potential for this external interference was reduced.

### 3.2 THE PRELIMINARY STUDY

Before beginning the main research study, a preliminary study was designed and conducted in order to acquire both the information and the experience necessary to implement the main research study. This approach is endorsed by Robson (1993:164) and others for three main reasons. First, preliminary studies allow researchers to test their research designs on a smaller scale before commencing their main studies, thereby decreasing the likelihood that substantial alterations will need to be made to the research design during the main study itself. In this instance, it was felt that a preliminary study would enable potential interview and survey questions to be tested and refined via the comments and suggestions of people who had intimate knowledge of the issues being investigated. Second, preliminary studies permit the collection of substantial background information about the topic being researched, which can prove valuable to understanding the issues that arise during the implementation of the main study itself. In this instance, it was felt that a preliminary study would enable the researcher to become more fluent in and informed about the specific issues and concerns facing governors *before* engaging in

the main research study itself. Finally, preliminary studies allow researchers to estimate the feasibility and practicality of the scope of the main study and the logistics required for implementation. In this instance, it was felt that a preliminary study would help ensure that both time and financial resources were budgeted effectively during the main research phase.

### **3.2.1 The Preliminary Study Cohort**

The preliminary study cohort consisted of the directors of Governor Services and the directors of the local Education-Business Partnerships (EBPs) in each of the thirteen inner London boroughs. Governor Services are a division of every Local Education Authority in inner London, and are charged with the task of assisting governing bodies in carrying out their responsibilities. Their typical responsibilities include organising governor training, informing governing bodies about new regulations and legislation, providing clerking services, and acting as a liaison between governing bodies and the LEA. Education-Business Partnerships are either LEA-run or independently-run, depending on the borough, and their aim is to increase the interaction between educational institutions and the business community at the local level. Because each EBP sets its own agenda, their activities vary widely. However, some common EBP activities include providing assistance in arranging work experience, organising partnerships between specific institutions and companies, and facilitating mentoring schemes.

There were several key advantages in using this cohort for the preliminary study. First, members of this cohort had substantial knowledge of the issues facing the schools *across* their specific boroughs. Given the time and resource constraints of this research, it was therefore felt that this cohort would provide an excellent overview of the main governance and business involvement issues (respectively) facing the inner London education system, as well as a perspective on how research on those issues could best be focused. Second, although the main research study sought to understand these issues from the perspective of governors, it was felt that *designing* the research questions based upon the perspective of governors might introduce an inadvertent institutional bias to the research. As Bryman (2001) argues, preliminary work ‘should not be carried out on people who might have been members of the sample that would be employed in the main study’ (2001:155). By running the preliminary study with borough-level professionals, the potential for

institutional-level issues taking precedence in the research design was diminished. Finally, the information provided by this cohort provided a measure of contextual ‘face validity’ for the data gathered in the *main* research study, as the preliminary study cohort provided an independent template against which governor comments from the main research could be evaluated.

### **3.2.2 Preliminary Study Procedures**

Each of the 26 potential members of this cohort was contacted via telephone to ascertain his or her willingness to participate in the preliminary study. Each potential member was informed about the proposed research, and asked if he or she would be willing to be interviewed for about one hour on topics related to their issue of expertise. Of the 26 potential cohort members, all thirteen EBP directors and eleven of the thirteen Governor Services directors agreed to be interviewed. This extremely high level of participation meant that all areas of inner London were represented more or less equally, thereby avoiding any geographic imbalance. After agreeing to participate, each individual was sent a list of potential topics for discussion in the interview, and was asked think about additional research questions and approaches that might be worth pursuing in the main research study (see Appendix A for the full interview schedules). Each interview was arranged for the time and place most convenient for the interviewee, usually at their office.<sup>3</sup>

### **3.2.3 Preliminary Study Contributions**

The preliminary study made major contributions to the overall research study in three specific areas: Question Design, Logistics, and Background Information / Further Assistance. Each of these areas is now addressed in detail.

#### *Question Design*

The first major contribution of the preliminary study was in the design of the interview questions. As was noted above, being able to modify the interview schedule *before* its implementation helped ensure that the validity of the data collected during the main study was not circumscribed by the need to make substantial alterations to the data collection instruments during the main study itself. In particular, this method of ‘testing out’ interview questions served to increase the

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<sup>3</sup> For details of the interviewing protocol, which was also used for the qualitative interviews in the main study, see Section 3.3.4.

focus of – and decrease the level of interviewer bias in – the final set of interview questions. After identifying the main research questions through the review of the literature (set out in Chapter Two), over one hundred potential interview questions were devised by brainstorming, consulting with the research supervisor, and breaking down the main research questions into smaller components. The initial contribution of the preliminary study was to simulate the field conditions of the main study in order to determine the number of questions that could feasibly be asked during the course of a one-hour interview. After conducting the preliminary study, it was determined that a *maximum* of 20 questions could be reasonably asked and answered over the course of an hour-long interview. The initial list of over one hundred questions was then pared down considerably, again by drawing upon the comments and the responses of the preliminary study interviewees.

The preliminary study made three significant contributions in this respect. First, this process assisted in identifying questions that were similar, tangential, or redundant. This process also helped to identify questions that frequently led to ambiguous responses, responses that duplicated responses to other questions, and responses that were equivocal or otherwise uninformative. Eliminating or reformatting these questions greatly assisted in the focusing of the remaining questions. Second, this process helped to ensure that questions were phrased clearly, and in a way that would ensure consistent interpretation by respondents. This approach minimized potential confusion regarding ‘question intent’, thereby adding a degree of internal reliability to the final interview schedule. Third, this process identified important issues that were inadvertently ‘missed’ by the initial proposed questions, as well as issues that were potentially controversial or which might make the respondent uncomfortable. The value of this particular preliminary study cohort was that they were able to make these recommendations based upon their substantial knowledge and experience with governance and business involvement. In summary, the preliminary study contributed to the question design phase by ensuring that poor questions were jettisoned, while new questions – acquired from the suggestions and responses of preliminary study interviewees – were added. This procedure ensured that the use of the limited interview time during the main study maximised, and that the questions themselves were designed to obtain the most relevant and valuable responses.

### *Logistics*

The second major contribution of the preliminary study was in testing the logistics of the proposed research study. While obtaining ‘the research data’ may be the ultimate goal of the field research, the effectiveness with which those data are collected depends greatly upon how the logistical procedures for data collection and processing. The preliminary study was essential in honing these procedures, which ensured that the procedures for the main research study interviews were consistent and professional.

First, the preliminary study provided an opportunity for the researcher to gain a general familiarity with issues related to the interviewing process, thereby avoiding the difficulties of testing questions and collecting data simultaneously. Through these preliminary interviews, it was possible to learn how to ask the interview questions in a fluid yet structured manner, as well as how best to make the interviewee comfortable and open to answering questions. The preliminary study also provided experience in pacing interviews, in order to ensure that all the necessary questions could be asked and answered in the time available – as well as experience in knowing what questions could be skipped if it was necessary to cut the interview short. Furthermore, the preliminary study provided experience in dealing with potential objections from interviewees (such as not wishing to be recorded), and in gauging and maintaining interviewee interest throughout the session.

Second, the preliminary study provided an opportunity to test the proposed data collection techniques (see Section 3.3.5 below). For example, by running the preliminary study under ‘field conditions’, it was possible to identify the need for an external microphone (as the internal microphone of the cassette recorder proved insufficient). It was also possible to identify and remedy various quirks in the operation of the recording device itself. Had these problems first arisen during the main study, they almost certainly would have led to the loss of substantial amounts of important data. The preliminary study also identified the need for taking handwritten notes in conjunction with the recording. The preliminary study experience demonstrated that written notes were needed to provide a backup if the tape recording failed, but also to enable important aspects of the interview to be identified quickly during transcription. Additionally, it was observed that taking

handwritten notes often diverted the attention of the respondent from the tape recorder, and as a consequence led respondents to be more open with their opinions.

Finally, the preliminary study highlighted potential timing and scheduling issues. In order to minimise the inconvenience to interviewees, the researcher travelled to interview them at the place they found most convenient. Through this process, it became easier to estimate both the travel time and the best transportation routes to individual interviews in the main study. More broadly, the preliminary study identified the frequent difficulty in navigating government bureaucracies when attempting to contact potential interviewees, as well as the potentially lengthy delays between scheduling and conducting interviews. This experience helped significantly in planning the length of time necessary for completing the main study interviews. Lastly, the preliminary study demonstrated the importance of timing interviews to coincide with the 'academic' calendar, since most of the preliminary study cohort operated in parallel with this schedule. By understanding the implications of this schedule (for example, that the least hectic time to interview in schools is several weeks after the start of a term, or during the summer term after A-level students have gone on study leave), it was possible to 'target' the scheduling of interviews with institutionally-based main study interviewees with greater success.

#### *Background Information / Further Assistance*

The third major contribution of the preliminary study was in the background information and further assistance provided by the preliminary cohort. The members of the preliminary cohort were exceptionally well informed about the historical and contemporary issues surrounding governance and business involvement. Cohort members therefore were able to suggest potential avenues for additional research, offer perspectives on how the historical context of specific issues might influence current events, report on observed on-the-ground gaps between theory and implementation, and explain local issues that might be referred to by interviewees. By using their experience to identify potential unexpected problems and oversights in the initial research design, the preliminary cohort provided information and insights that proved invaluable in maintaining the focus and consistency of the main study. Additionally, being able to understand and use the numerous and ever-changing acronyms and 'catch phrases' surrounding governance and business involvement was an essential part of conducting intelligent and knowledgeable interviews, and the



knowledge base of the preliminary cohort aided the researcher in the acquisition of this fluency. Finally, cohort members provided the researcher with numerous documents and publications that greatly facilitated the understanding of the issues being studied. Importantly, many of these documents were ‘grey’ literature – pamphlets, ‘trigger packs’, guidance memoranda – that, while essential to understanding both governance and business involvement, are often unavailable in academic libraries.

Besides providing background information and context, the preliminary cohort also provided substantial ‘further assistance.’ For example, many cohort members offered to put the researcher in touch with other individuals whom they believed could contribute to the research study. Others offered their informed opinions about which specific schools and governing bodies might be the most willing to participate as case study sites, and several of the Governor Services directors offered to provide letters of introduction to the relevant individuals at those institutions. Finally, nearly every Governor Services director provided a covering letter and home addresses for the survey (see Section 3.4.3), a facet that almost certainly increased the survey response rate. Without the network of support and contacts provided by the preliminary study cohort, the actual execution of the main research study would have been significantly more difficult.

In summary, the preliminary study provided a valuable outlet for testing interview questions and the overall research design, gaining familiarity with logistical issues, obtaining important contextual information, and acquiring further support for the execution of the main research study itself. However, the intentionally exploratory nature of this work meant that the extent of participation of individual cohort interviewees, the focus of individual interviews, and the emphasis on the types of questions asked of interviewees varied significantly. As such, it was felt that data collected in this phase should not be incorporated in the formal data presentation portion of this thesis. Nevertheless, the preliminary study made substantial and valuable contributions in framing the issues and questions addressed therein.

### **3.3 THE MAIN QUALITATIVE STUDY**

This section presents the research design for the qualitative phase of the main study. First, Section 3.3.1 explains the rationale for pursuing an interview-based qualitative

approach, as well as the rationale for employing the general principles of the case study method as a research framework. Section 3.3.4 then explains the important decision to *modify* the traditional case study approach in the data analysis phase, by departing from the traditional interpretation of ‘cases’ as units of comparative analysis and instead treating cases as vehicles for systematic data collection. Section 3.3.3 then outlines the institutional criteria used to identify potential research sites. Section 3.3.4 describes the logistical process of choosing the five eventual research sites, as well as the process of and rationale for incorporating supplementary chairs of governors interviews into this research stage. Section 3.3.5 then outlines the protocol for conducting the interviews themselves, Section 3.3.6 discusses the protocol employed for tape recording and transcription, and Section 3.3.7 outlines the logistical procedures used in analysing the qualitative data.

### **3.3.1 The Advantages of a Qualitative Approach**

The major advantage of employing a qualitative research approach is that it permits researchers to examine what Wellens described as the ‘nature, breadth, depth and quality’ of governors’ perceptions and opinions’ (1993:10). It was decided to collect qualitative data using a semi-structured interview-based approach, which was deemed the most appropriate tool because of its ‘controlled flexibility’ – as Wragg (1978) noted, the semi-structured interview permits ‘respondents to express themselves, but offers enough shape to limit aimless rambling’ (1978:10). In this format, although the interviewer constructs a set of ‘guiding’ questions for the interview to follow, these questions do not need to be asked in a strict order, nor do they require a constrained set of responses. It was felt that this kind of approach to qualitative data collection offered three main advantages. First, this approach permits researchers to seek elaboration, explanation, and clarification of interviewee responses. This can therefore allow researchers to obtain a more complete contextual understanding of a given issue than might be provided by either a more structured interview or a quantitative approach. Second, this approach gives the researcher the ability to adjust the direction of the discussion in response to new information provided by interviewees during the course of the conversation. For example, valuable and useful information is often revealed when an interviewee decides to answer a slightly different question than the one that was asked. Third, this approach provides interviewees with the opportunity to volunteer information, in contrast to other research approaches that can constrain responses to the range of those pre-

identified by the researcher. Indeed, the semi-structured format gives the interviewee the opportunity to comment more broadly, while being flexible enough to accommodate potentially valuable tangents and more in-depth discussions. As such, it was felt that this ‘controlled flexibility’ made the semi-structured interview approach the most appropriate qualitative tool for this study.

### 3.3.2 The ‘Modified Case Study’ Design

However, qualitative research is often criticised – rightly or wrongly – for being haphazard, unmethodical, and less rigorous than quantitative research. In order to avoid these criticisms, the research design for the qualitative component of the main study followed the *general* principles of the case study method, and modified the method in one *extremely* important respect (see below). First, according to Yin, the case study approach is most valuable where ‘a how or why question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control’ (1994:9). Given that the proposed research fell clearly within these parameters, it was felt that the general tenets of the case study approach would be appropriate for this research design. Second, it was felt the relative methodological rigour of the case study approach would provide the necessary level of ‘quality control’, assisting in maintaining both the thoroughness and accuracy of the qualitative research. The case study approach demands that the rationale for selecting the individual ‘case sites’ can be explained and justified (see below for a detailed explanation of the criteria employed), and that the overall research design meets the ‘quality control tests’ of validity and reliability (addressed in Section 3.5). Furthermore, the data collection phase of this research was conducted along the lines of the traditional case study format, in that the bulk of the interviewees came from one of five ‘case’ schools.

Yet while this research design employed many components of the traditional case study approach, this design also modified the case study approach *in one extremely important respect*. In the data analysis phase, this research design *rejected* the traditional use of ‘cases’ as the main units of comparative analysis. The traditional approach calls for cases (in this instance, the schools and their governing bodies) to be compared to one another at the case (i.e., school) level. The research design for this study took a *fundamentally different approach*, as this research did *not* seek to achieve the results of traditional case study research. Instead, this modified design

treated ‘cases’ as vehicles for the systematic collection of individual-level data, rather than as analytical units in and of themselves (for previous examples of this approach, see West et al. 1990; West and Vaarlam 1991). In sum: *cases were used simply as an orderly way to acquire a critical mass of qualitative data for analysis.*

This alternative analytical framework was deemed preferable because the aim of this research was to use cases in a fundamentally new way: to identify issues of *common* concern amongst governors, those issues that *transcended* the unique circumstances of any given individual school or governing body. The emphasis of this research was on identifying *similarities* between disparate sites, *not* on comparing individual sites and identifying their differences. As such, it was felt that this ‘modified’ case study framework offered three important methodological strengths in terms of qualitative data collection:

- First, this approach allowed the research to operate at the level of the individual governors, making the research more fine-grained than it would have been if the comparisons could be made only at the case level. By collecting the data in ‘cases’, it was possible obtain a broad diversity of perspectives (for example, from different categories of governors) at the individual level without resorting to the ‘haphazard interviewing approach’ that is often criticised by sceptics of qualitative research.
- Second, this approach of acquiring individual-level data through an orderly rubric of ‘cases’ offered a significant advantage in terms of improving the internal validity of the data itself. By conducting multiple interviews within the same ‘case’, many underlying variables (such as location, student intake characteristics, etc.) were effectively held constant. This made it easier to determine the ‘representativeness’ of any given comment, since comments could then be evaluated in the context of similar comments within the same ‘case’.
- Third, this approach had advantages for data presentation. The orderly collection of individual-level data via the ‘case’ approach made it easier to identify where any given individual governor’s opinion fell on the contextual continuum of *all* of the governor comments collected in relation to a particular issue. This data collection process meant that it was then possible to clearly identify the parameters of overall governor opinion on a given issue. As such, it then became possible to *illustrate* the overall opinion of governors on that issue by using a set

of quotations from individual governors that best *reflected* these general findings. This model therefore sought to shift the focus away from the inevitable ‘institution-specific’ reasons for why individual schools may encounter problems in strategic planning, and towards the factors that appeared to affect *many* schools.

For all these reasons, it was felt that this ‘modified’ case study model offered the best methodological approach for researching the research questions identified herein. However, it should be acknowledged that pursuing this modified case study approach did mean sacrificing some advantages of the traditional case study approach. For example, because this research did not emphasise governing body observation (as traditional case study methods often do), there is no attempt made to evaluate how the mechanics of individual governing bodies in this study operated at the ‘nuts and bolts’ level. Similarly, this study does not provide as clear a view of the variety *between* the various schools that would be possible using a traditional case study approach (although as was noted above, this aim was not the intention of this study). However, this type of research into governing bodies has been conducted much more extensively (see Deem et al. 1995) than the resources of this study would ever have allowed, and it was felt that the ‘modified’ approach would provide a rigorous data collection framework that would maximise the breadth and scope of this research, with the acknowledgement that some detail would be sacrificed in the process.

Another advantage of the traditional case study approach is the opportunity it provides to acquire the highly detailed ‘rich descriptions’ that can result from the intense ethnographic observation of case sites over extended periods of time. However, as the intention of this study was to provide a viable policy model that could be used in practice by researchers, governing bodies and central government, it was felt that remaining completely faithful to the traditional case study method might lead either to findings that were obsolete or results that were largely ungeneralisable. As Walford (2003) argued in his Introduction to *Investigating educational policy through ethnography*:

‘Policy making and policy evaluation moves fast. One of the major reasons put forward for the lack of utilisation of *all* educational research is that the research time scale is often much longer than policy makers are prepared to wait, [and] if this problem exists for most educational research, it is greatly magnified with ethnographic work.... By the time such studies are published,

so much else is likely to have changed that no direct recommendations for action can be made' (2003:5).

In summary, it was deemed justifiable (for the reasons outlined above) to modify the traditional case study approach in order to enable this research study to meet its stated goals. This was done by retaining the rigorous data collection protocols and opportunities for intra-site comparisons offered by the case study approach, while jettisoning those components that were not compatible with the overall goals of this specific study.

### **3.3.3 Case Study Selection Criteria**

For three main reasons, it was decided to seek five different case sites for this research phase. First, it was felt that five cases permitted enough variation between different types of schools and different geographical areas within inner London to give the study sufficient diversity and construct validity. Second, it appeared that given time and resource constraints, five was the greatest number of sites that could be included while still ensuring the rigorousness and thoroughness of the research process. Third, it was felt that five sites would ensure that a sufficient overall number of interview candidates could be obtained.

There were, of course, limitations to this study created by the decision to focus specifically on the governing bodies of inner London schools. For example, this decision meant that while these research findings are likely to be applicable to other urban secondary schools, it is not possible to *automatically* generalise these findings to primary schools, or to secondary schools in suburban and rural areas. While the inclusion of a suburban or primary school case might have alleviated this limitation to some extent, it was felt that the value of doing so would have been significantly outweighed by two significant additional complications. First, determining the representativeness of a single individual site in the context of the population of all such sites *nationwide* would have been extremely difficult, particularly after having outlined such stringent selection criteria (see the two tests below) in seeking representativeness amongst the inner London case sites. Second, it would have been financially impossible to engage in a quantitative study that would have provided the level of supporting quantitative data for an additional *external* site comparable to that of the quantitative data acquired for the inner London sites. Another limitation of focusing on inner London was that inner city schools are, for example, well known to

suffer from difficulties in recruiting governors. As such, it is possible that the issues of governor recruitment addressed in this thesis (see section 6.1.4) as well as some of the other issues raised herein, may be *more* prevalent in inner cities than they are elsewhere in the country. The general caveat to the reader, therefore, is that the findings in this study should be viewed as *directly* applicable to inner London secondary schools, whilst judgement on their applicability in other circumstances should be made with caution pending future testing and research.

In setting out the criteria for case selection, it was felt that potential case study sites needed, individually and collectively, to demonstrate a level of ‘representativeness’ of the 139 inner London state-maintained secondary schools. This term may prompt criticism because of its potential subjectivity, and not the least because of the cliché that ‘every school is unique’. However, it was felt that such tests were necessary in order to ensure that a) the findings and the conclusions of this research had strong face validity in the context of the inner London secondary system, and b) there were reasonable grounds to presume that the theoretical conclusions of this research could be applicable and testable in other similar situations. Two sets of tests were employed: the first set sought to determine the acceptability of an individual institution, while the second set sought to ensure the collective diversity of the set of cases as a whole.

#### *Test One: Institutional Representativeness*

This set of tests sought to ensure that the overall set of cases was not skewed by the inclusion of an institution whose circumstances were atypical to those of most inner London secondary schools. Three criteria were employed to identify and eliminate from consideration such institutions: recent designation of serious weaknesses or special measures, percentage of students eligible for free school meals, and overall governing body competence. Each of these is discussed below.

#### Serious Weaknesses or Special Measures

Serious weaknesses and special measures are designations that can be issued by Ofsted – the government’s school inspection service – in the event of an unsatisfactory inspection.<sup>4</sup> Under Ofsted regulations (2003b), ‘serious weaknesses’

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<sup>4</sup> Office for Standards in Education. Ofsted manages the school inspection system, under which every school in the country is inspected thoroughly once every six years. After inspection, Ofsted issues a

warns a school that an inspection has found severe problems that require close attention, usually in 'one or more key stages; leadership...; the quality of teaching...; and the limited extent of school improvement given the previous inspected' (2003b:54). Furthermore, the designation of 'special measures' is made when a school is 'deemed through inspection to be failing, or [is] likely to fail, to provide [its] pupils with an acceptable standard of education' (2003b:54). Such a designation requires a school to accept substantial external assistance to improve those problems. None of the fifteen schools whose most recent Ofsted report designated them for serious weaknesses or special measures were considered as candidates. This was for two reasons. First, it was felt that schools facing administrative, academic, or disciplinary problems severe enough to warrant the government taking 'special measures' were, as the name suggests, special cases that would be unrepresentative of the majority of inner London secondary schools. Second, it was felt that, given the time and energy required to solve these problems, the governing bodies of these schools would be unlikely to have either the time or inclination to participate.

### Free School Meals

On the other end of the spectrum were those schools with extremely low percentages of their pupils eligible for free school meals. This statistic is the only nationally-collected and reported numerical indicator (albeit an imperfect one) available to researchers seeking to determine the relative economic deprivation of the student population. Across England, the mean percentage of secondary school students known to be eligible to receive free school meals in 1999-2000 (the school year with available statistics closest to the dates of the main study) was 16.5 per cent, whereas within greater London the percentage was 26.8 per cent, within inner London the percentage was 43.9 per cent (DfEE 2000c:35). Furthermore, the large majority of state schools in inner London reported percentages rising well above the national average, reaching over 80 per cent of students in schools located in some of the most deprived areas. It was therefore decided that none of the twelve inner London secondary schools with fewer than 20 per cent of its students known to be eligible for free school meals would be included in the case studies, as it was felt that such schools were not generally representative of the great majority of schools in the inner London secondary system. While it is true that these lower deprivation schools may



have strategies to offer to schools with higher levels of student deprivation, it seemed more judicious to focus on schools whose deprivation levels more closely matched those of the majority of inner London secondary schools.

### Overall Governing Body Competence

Since this research focused on governors, it was decided that at minimum, potential case study sites needed to have governing bodies that were not determined to be liabilities to their respective schools. The level of governing body performance was determined by examining the most recent Office of Standards in Education (Ofsted) report for each of the 139 schools in the research area. Ofsted reports provided the best available indicator of governing body performance, since each Ofsted report includes an assessment of the governing body's strengths and weaknesses, as well as an analysis of the extent to which the governing body helps shape the vision and direction of the school (Ofsted 2003a:41). Although this determination of overall governing body competence was clearly a subjective one, schools whose governing bodies were criticised severely by Ofsted were not pursued as potential case study sites. After applying the first two criteria of this section, this third criteria eliminated a further ten schools.

### *Test Two: Collective Representativeness*

Approximately one hundred schools out of 139 met the three criteria of institutional representativeness outlined above. This second set of tests therefore sought to ensure that collectively, the overall set of cases was adequately balanced in terms of the main demographic characteristics of the inner London secondary system. Six main criteria – geography, size, gender, school control, percentage of ethnic minority students, and average examination results – were deemed relevant to determining this balance, and each is discussed below.<sup>5</sup>

### Geography

Sites were drawn from the inner London boroughs as defined in Section 3.1.1. In order to acquire a measure of geographic diversity, no more than one case was drawn from a single borough. Further, an attempt was made to spread the cases

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<sup>5</sup> A seventh criterion – student/teacher ratio – was discarded due to the difficulty in obtaining accurate data. Institutional-level data on student/teacher ratios are not available from the DfES, and would have to have been obtained from the more unreliable self-reported figures contained in individual Ofsted reports.

geographically across the research area, with two cases coming from schools north of the Thames, and three from schools south of the Thames.

### Size

The size of inner London's secondary schools varies from a low of approximately 440 pupils to a high of over 2030 pupils, with a mean average of 949 and a median average of 899 (DfEE 2000d). Sites were selected in order to reflect this range, and varied in size from between 575 and 1500 pupils.

### Gender

Of the five schools selected, four were mixed, and one was single-sex girls. For comparison, the overall distribution of inner London schools by gender is 55.8 per cent mixed, 27.5 per cent single-sex girls, and 16.7 per cent single-sex boys (DfEE 2000d). Although attempts were made to reflect more closely the overall distribution by replacing a mixed school with a single-sex boys school, none of the boys schools approached responded positively to the request. However, it was not felt that the absence of such a school from the research rendered these findings inapplicable to such institutions.

### School Control

Four of the schools in this study were community schools, while the fifth was a non-denominational voluntary aided institution. Admittedly, this ratio is weighted more heavily towards community schools than is the overall composition of the inner London secondary system (in which 53 per cent of secondary schools are community schools, 37 per cent are voluntary aided, and ten per cent are other types (DfEE 2000d)). However, there was little that could be done other than to plead repeatedly with schools in underrepresented categories for their participation. Most notably, it was simply not possible to obtain the participation of any *religious*-affiliated schools as case studies, since ten such schools either declined or did not respond to requests for participation. However, while it would have been valuable to include a religious school in the qualitative study, the fact that these schools share many similarities with community schools (such as state funding, requirements to operate under many state statutes, and relatively similar governing body compositions), meant that the absence of one was not deemed vitally important.

### Percentage of Ethnic Minority Students

Because of the traditional emphasis placed on the importance of the ‘percentage of ethnic minority students’ variable, the research sought to include schools that broadly reflected the inner London range of this variable. According to the DfEE Annual Schools Census (2000d), the mean average for ‘percentage of ethnic minority students’ in inner London secondary schools was 54 per cent.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, nearly 60 per cent of inner London secondary schools reported that over half of their pupil intake was comprised of ethnic minorities, whilst only ten per cent of inner London secondary schools reported an intake that was less than 30 per cent ethnic minority. These figures were reflected in the composition of the schools that participated in this research, as two schools were moderately below the inner London average, whilst three exceeded it.

### GCSE Examination Results

This criterion was not a significant factor in determining the balance of the cases, as it was felt that average examination scores are often a misleading indicator. Low average scores can indicate that schools are dealing with pupils who experience significant existing constraints (such as poor English language skills), while high average scores can easily indicate the opposite. However, as with the ethnic minority percentage criteria, it was also felt that the schools selected for this study should be as ‘representative’ of the inner London system as was possible, since inadvertently including schools with only relatively high or low examination scores would fail to accurately reflect the state of the inner London system. Although all of the schools selected as case sites scored below the national average of 49.2 per cent of students achieving five GCSE passes at A\*-C (DfEE 2000e), so too did 79 per cent of all inner London secondary schools. When evaluating these schools in the inner London context, however, it was clear that they provided a diverse representation of the inner London system. Three of the five schools in this study ranked between the 40<sup>th</sup> and 55<sup>th</sup> percentile of all inner London schools in terms of the percentage of students achieving five good GCSEs, while a fourth school ranked above the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile, and a fifth below the 20<sup>th</sup> percentile.

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<sup>6</sup> A formal Form 7 request was made to the DfES for research access to school-level data on ethnic minority population and free school meal eligibility, as these data are not publicly available. This request was granted under the condition that the resulting research did not reveal the data of individual schools. Ethnic minority is defined as students classified by the DfES as being of: Black Caribbean heritage, Black African heritage, Black Other heritage, Indian ethnic origin, Pakistani ethnic origin, Bangladeshi ethnic origin, Chinese ethnic origin, or ‘any other minority ethnic origin’.

### 3.3.4 Selection of Case Sites and Supplementary Interview Candidates

After assessing each school against the two tests outlined above, a preliminary list of fifteen potential case study sites was created. The chair of the governing body and the head teacher of each potential participant institution were contacted via letter, which explained the proposed study (see Appendix B). This letter was followed by a telephone inquiry. If the chair and head appeared willing to explore participation, an initial informal meeting was held to address questions, discuss concerns, and ensure the support of these individuals in soliciting participation from other governors. All case study participants were promised individual and institutional anonymity (for precedents see Esp and Saran 1995; Scanlon et al. 1999). This decision was taken because the goal of this research was to identify policy patterns, trends, and solutions, rather than to identify these attributes to specific institutions or individuals. Additionally, while the promise of anonymity reassured institutions who might otherwise have been wary of participation in this research, it was clear upon completion of this research that naming specific schools or individuals would not have improved the quality of the data analysis. Of the initial fifteen schools approached, four agreed to participate as research sites. An additional ten potential schools were then contacted in the manner described above, and one of those schools agreed to participate as the fifth case study site.

Within each case study school, seven to nine individuals were interviewed according to the protocols outlined below. As mentioned above, interviewing this number of governors (40 in all) had the advantages of providing both a significant amount of data for analysis as well as a spectrum on which to gauge the representativeness of individual governor comments (by interpreting them in the context of the comments made by their colleagues). Each set of interviewees included the chair of governors, a teacher governor, a parent governor, an LEA governor, and a co-opted or foundation business governor. Furthermore, at four of the five case study schools the head teacher was interviewed as well.<sup>7</sup> Governors also often recommended interviewing *other* additional specific governors on their governing body, due to either the interest or expertise of those particular individuals, and these recommendations were acted upon wherever feasible. Once a case study was begun, the majority of interviews within that case were conducted within four to six weeks.

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<sup>7</sup> The exception was the school identified in this study as Whitefrost, where the head approved the research but, despite repeated requests, was unable to find the time to participate as an interviewee.

In addition to the interviews from the five case sites, it was decided to conduct a set of eight additional targeted interviews with chairs of governors from other inner London secondary schools. These interviewees were identified in several ways: some were recommended by the local governor services director, some were chairs of schools that were approached as potential case sites but which chose not to participate institutionally, and some were recommended by fellow chairs. By including these additional chairs in the research, it was possible to explore the broader general *extent* of patterns and themes identified through interviews at the five case sites, without the increased logistical difficulties of pursuing additional full case studies at numerous additional sites. This rationale for this decision came from the research design of Esp and Saran (1995), in which data were collected *solely* through interviews with chairs and heads. Esp and Saran's focus on 'elites' implied, reasonably, that chairs (and heads) often had the most significant influence in guiding the general direction of the governing body. The main purpose of these supplementary interviews, therefore, was to maximise the breadth of the research, while remaining within the time and resource constraints. For example, including these eight chairs in the research meant that thirteen different schools were represented (or ten per cent of those in the research area), as were nine different boroughs (out of thirteen in the research area). Furthermore, the addition of these interviews raised the total number of interviews in the main study to 48, which was felt to be sufficiently robust so as to provide a broad enough source of data from which to draw conclusions.

### **3.3.5 Interviewing Protocols**

Both the main study and the preliminary study interviews were designed to follow the same general format. Most interviews lasted for 45 minutes, although some were as short as 30 minutes and others lasted for over 90 minutes. All were arranged at the time and place most convenient for the interviewees, which usually meant in their home or office. When possible, each interviewee was sent a general written summary of the research study and a list of 'Frequently Asked Questions' prior to the interview (see Appendix B). This summary had two advantages. First, it provided the interviewee with the opportunity to think about some of the general issues prior the interview itself. Second, it permitted the researcher to avoid spending limited interview time on a lengthy explanation of the overall research project. Any interviewee who asked for an advance list of the interview questions was instead sent

a list of the general topics that were to be discussed. This was done in order to avoid the possibility of interviewees preparing ‘safe’ answers instead of responding spontaneously. Each interview was conducted using a pre-designed interview schedule, consisting of approximately 20 questions. Three different interview schedules were used in this research – two for use in the preliminary study (one for governor services directors and one for education business partnership directors – see Appendix A), and a third for the main study interviews (see Appendix B). The interview schedules for the preliminary study were created as described in Section 3.2.3, and, using the experience gained from the preliminary study, these preliminary interview schedules were then revised for use in the main qualitative study.

While Bell (1999) argues that ‘it is easier to acknowledge the fact that bias can creep in than to eliminate it altogether’ (1999:138), all attempts were made to eliminate sources of interviewer bias – such as leading questions, interruptions, providing answers, and other similar factors. Additionally, the general question order *within* the schedule was maintained when possible, both in order to ensure a measure of uniformity between respondents and to aid in the subsequent data analysis process. However, the semi-structured format allowed for questions to be asked, when necessary, in the order that appeared to have the best chance of encouraging the most useful responses from the interviewees. This flexibility preserved the context and fluidity of the interview, while helping put the interviewee at ease by both preventing awkward shifts in emphasis and by lending a logical flow to the development of the discussion. Each interview was concluded by thanking the interviewee, providing contact information should the interviewee have additional questions or comments, and enquiring whether the participant would be amenable to being contacted should their comments require clarification or elaboration.

### **3.3.6 Tape Recording and Transcriptions Protocols**

Although written notes were taken during each interview, interviews were audio taped for transcription purposes whenever possible. All interviewees were asked explicitly if their interview could be recorded, and all interviewees were given assurances that tapes would be erased after analysis. Additionally, all interviewees were promised that all of their comments, as well as reference to specific sites and individuals, would be made anonymous in the final written work. It was decided that the value gained by promising anonymity, in terms of the candour and comfort of the

interviewees, outweighed the analytical value of identifying specific sites. Although on some occasions taping was *not* possible (either due to the interview environment or due to equipment failure), over 90 per cent of interviews were tape recorded, and only two interviewees refused on principle to be recorded. This high rate of acceptance was extremely important, as recording interviews has a number of advantages for qualitative research. For example:

- Recording provides the opportunity to hear the entire interview in context, which can often assist in interpreting specific sections of an interview;
- Recording eliminates the problem of ‘data distortion’ that can be created during the post-hoc recreation of interview content from written notes;
- Accurate verbatim transcription is possible for recorded interviews, whereas it is nearly impossible when transcribing from written notes;
- Recording allows for conversations to be revisited, permitting a greater attention to vocal emphasis and stresses that are not conveyed solely by written notes;
- Recording allows the interviewer to focus on the interviewee, rather than on transcription. This focus not only helps the interviewee relax, it also permits the interviewer to follow the conversation more closely and ask relevant clarification or follow up questions.

Every recorded interview was transcribed verbatim using a transcription machine and a word processor. In cases where recording was not possible, the extensive shorthand notes from the interview were written up as soon as was possible afterwards. This created a written ‘record bank’ of all interview conversations (the method of analysing these transcripts is discussed below in more detail). The logistical difficulty associated with providing each interviewee with a copy of their transcribed interview before quotation meant that offering a transcript was not standard practice, and no interviewee requested a transcript of their interview. However, if interviewees had expressly asked to review their comments, a decision had been made at the outset of the research to provide transcripts if so requested.

### **3.3.7 Qualitative Data Analysis Procedures**

Interview transcripts were, on average, approximately 4,000 words apiece. In order to make this quantity of data manageable for analysis purposes, the general coding

processes outlined by Bryman (2001:398) were employed. In particular, all comments that appeared clearly relevant to the analysis were colour-highlighted *as they were being transcribed*. This meant that although the transcripts were still read fully during the analysis stage, seeking out the relevant portions of each transcript became a relatively straightforward process. Identification of these sections was aided by the use of the field notes, as a point was made during the interviews to manually denote comments of particular value or interest. By cross-checking these notes with the relevant sections of the transcript, it was easier to draw out the most relevant sections for analysis. Additionally, all interviews from a particular case study were transcribed consecutively, which meant that common themes within case studies became easier to identify due to their repetition by various interviewees. Because the transcripts were stored as word processing files, it was extremely simple to move relevant sections from the transcripts into the body of the data chapter, and to view different responses to the same question simultaneously.

The use of a software package for qualitative data analysis was considered, but eventually rejected, for three reasons. First, the fact that not all of the interviews were able to be tape recorded meant that the value of the text-pattern identification features of these programmes would be substantially diminished. Second, respondents often referenced their responses to other portions of the interview, making it vital to have a thorough understanding of the context in which comments were being made. It was felt that the current limitations of the computerised packages were not adequately equipped to provide this kind of sophisticated contextual analysis. Third, many of the available qualitative analysis software packages operate by quantifying the occurrence of particular words or phrases. However, it was felt that counting alone provided minimal advantages a study that was seeking to identify themes and patterns. For these reasons, it was felt that the advantages of computerised qualitative data analysis packages would be minimal.

### **3.4 THE QUANTITATIVE SURVEY**

In the third phase of this research, a mail survey was employed in order to provide a quantitative balance to the issues that had been investigated through the qualitative case studies. The value of using a quantitative survey was fourfold. First, this survey provided additional ‘triangulation’ regarding governors’ perceptions about business involvement and strategic planning. Second, this survey enabled this



research to cover the entire population of the research area. Third, this survey enabled the full range of variation in secondary schools – from school control to school size to school gender – to be represented in this research.<sup>8</sup> Finally, as Robson (1993) argues, employing ‘multiple-method research’ (such as a quantitative survey in conjunction with qualitative research methods) can enhance the overall interpretability of research data, and permit a broader and more complete analysis than either a quantitative or a qualitative approach could provide alone (1993:289). In explaining the methodology employed for the quantitative component of this research, this section discusses the parameters of the survey, question design and survey creation, logistical issues, overall results, and analysis methods.

### **3.4.1 Survey Parameters**

The survey was carried out during June and July of 2001. In order to obtain the greatest coverage of the research area while remaining within resource constraints, the survey was designed to be sent to the head teacher and the chair of governors at every (non-special) state-maintained secondary school within the 13-borough research area. This area comprised 139 schools, and therefore 278 individual recipients.<sup>9</sup>

### **3.4.2 Question Design and Survey Creation**

Because the survey was intended to gauge the opinion and knowledge of the *broader* population in regards to the issues raised in the case studies, the survey questions were designed to mirror (as closely as was possible) the interview questions from the case studies. The survey questions were grouped into the same three main categories – business involvement, strategic planning, and the role of central government – and the same questions were sent to both chairs of governors and head teachers. The only difference between the surveys sent to the two groups came in the preparatory section of the survey, which requested information regarding the respondent’s length of service at the school and whether they had ever been employed in the private sector. In this section, minor alterations were made to reflect the position of the recipient (for example, ‘years on governing body’ and ‘years as chair’ were changed to ‘years at this school’ and ‘years as head teacher’.) All respondents were guaranteed that their responses would be held in confidence, but the survey did ask

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<sup>8</sup> While City Technology Colleges are technically ‘independent’ institutions, they were included in the mail survey since – despite their status – their funding comes almost entirely from central government.

<sup>9</sup> One additional school was eliminated from the study as it was designated for closure at the end of the 2000-2001 school year.

for their school's name in order to match their survey responses with the school's statistical data. This method had the advantage of not expending valuable survey space on asking factual questions, such as school size or affiliation. The survey instrument itself can be found in Appendix C.

Survey question response options were scaled in the manner deemed most appropriate to the question being asked. For the majority of questions, respondents were given an interval scale of one to five, with the polar points labelled in order to provide the scale definition. A one to five scale was chosen because it provided the respondent with sufficient gradation, while also permitting aggregated responses to be collapsed into three categories (i.e., low, middle, high) for analysis purposes. In one question (number 22) the scale itself was reduced to three response options, as this was a unidirectional question concerned with level of hindrance that the given set of factors had on governing body strategic planning. For other items, response options were given as simple nominal yes/no or yes/no/unsure choices, as appropriate.

Before distribution, the survey was piloted in order to assess the ease of its completion, identify confusing or ambiguous wording, and ensure that respondents were interpreting the questions as intended. While interviews permit the researcher to seek clarification of an interviewee's responses, it is clearly impossible to determine the respondent's interpretation of a particular survey question. Therefore, it was essential that questions were worded in a manner that ensured as uniform an understanding of the question as was possible. The survey was piloted on a number of governors who would *not* be eventual survey recipients, as well as on individuals with experience in education and on individuals with experience in survey design. These comments were all incorporated into the final survey design.

### **3.4.3 Survey Logistics**

Although the literature on survey design is extensive (e.g., Sudman and Bradburn 1982; Foddy 1993; Gillham 2000), little has been written on how to acquire good *response* rates to those well-designed survey instruments. Traditionally, response rates to mail surveys hover around 25 per cent, at which point serious questions arise about the representativeness of the results. In an attempt to avoid these problems, this survey was distributed using a modification of the method devised by Dillman (2000), whose research into survey logistics has been both thorough and extensive.

First, the four-page survey was duplex-printed on a single sheet of folded A3, in order to ensure that pages were not lost during the response cycle. The survey was then packaged with three additional items: a personalised letter from the governor services director in the respondent's borough, a personalised letter from the research supervisor, and a stamped addressed return envelope (examples of these letters can be found in Appendix C). The purpose of these personalised letters was to reduce any adverse 'cold-call' effect of the survey. The letter from the governor services director indicated a level of official approval of the research from a source that would be known to the respondent. This letter, on official borough letterhead, was always placed first in order to maximise its influence with the respondent. The research supervisor's letter, also on official letterhead, served a similar purpose, by providing the imprimatur of a well-known academic institution. Finally, a second-class stamped addressed return envelope was included in the package, as Dillman (2000) determined that return envelopes with physical stamps increased response rates by nearly 10 per cent over metered or postage-paid return envelopes.

Both letters requested that the survey be returned within three weeks of its receipt, when possible. The timing of the survey sending was also carefully chosen, in order to avoid having the survey arrive during a time of high activity during the school year (such as the first few weeks of term), or when the school was not in session (such as half-terms). The survey was posted during the first week of June 2001, creating an expected reply window of the last two weeks of June 2001. Although the survey package was posted to head teachers at their *school* addresses, the survey package was posted directly to chairs of governors at their *home* addresses whenever possible. These home addresses were acquired from the LEAs in 10 of the 13 research boroughs. Since mail sent to governors via their schools is often delayed due to rerouting (or discarded due to 'selective sorting' by school office staff), it was felt that sending the surveys directly to home addresses would increase the possibility of rapid response. Additionally, it was felt that in conjunction with the letter of support from the director of governor services, sending the survey package to a home address would increase the likelihood of a favourable response.

The second logistical stage occurred three days later, when a second letter was posted to each of the survey recipients (see Appendix C). This letter was sent from the governor services director on local authority letterhead (using a template

provided by the researcher), and noted that the recipient should have received a survey several days earlier. Dillman (2000) determined that using this type of 'immediate follow-up' letter increased response rates significantly for two reasons. First, respondents recognised that the survey was of sufficient importance to the researcher that he or she was willing to spend the time and money to determine that the survey had arrived safely. Second, such a letter encouraged respondents to complete the survey before they had the opportunity to *discard* it. By reaching respondents a few days after the arrival of the survey and jogging their memories, the risk of the survey being added to (and lost in) the 'to do' pile was greatly reduced.

The third stage occurred four weeks after the initial survey mailing, or one week after the stated deadline for receipt of the completed surveys. A third letter, authored by the researcher, was sent to all target recipients who had not returned a completed survey. This letter noted this fact, and a second copy of the survey instrument and a second stamped return envelope were enclosed. Although the response rate to this 'second sending' was substantially lower (19 per cent) than the overall response rate (57 per cent – see below), it was reasonable to expect a lower rate given the population to which this letter was sent (i.e., those who had not responded to the initial mailing).

#### **3.4.4 Survey Response Results**

All responses were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet, which expedited the tracking of completed and outstanding surveys. This method also allowed for the tracking of completed surveys by borough and respondent category (head or chair). Overall, 158 responses were received. This comprised 63 per cent of all chairs of governors and 50 per cent of all head teachers, giving a combined response rate of 57 per cent – well above the traditional response rate for such surveys. It also appeared that most respondents were satisfied with the promise of anonymity, as only four respondents (2.5 per cent) declined to provide either the name of their school or their borough. The response rates to questions *within* the surveys were also extremely thorough, as only five respondents (three per cent) did *not* answer at least 95 per cent of the survey items. Not only were these 'internal' response rates higher than expected, but several completed surveys were accompanied by notes and letters offering more thorough explanations of particular responses, and suggesting additional research ideas. Finally, at least 20 per cent of respondents requested copies of the survey results, suggesting a moderately high level of interest in the subject matter amongst the respondents.

While these statistics assist in establishing the validity and potential generalisability of the results from the respondent level, three other important statistics assist in establishing the validity and potential generalisability from the school and borough level. The first of these is the ‘double-response’ rate; in 42 schools (34 per cent of all schools in the research area), *both* the head teacher and the chair of governors responded. The second of these is the overall school participation rate; out of the 139 schools in the research area, responses were received from either the head or the chair of governors of 110 of them – an impressive 79 per cent. This breadth of coverage is extremely important, as it suggests that the results of the survey reflect the situations in the full range of secondary schools, not just in one narrow segment of them. Finally, the response rate by LEA is important, as a low response rate from some boroughs might offer the misleading impression that those few responses to the survey represented the views of all those in the borough. Fortunately, as can be seen from Table 3.2, no borough’s response rate was below 40 per cent (Lambeth), and at the upper end, Greenwich achieved a response rate of 75 per cent.

**Table 3.2: Response Rate (by LEA) to Survey of Chairs and Heads**

<b>LEA</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Response Rate (%)</b>
Greenwich	18	75
Lewisham	19	73
Southwark	18	64
Kensington & Chelsea	5	63
Tower Hamlets	18	60
Wandsworth	12	60
Islington	10	56
Westminster	8	50
Hammersmith & Fulham	8	50
Camden	10	50
Newham	14	47
Hackney	8	44
Lambeth	8	40
Anonymous Responses	2	N/A
<b>Totals</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>57</b>

### 3.4.5 Quantitative Data Analysis Procedures

All survey responses were coded and entered into an SPSS data file. Using the school name provided by the respondent, additional factual data were entered into the SPSS framework, including data on school size, gender, school control, and location. Using publicly available DfEE data (DfEE 2000e), information was added on the

school's GCSE results from 2000 (percentage receiving five grades A\*-C, percentage receiving grades A-G, percentage of no passes), and the comparisons of these results to the overall percentages for both England and the LEA. Additionally, restricted-access school-level data were obtained from the DfEE Annual Schools Census (2000d) via a Form 7 request, since while 'known eligibility for free school meals' is the strongest proxy indicator for the school deprivation level, these data are not publicly available.

All data were then analysed either through the straight reporting of frequencies, or by cross-tabulating various variables and using tests of statistical significance to identify any statistically significant differences between the responses of chairs and the responses of heads. The chi-squared test was used for nominal data, and the Mann-Whitney U test was used for ordinal data. As was noted in Section 3.4.2, most survey questions with ordinal response scales offered respondents five discrete response options, and the full five-category data sets were used when executing the Mann-Whitney U tests. However, it should be noted that *after* executing these statistical significance tests, the full five-category ordinal data sets were *always collapsed from five categories into three*. This procedure was employed in order to improve the management of the data during analysis and to improve the clarity of the formal data presentation. In collapsing these ordinal data sets, the two lowest and two highest categories were combined, respectively, to form a single data category. (To illustrate, on a scale where 'one' indicated 'strongly oppose' and 'five' indicated 'strongly support', the data were collapsed so responses of 'one' or 'two' indicated 'oppose', a response of three indicated 'neutral', and a response of 'four' or 'five' indicated 'support'.) This method made general trends easier to identify while still preserving the original gradation differences for future analyses.

### **3.5 CONSTRUCT VALIDITY, RELIABILITY, AND EXTERNAL VALIDITY**

This section addresses how the overall research design addressed the 'quality control tests' of construct validity, reliability, and external validity. Kidder (1981) defines construct validity as 'establishing correct operational measures for the concepts being studied,' reliability as 'demonstrating that the operations of a study can be repeated with the same results,' and external validity as 'establishing the domain to which a study's findings can be generalised' (1981:7-8). Demonstrating that this

research design addressed these issues therefore provides an additional measure of confidence in both the design itself and the research data collected under its auspices.

### **3.5.1 Construct Validity**

This research design addressed the issue of construct validity in two ways. First, this research relied upon multiple interviews, multiple sites, multiple survey respondents, and multiple data sources. This triangulation of data sources reduces the likelihood that the overall research findings are biased by outlier cases, or that any *particular* data source or contact unduly influenced either the evaluation of evidence or the perspective of the conclusions. Second, questions of validity often arise when the ‘questions being asked’ are inaccurately designed for gathering information about the ‘concepts being investigated’. For this research, this meant avoiding asking vague or poorly-worded questions that lead to responses that *actually* answer a subtly different question than the one the researcher believes is being asked. As was noted earlier, the preliminary testing of both the interview questions and the survey instrument was a great asset in this regard, and the corrections made as a *result* of these processes serve to increase the confidence in the construct validity of the overall research.

### **3.5.2 Reliability**

In this study, reliability was ensured via the consistent use of data collection techniques and methods. In particular, the methods for the qualitative interviews, the quantitative survey, and their respective preliminary studies were clearly documented, a log of interviewees was maintained, interviews were transcribed using recognised transcription procedures, and interview questions and survey were made available for future scrutiny and replication (see Appendices). It was felt that this record of the research process adequately addressed any concerns about either the replicability of the proposed study or the reliability of its results.

### **3.5.3 External Validity**

The issue of external validity and generalisation is one that often plagues qualitative research, since it is often argued that case studies are not ‘representative’ of the study population, so therefore their findings cannot be generalised (and are therefore of limited value). This research design addressed this concern in two ways. First, a quantitative survey was carried out in conjunction with the qualitative research. The relatively high response rate to the quantitative study provided the overall study with

a measure of ‘representativeness’ for the study population (inner London state secondary schools), and confirmed the external validity of the quantitative research. Furthermore, given that these quantitative results corresponded quite closely with the qualitative data, it can be argued that there the quantitative results offer an increased measure of supporting external validity to the qualitative data as well. Second, however, Yin argues that it is not necessary to apply ‘sampling logic’ to qualitative research, suggesting that the contribution made by generalising qualitative results is *analytical-theoretical*, rather than *statistical*. Yin states:

‘Case studies, like experiments, are generalisable to theoretical propositions and not to populations.... [T]he case study, like the experiment, does not represent a sample, and the investigator’s goal is to expand and generalise theories...not to enumerate frequencies’ (1994:10).

This argument states that if clear patterns are observed during a qualitative study, such findings can be generalised as contributions to theory. These ‘theoretical’ contributions can then be tested in other situations where there is reason to believe that these theoretical patterns might help explain a certain pattern of behaviour. There are, of course, limits to the extent of the generalisations of this research, and these limitations are addressed more fully in the final chapter of this thesis. However, by casting the patterns identified in this research in the context of general theoretical propositions about the strategic planning barriers facing governing bodies, it is argued that this research adequately addresses the issue of external validity.

### **3.6 THE RESEARCH SAMPLE**

This final section presents the description of the qualitative and quantitative research samples. First, Section 3.6.1 provides the profiles of the five case study schools whose governors participated in the qualitative research. Second, Section 3.6.2 describes the governing bodies at each case study school, and provides the background context on the schools of the supplementary interview chairs. Finally, Section 3.6.3 describes the quantitative research sample, and illustrates the representative nature of this sample in relation to the population of possible respondents.

#### **3.6.1 Profiles of the Five Case Study Schools**

Each of the five case study schools is profiled below, using the pseudonym assigned by the researcher. Some statistical data have been presented in intentionally general terms in order to preserve the promised institutional anonymity. The statistical data



are drawn from the DfEE Annual Schools Census (2000d), which was the most recent uniform compilation of data available at the time of the data analysis. The remaining data come from Ofsted reports and from personal observations.

**Bluewater School** is a mixed community school in west London. Good access to transport means that over 50 primary schools are represented in each annual intake, and that only 60 per cent of Bluewater's nearly 1200 students come from inside the borough. In addition, Bluewater has a 300-student sixth form. The school is quite ethnically diverse: its students speak over 60 native languages (indeed, over 60 per cent speak English as an *additional* language), and nearly two-thirds of students are identified as ethnic minorities (predominantly Black, Chinese, and South Asian). The school is situated in a relatively affluent residential area, yet despite this location, the school's physical infrastructure is in dire need of repair, and Bluewater caters to a relatively disadvantaged student body. Over 40 per cent of its students are eligible for free school meals, nearly equalling the Inner London average of 43.9 per cent, and well exceeding the overall London average of 26.8 per cent (DfEE 2000c:35). In addition, over 20 per cent have been designated as having special educational needs. Recent GCSE results reflect these difficulties, as the percentage of students achieving five or more grades A\*-C between 1997 and 2000 has been steady at 30 per cent – well below both the 2000 national average (49 per cent) and the 2000 borough average. However, Bluewater's most recent Ofsted Report (1997) rated the school as satisfactory, taking into account the challenges the school faces given the range of its student abilities and socio-educational backgrounds. In terms of business involvement, Bluewater has engaged in a number of one-off projects in recent years, but in general the school community has strong reservations about the role business should or could play in education.

**Brownstone School** is a mixed community school located in a highly urbanised area of east London. Nearly all of the approximately 1000 students live in the immediate area, and there is no sixth form. This school serves a mainly ethnic minority community, as nearly all of the pupils are of Bangladeshi origin. For over 90 per cent of these students, English is an additional language, and over 75 per cent of students are eligible for free school meals – one of the highest rates in the country. Academically, however, Brownstone has done exceedingly well in relation to its challenges, as its recent GCSE results have showed steady improvement.

Approximately 30 per cent of students achieved five or more grades A\*-C in 2000, a figure that, while falling below the national average, very nearly reaches the borough average. Acknowledging this progress, Ofsted's most recent report (1999) noted that Brownstone was a strong school operating under challenging circumstances. Of the five case study schools, Brownstone is the most enthusiastic about business involvement. In recent years the school has vigorously sought specialist school status, created a large student-business mentoring scheme, and actively pursued both financial and in-kind contributions from the business community.

**Greenleaf School** is a girls community school south of the Thames. It is located in a mainly residential and working-class area, and is surrounded by a park and small retail stores in addition to terraced housing. The school itself is an amalgam of Victorian architecture and a substantial 1970s addition. There are 1200 girls in years seven to eleven, and an additional 300 students in the mixed sixth form cooperative. English is an additional language for nearly 50 per cent of pupils, and over 45 per cent are from ethnic minorities, predominantly Black African and Indian, respectively. Approximately 40 per cent of students are eligible for free school meals, which is near the Inner London average. Recent trends in GCSE results have matched the LEA average, with approximately 30 per cent of students achieving five or more grades A\*-C. Although this is well below the national average, there has been a steady upward trend since 1997. Greenleaf's most recent Ofsted Report (1999) rated the school as having had weaknesses but improving, and the governing body was described as providing strong leadership. The school has received several honours and recognitions from central government in recent years, having participated in a statutory EAZ and been designated as a specialist school. In terms of business involvement, Greenleaf has had a small number of *ad hoc* activities over the past few years, but its major involvement with business has been the fundraising campaign associated with its specialist school bid.

**Redwood School** is a mixed non-denominational voluntary aided school, located along a busy local high street in a working class yet slowly gentrifying area of south London. Although somewhat cramped due to its Victorian quarters, the school is undergoing a major renovation and expansion, which officials hope will improve education provision in the near future. Because of its voluntary aided status, Redwood has the freedom to designate its own admissions criteria, and draws its

approximately 500 students from a broad catchment area, including a significant number of students from outside its borough. Redwood also has a very small sixth form. While less than 20 per cent of students speak English as an additional language, approximately half of the students are from ethnic minorities, and approximately 45 per cent of students are eligible for free school meals (a figure quite near the Inner London average). From 1997 to 2000, a fairly consistent 30 per cent of students achieved at least five grades A\*-C at GCSE – well below the England average, but about average in relation to other schools in the borough. In general, Redwood is perceived as a generally average urban school; its most recent Ofsted report (1999) noted that the school had more strengths than weaknesses, and felt that it had improved since its previous inspection. While the school has had limited involvement with business in recent years, there have been recent efforts to increase the school's engagement with the local community, and particularly with surrounding high street employers.

**Whitefrost School** is a mixed state community in south London, situated on a main thoroughfare between an affluent residential neighbourhood and a large council housing estate. Built in the 1960s, the school is physically dilapidated and in much need of repair. Drawing students from all across the borough, Whitefrost serves approximately 800 students to GCSE level, nearly two-thirds of whom come from Black African or Caribbean backgrounds. Whitefrost also serves an extremely underprivileged community; nearly 60 per cent of its students are eligible for free school meals (significantly above even the inner London average), and English is an additional language for over 50 per cent of pupils. These challenges are evident in the Whitefrost's exam results, as less than 20 per cent of students achieved five or more GCSE grades at A\*-C between 1997 and 2000 – well below both the national and borough averages. However, Ofsted believes that Whitefrost is an improving school. The school was placed into special measures in the late 1990s, but, following a change in its head teacher and chair of governors, Whitefrost was removed from special measures and began moving forward. Although the school is situated within a statutory EAZ and aspires to become a specialist school, governors and teachers admit that they have not previously engaged in business involvement to the extent that they would have liked. However, the school has worked on careers days and mentoring projects with several local multinational companies in recent years.

### **3.6.2 Profiles of the Case Study Governing Bodies**

#### *The Bluewater Governing Body*

Eight governors plus the head teacher were interviewed at Bluewater. These were the chair of governors (a co-opted governor who was a former Bluewater teacher, and who acts as Curriculum Chair), three co-opted governors (two with significant business backgrounds, and one employed as a university professor whose daughter was a former pupil), one teacher governor, one parent governor, and two LEA governors (one a Labour councillor and one a Conservative councillor; the latter was also the Finance Chair). Bluewater's governors were praised by Ofsted as being well organised and knowledgeable, and there were only a few vacancies on the governing body – indeed, many governors had served on the governing body for a number of years. The governors at Bluewater were generally highly educated, vocal, and opinionated, and tended to be active professionals. The head teacher was a new – external – appointment, having arrived at the beginning of the school year in which this research was conducted.

#### *The Brownstone Governing Body*

Seven governors plus the head teacher were interviewed at Brownstone. These were the chair of governors (a co-opted governor who owns and runs a local business), two co-opted governors (one, the Finance Chair, was employed as an investment manager for a major City firm, and the other was employed in a similar capacity as a civil servant), two LEA governors appointed by the Labour party (one employed as a professional labour negotiator, while the other was a former teacher and the current Curriculum Chair), one parent governor, and one teacher governor. In its most recent report, Ofsted noted that the governing body worked effectively to support the school. However, while there were several Brownstone governors who are quite active, there were frequently a number of parent vacancies on the governing body. The governing body at Brownstone tended to be split between older local residents and younger individuals who worked near the school but resided elsewhere. The head teacher had been in post for nearly ten years, and had built a strong working relationship with the governing body.

#### *The Greenleaf Governing Body*

Six governors plus the head teacher were interviewed at Greenleaf. These were the chair of governors (an LEA governor who was the former head teacher of Greenleaf's main feeder primary school), two co-opted governors (one the *former*

chair of governors, and the other an external advisor who came to the school in relation to their specialist school bid), one teacher governor, one parent governor (who was also the chair of governors at a local primary school), and one LEA governor appointed through the Labour party (who was also the Finance Chair). The governors at Greenleaf tended to have strong professional backgrounds in education, and lived in the immediate vicinity of the school. There were frequently a small number of vacancies on the governing body, but in general the governing body had maintained a fairly stable level of membership. The head teacher had been in post for a number of years at the time of the research, and had built a good working relationship with the governing body.

### *The Redwood Governing Body*

Seven governors plus the head teacher were interviewed at Redwood. These were the chair of governors (a foundation governor who founded and runs his own major computer corporation, and who acts as Curriculum Chair), two foundation governors (one the vice-president of a major multinational and the Finance Chair, the other a retired individual), two LEA governors (one a social worker in another local authority, the other a university professor), one teacher governor, and one parent governor. In its most recent report, Ofsted deemed Redwood's governing body to be well led and well informed, and due to the quota of foundation governors, there were rarely vacancies on the governing body. Many Redwood governors had attended the school themselves, although most had eventually moved well away from the immediate vicinity of the school. The head was fairly new at the time of this research, having been appointed within the past two years.

### *The Whitefrost Governing Body*

Eight governors were interviewed at Whitefrost, although the head was not available to be interviewed. Those interviewed were the chair of governors (a co-opted governor employed as a civil servant, who had been recently elected as chair), two co-opted governors (one a local parent and Curriculum Chair, the other a City-employed manager and the Finance Chair), three LEA governors (one local Labour councillor and two appointed by the Conservative party), one parent governor (himself a former Whitefrost chair of governors), and a staff governor with 20 years service to the school. Although Ofsted has rated the governing body as satisfactory, there were frequent vacancies on the governing body, and governor turnover was a

significant problem. Whitefrost's governing body consisted of individuals from across the socio-economic and geographic spectrum; many of the most active governors joined because they were attracted by the opportunities for 'making a difference' during the school's emergence from special measures. The head teacher had been in post for only twelve months at the time this research was conducted.

### *The Supplementary Interview Chairs*

As was noted in Section 3.3.4, supplementary interview chairs – four men and four women – were identified in several ways: some were recommended by the local governor services director, some were chairs of schools that chose not to participate as case studies, and some were recommended by fellow chairs. Table 3.3 provides a brief overview of the schools at which these interviewees were chairs, using data from the DfEE Annual Schools Census (2000d). To preserve the anonymity of these interviewees, school enrolments are reported to the nearest hundred, and percentages are presented to the nearest decile.

**Table 3.3: Descriptive Data for the Schools of Supplementary Interview Chairs**

School Location	Number of Pupils	Pupils Known Eligible for FSM (%)	Pupils from Ethnic Minority Backgrounds (%)	Pupils Receiving Five A*-C at GCSE (%)	School Gender	School Control
North	1000	50	50	30	Mixed	Community
Northeast	1900	40	80	40	Mixed	Community
East	800	50	80	40	Girls	Vol. Aided
East	1000	40	60	50	Mixed	Vol. Aided
East	1400	80	100	50	Girls	Community
South	1000	50	60	20	Mixed	Community
Southwest	900	30	60	20	Mixed	Community
West	600	10	20	90	Girls	Vol. Aided

### **3.6.3 The Quantitative Sample**

This final section provides two sets of descriptive statistics. First, Tables 3.4 through 3.11 illustrate the extent to which the quantitative sample was representative of the population of all possible survey respondents. This is done by comparing the characteristics of the schools of *survey respondents* to the *overall population* of schools (N=138) in eight key categories, using data from the DfEE Annual Schools Census (2000d).<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that these data demonstrate that this survey

<sup>10</sup> The discrepancy between the overall population N for this descriptive data (N=138) and the population N for the mail survey (N=139) is due to the fact that one new school opened in the interval

was extremely representative, as *none* of the differences between respondents and the population in *any* category were statistically significant. Tables 3.4 through 3.6 report the mean, median, and range of the data on pupil enrolment, percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals, and percentage of students achieving five or more grades A\*-C at GCSE, respectively.

**Table 3.4: Pupil Enrolment**

	<b>All Schools (N=138)</b>	<b>Chair Respondents (N=85)</b>	<b>Head Respondents (N=68)</b>
Mean	949	928	964
Median	899	880	894
Range Low	437	437	437
Range High	2039	1932	2039

**Table 3.5: Percentage of Students Known to be Eligible for Free School Meals**

	<b>All Schools (N=138)</b>	<b>Chair Respondents (N=85)</b>	<b>Head Respondents (N=68)</b>
Mean	43.2	43.2	44.3
Median	43.0	41.7	43.6
Range Low	6.2	6.2	6.2
Range High	88.1	88.1	82.8

**Table 3.6: Percentage of Students Achieving Five Grades A\*-C at GCSE**

	<b>All Schools (N=138)</b>	<b>Chair Respondents (N=85)</b>	<b>Head Respondents (N=68)</b>
Mean	34.1	33.7	34.4
Median	32	34	32
Range Low	5	6	5
Range High	92	89	89

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*Percentages of overall GCSE attainment levels are only reported by the DfEE in whole numbers.*

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Next, Tables 3.7 through 3.10 report the overall percentages in each sub-category of school type, religious affiliation, gender, and location, respectively.

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between the collation of the data from the Annual Schools Census in January 2000 and the time the mail survey was conducted in 2001.

**Table 3.7: School Type**

	<b>All Schools (N=138)</b>	<b>Chair Respondents (N=86)</b>	<b>Head Respondents (N=68)</b>
Community	52.9	51.2	52.9
Voluntary Aided	38.3	39.5	36.8
Foundation	5.1	5.8	7.4
CTC	2.2	2.3	—
Voluntary Controlled	1.9	1.2	2.9

**Table 3.8: School Religious Affiliation**

	<b>All Schools (N=138)</b>	<b>Chair Respondents (N=86)</b>	<b>Head Respondents (N=68)</b>
None	66.7	67.4	70.6
Roman Catholic	21.0	19.6	17.6
Church of England	10.9	11.6	11.8
Christian	0.7	1.2	—
Jewish	0.7	—	—

**Table 3.9: School Gender**

	<b>All Schools (N=138)</b>	<b>Chair Respondents (N=86)</b>	<b>Head Respondents (N=68)</b>
Mixed	55.8	54.7	57.4
Single-Sex Girls	27.5	26.7	32.4
Single-Sex Boys	16.7	18.6	10.3

**Table 3.10: School Location – East v. West / North v. South**

	<b>All Schools (N=138)</b>	<b>Chair Respondents (N=85)</b>	<b>Head Respondents (N=69)</b>
East	71.0	71.3	73.9
West	29.0	28.7	26.1
North	55.8	54.2	49.3
South	44.2	45.8	50.7

Finally, Table 3.11 compares the gender of survey respondents to the gender distribution of all chairs and heads in the survey population.

**Table 3.11: Chair and Head Gender**

	<b>Chairs All Schools (N=138)</b>	<b>Chair Respondents (N=85)</b>	<b>Heads All Schools (N=138)</b>	<b>Head Respondents (N=69)</b>
Male	61.9	64.0	46.8	35.3
Female	38.1	36.0	55.2	64.7



Having established that this survey was representative of the population, the second set of statistics provides some insight into the survey respondents themselves. First, it was found that chairs in this survey tended to be foundation governors (40.2 per cent – although such governors only exist at foundation or voluntary sector schools), with most other chairs reporting that they were either LEA (25.3 per cent) or co-opted (19.5 per cent) governors. Only 3.4 per cent of chairs said they were parent governors, while 11.5 per cent did not report their affiliation (N=87). Turning to the time that respondents spent on governing body issues, Table 3.12 illustrates that chairs were more likely to spend significant time on such issues than were heads. Although statistically significant, this finding is somewhat unsurprising, as it would be expected that heads would find it easier to apply their daily in-school experiences to their governing body tasks.

**Table 3.12: Hours Spent Per Week on Governing Body Matters**

	<b>Chair Respondents (N=86)</b>	<b>Head Respondents (N=68)</b>
Zero to Five Hours	48.7	74.1
5.1 to Ten Hours	35.9	22.4
Over Ten Hours	15.4	3.4

*Differences between chairs and heads were statistically significant: Mann-Whitney  $z = -3.2$ ;  $p < 0.05$ .*

Looking further at the head respondents, the survey found that 55.9 per cent had been in post for five years or less, 26.5 per cent from between 5.1 years and ten years, and the remaining 17.6 per cent for over ten years (N=68). However, as can be seen in Table 3.13, the range in the *total* number of years that chair and head respondents had been at their schools was fairly well distributed.

**Table 3.13: Total Number of Years at the School**

	<b>Chair Respondents (N=79)</b>	<b>Head Respondents (N=67)</b>
Zero to Five Years	33.3	47.8
5.1 to Ten Years	33.3	23.9
Over Ten Years	33.3	28.4

*Differences between chairs and heads were not statistically significant.*

Finally, chairs and heads were asked about their public and private sector experience. When asked whether they had ever been employed in any capacity in the state

education sector, 33.7 per cent of chairs said they had, while 66.3 per cent said they had not (N=83). However, when asked whether they had ever been employed in the *private* sector, 67.1 per cent of chairs (N=82) said they had, as opposed to only 13.6 per cent of heads (N=66). This difference was statistically significant (chi-squared = 42.5;  $p < 0.05$ ), although such a discrepancy was not necessarily surprising.

### 3.7 CHAPTER THREE CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the methodology and research design employed for collecting and analysing the research data in this thesis. First, the overall scope and parameters of the study were explained, as was the tripartite structure of the final research design. The justification for and logistics of each of the three major components of this design – the preliminary study, the qualitative study, and the quantitative survey, respectively – were then discussed in detail. The steps taken to ensure that the research design met the ‘quality control tests’ of construct validity, reliability, and external validity were then discussed and finally, the data describing the characteristics of the qualitative and quantitative research samples were presented.

Given this research design, this thesis now proceeds to the presentation of research evidence itself, which is presented in three phases over the course of the next five chapters. Before doing so, three minor presentational notes need to be made.

- First, where possible, survey and interview responses are presented together. This decision enables the reader to construct a more complete picture of a given issue than might be possible if the survey and interview material were presented separately;
- Second, in the interest of conciseness, references to either opinions of or observations about ‘governors’ in the data chapters should *always* be understood to mean ‘governors *participating in this study*’, *unless explicitly stated otherwise*; and
- Third, in the interest of conciseness, when this thesis presents the quantitative responses of chairs and heads to the same survey question, it should be presumed that any differences between the responses two groups are *not statistically significant, unless explicitly stated otherwise*.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### GOVERNORS AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

#### 4.0 INTRODUCTION

Having thus established the background and methodology of this research, this chapter now attempts to answer the first two of the four main research questions:

Do governors in inner London state secondary schools view their role as a strategic one, and if so, how do they themselves define strategic planning?

Is the lack of strategic planning implied by the existing literature actually evident in the governing bodies of inner London state secondary schools?

Sections 4.1 and 4.2 address the first research question. Section 4.1 examines how governors perceived their role, and whether governors believed that their role should include strategic planning. It will be argued that governors did see their role as a strategic one. Section 4.2 then presents evidence to demonstrate that governors appeared to share several common factors in their definition of strategic planning, and these factors are then described in depth. Sections 4.3 and 4.4 then address the second research question. Section 4.3 takes the common factors in governors' own definition of strategic planning, outlined in Section 4.2, and presents evidence to suggest that governors perceived significant discrepancies between their stated criteria for strategic planning and the extent to which those criteria were realised in practice. Section 4.4 then examines the governing body's role in the School Development Plan (SDP), seeking to determine whether governors saw the SDP as their schools' main strategic plan, and whether the development planning process provided governors with meaningful *strategic* planning opportunities. Given the findings in Sections 4.3 and 4.4, it will be argued the lack of strategic planning implied by the literature *is* actually evident in the governing bodies of inner London state secondary schools. Section 4.5 summarises this chapter and provides a short concluding discussion of these findings.

#### 4.1 PERCEPTIONS OF THE GOVERNING BODY ROLE

##### 4.1.1 Central Government Perceptions of the Governing Body Role

The first issue raised in the first research question was whether governors felt that their role included responsibility for strategic planning. On paper, their

responsibility to do so is incontrovertible, as was illustrated in Chapter Two. For example, the DfES's *Guide to the Law for School Governors* (2001) clearly states that the powers and duties of governing bodies include 'taking general responsibility for the conduct of the school – in practice this should include how in broad strategic terms it should be run' (2001:5.1). Notably, this duty of strategic planning is listed even before responsibility for 'managing the school's budget,' suggesting that is strategic planning not simply one of many governing body responsibilities, but that it is an extremely important one. Further evidence of the relevance of this responsibility can be found in numerous other central government documents, including the section on governors in the DfEE Green Paper *Schools: Building on Success* (2001), which states:

'At the heart of the framework for continuous improvement which we have put in place is the self-governing school responsible for the performance of its pupils, in control of its staffing and budget *and planning its own future development* [emphasis added]' (DfEE 2001:85).

Yet while central government believes that one of the main responsibilities for governing bodies is strategic planning, it seemed possible that governors might have perceived this responsibility as less important than others. Clearly, if governors felt that strategic planning was a peripheral responsibility, the absence of their activity in this area would be unsurprising.

#### **4.1.2 Governors' Perception of their Role**

However, both the survey and the case studies demonstrated that this was not the case. When asked what they perceived as being the governor's role, the initial response from most governors was framed negatively: governors frequently noted that they were *not* responsible for 'day-to-day management'. Additionally, almost all governors cited one of their main responsibilities as 'supporting the head' in his or her decisions, or more generally, 'supporting the school.' It was also clear, however, that governors believed strategic planning should be central to their responsibility as governors, and that they saw the benefits of engaging in strategic planning. Looking first at the quantitative evidence, the survey respondents were nearly unanimous in voicing their support for this notion – an overwhelming 98.8 per cent of chairs (N=80) and 93.5 per cent of heads (N=62) agreed when asked whether 'long-term strategic planning should be one of a governing body's main responsibilities.' In the qualitative component of this research, governors were asked the general question,

‘what do you see as the governor’s role’, and were then asked a more direct sub-question, ‘do you see that role as including strategic planning?’ if the response to the first question did not include strategic planning as an identified responsibility. In approximately 80 per cent of the governor interviews in this study, governors mentioned (unprompted) that their role included strategic planning. In the remaining cases where a follow-up question was required, all of those governors subsequently agreed that strategic planning was within their remit. In general, the comments of most governors from the case study schools were similar to these:

‘The role of the governing body needs to be at the level of understanding what the development plan is, [doing] strategic planning, understanding what the budget is, having an overview of what’s going on in the school.’ (Redwood LEA governor)

‘[Governing bodies should be] setting the strategy of the school, making sure that there are appropriate controls in place, and at a high level, monitoring the progress of the school towards its strategy.’ (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

‘We are there in a support and advisory role, taking the strategic view on things like the curriculum and on things like physical development of the school.’ (Brownstone LEA governor)

Yet while most governors interviewed saw strategic planning as a one responsibility of many, others were forceful in arguing that strategic planning should be the main priority – and in some cases, the *only* priority. These governors, admittedly a smaller minority of the whole, believed that strategic planning was the role that lay governing bodies were best positioned to fulfil. As one Brownstone governor observed, the demand that governors act as ‘critical friends’ on a wide breadth of issues ‘isn’t really a valid role to ask governors to play, because they don’t have the *capacity* to do it.’ Alternatively, as one Bluewater co-opted governor argued:

‘I only believe that governing bodies, as constituted with their responsibilities, can sensibly *do* what I would call the ‘strategic direction setting’ and the approval of the operational and financial budgets for the year ahead. I think you have to lay down very clearly the *objectives* of the place, the resource base we accept the head is working with, the ways we’re going to measure their performance against that, and then, frankly, get out of the way.’

Overall, it therefore appeared that governors both recognised and supported the notion that they should be doing strategic planning, with some governors more adamant than others. However, it is certainly possible that definitions of ‘strategic

planning’ differ between governors and governing bodies. As such, determining what governors *meant* by ‘strategic planning’ was the next step towards answering the first research question.

## 4.2 GOVERNORS’ DEFINITIONS OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

This research found that governors throughout this study shared strikingly similar conceptions of strategic planning. Although some individual governors emphasised particular facets of strategic planning more than others, several broader themes emerged that, together, created a picture of what strategic planning meant and entailed for governors. Overall, governors argued that there were three main components to strategic planning, each of which is addressed in the following subsections: setting goals over a long-term time frame and viewing specific actions within a long-term context (Section 4.2.1), ensuring that the ethos of the school was both protected and advanced (Section 4.2.2), and creating a common framework that would guide both decision making and resource allocation (Section 4.2.3).

### 4.2.1 Time and Goals

One supplementary interview chair put it bluntly: to her, strategic planning was about ‘Where are we now, and where do we want to be in five year’s time, and how are we going to get there.’ Although not always this pointed, nearly all interviewees agreed that *time* was the main component of their strategic planning definitions. While the length of this time period varied, the majority of interviewees felt the time span for strategic planning *should* be at least three years, preferably five years, and possibly longer; according to Bluewater’s chair, ‘the actual implementation of these things is probably [over] a ten year frame.’ Based on the ubiquity of this finding, and due to the need for consistency in the survey, a time-centred definition of strategic planning was used in the quantitative survey instrument: *‘For the purposes of the following questions, ‘long-term strategic planning’ means ‘future planning beyond the current and next school year.’*’

However, the interview responses also provided strong evidence for *why* governors saw strategic planning within a five-year time frame. In one sense, governors felt that five years was the *minimum* time frame in which schools could pursue realistic goals for substantive change; to one Whitefrost LEA governor, strategic planning meant determining ‘Where are we now, to be absolutely honest. Where would *like* to

be in five years time, ideally. What is *practical* for where we can be in five year's time. And how can we achieve it.' Similarly, a Brownstone LEA governor suggested that the five-year approach permitted forward thinking while also providing a framework for pursuing realistic and achievable shorter-term goals. This governor described Brownstone's strategic planning as:

'A five-year planning cycle where we've set specific targets under the various headings, and see where we want to be in five year's time. Then each year we also set more specific time-limited targets for what we are going to be doing *this* year within that longer framework.'

Yet while a number of governors saw five years as the minimum necessary time span for implementing a strategic plan, other governors saw five years as the *maximum* time in which strategic planning could have any realistic relevance. One Bluewater LEA governor illustrated this point when he argued:

'I think it's silly to get too far into the long term. Because if you do that, you duck issues. I think realistically, you ought to have about a five-year time horizon. And if you're going to achieve anything, if you haven't done it within five years, I don't think you're ever going to!'

The comment of this Bluewater governor touches on an important related facet of strategic planning identified by governors – that strategy is about reaching certain *goals* within a period of time. Although the goals may vary – governors at some schools saw strategic planning as a means for pursuing specific projects, while others saw strategic planning as a means for pursuing general 'improvement' – all interviewees recognised that goal setting was integral to effective strategic planning. As the Bluewater head suggested:

'Strategic planning is about having a very, very clear end goal in sight, and knowing exactly where you want to get to. The strategic plan is all the big things you can do in order to achieve that.'

Additionally, since governors were often keen to clarify that their role was not 'day-to-day management,' carving out a role in shaping 'the bigger picture' was a particularly attractive option for many respondents. 'My idea of strategic planning is to look at a macro plan, to look at a particular direction, and to have some goals or achievements at the end of that plan,' said a Brownstone co-opted governor. 'I think that's all a strategic plan is – it's an overview, an outlook, and it's an approach in a particular direction.'

#### 4.2.2 Setting, Maintaining and Improving the School Ethos

Many governors felt that they were best able to take the aforementioned ‘broad-based approach’ by addressing their responsibility for the ethos of the school. Because of the ephemeral nature of ‘school ethos’, it appeared that many governors felt that if they were able to turn their strategic planning attention towards setting, maintaining, and improving the school ethos, they might avoid disagreements with school staff about whether the governors were infringing upon ‘day-to-day management issues.’ In one of the very few instances in this study where responses appeared to differ greatly between case study schools, this phenomenon of managing via ethos appeared particularly true in Bluewater and Brownstone, where governors had tried to draw a very clear line between ‘oversight’ and ‘management’. On the other end of the spectrum were schools like Whitefrost, where the school’s previous academic problems had blurred this management/oversight line and required governors to become more involved in making short-term decisions.

In general, however, governors saw the interaction of strategic planning and ethos as an integrated cycle. On one hand, governors agreed that the ethos of the school would *guide* their strategic planning; as one Brownstone governor suggested, ‘I think strategic planning starts from having an idea about [both] what the general ethos of the school is [and] what its aims are.’ In this sense, governors felt that their familiarity with ethos-*setting* activities put them in a good position to do ethos-*influenced* strategic planning. On the other hand, governors also felt that the school’s ethos itself would be *influenced and maintained* through strategic planning. As one Bluewater co-opted governor argued:

‘In a perfect world, I think of strategic planning as some kind of exercise [that] will have to do with establishing, maintaining, and enhancing the school’s identity, its ethos, its way of approaching not just instruction, but the school community, over that term.’

However, these two perceptions were rarely mutually exclusive. Most governors were able to accommodate both perceptions of the ethos-strategy connection simultaneously, and as such, strongly suggested that ethos should both be reflected in, and play an integral part in directing, strategic planning. Furthermore, several governors observed that a common understanding of the school’s ethos was a valuable tool for putting all relevant stakeholders on the same page. As one Redwood governor argued, strategic planning meant:



‘Ensuring that we have an idea of how the school should be run in terms of its ethos. We should ensure that the head master and the staff understand where the governors – between them and the governors – what we should be doing *for* the school.’

Furthermore, most governors felt that ethos and strategic planning should play an important role in creating a common framework within which stakeholders could operate and relate to one another. This observation leads to the third and final component of governors’ definition of strategic planning, the importance of creating a common framework for decision-making and resource allocation.

#### **4.2.3 Setting a Common Framework**

It was clear from the case studies that governors believed that the first two components of their strategic planning definition – goals and ethos – should guide the third (and most ‘tangible’) component of their strategic planning definition: the design of a working strategic framework. The interviews elicited two main functions for such a framework: a) guiding decision-making and b) prioritising resource allocation. Turning first to the issue of decision-making, governors repeatedly defined strategic planning as the process of creating a shared framework that would assist the various school constituencies and stakeholders in their decision-making processes. However, two distinct modes of thought emerged regarding the *rationale* for having this shared framework. In the first rationale, governors perceived strategic planning as the mechanism for pursuing a defined set of specific projects. For example, one Whitefrost co-opted governor spoke of the need for a strategic framework that would meet a very specific goal – in this particular case, improved institutional positioning:

‘In abstract terms, strategic planning is looking at the outside environment in which the school operates, and working out how the school needs to position itself to serve its stakeholders – whether they be the kids, the community, government.’

However, other governors perceived the strategic planning framework in broader terms, as a means for ‘joining-up’ disparate responsibilities and goals under a more cohesive decision-making rubric. For one Brownstone governor who subscribed to this theory, strategic planning was about:

‘[B]eing able to input into the school development plan, being able to see the role of governors in that, and also being able to support all the policies that have to be produced *and* have an input into them.’

Yet regardless of which perspective they took, governors generally agreed that a strategic planning framework both enabled them to start separating their ‘ideal’ aims for the future from their ‘realistic’ aims, and provided a common starting point for decision making and project evaluation. Redwood’s vice-chair articulated this ‘amalgamated’ position extremely well, arguing that done correctly, strategic planning provided governors with a shared vision that could be applied to future decisions:

‘It’s thinking about the various components of the school – direction, goals, plans on buildings, raising finance, whether it captures the future plans of government – it’s pulling that together as a document. You’ve got to have *some* document to work to.’

Turning to the second advantage that governors saw in employing a strategic framework, governors argued that such a framework could provide a mechanism for managing resource allocation. Given governors’ heightened fiscal responsibilities, it was not surprising that this model was one proposed by several governors:

‘My definition of strategic planning is prioritising scarce resources over the middle to longer term...and a methodology that allows you to progress things effectively.’ (Bluewater co-opted governor)

‘[Strategic planning] is about having a goal, and finding the best way that you can reach that goal that’s *economical*, short in terms of time, but yet provides the quality of education.’ (Brownstone teacher governor)

The broad support for this component of strategic planning also highlighted the extent to which governors connected ‘strategy’ with ‘financial management’ – as Brownstone’s head argued, ‘What schools need to do [is look] at where they are at the moment and then using that funding to try and support their aims the best they can.’ Yet more revealing was the comment of a Greenleaf parent governor, who suggested that for her governing body, ‘The main strategic areas are in finance and premises – and then there are curriculum issues.’ By defining ‘strategy’ primarily in terms of managing financial or physical resources, this governor verbalised a practical distinction of strategic planning that was quietly implied by many respondents. This research found that for many governors, finance and curriculum were issues on parallel planes. As long as governors managed the financial health of

the school well, many believed that they as governors could (and should) avoid becoming too closely involved with aspects of the governors' role that could be perceived as 'primarily education-related'. Such aspects encompassed most curricular-related issues, as well as almost any associated issue on which governors believed that – regardless of their *own* opinions – the opinions of professional educators should be respected and remain largely unchallenged. This reluctance of governors to engage in what will henceforth be referred to as the 'primarily education-related' aspects of their responsibilities will be addressed in more detail in Chapter Five.

#### **4.2.4 The Rationale for Strategic Planning**

The evidence presented above in Section 4.2 provides an answer to the second half of the first research question, regarding governors' own definition of strategic planning. Yet despite their general agreement over time frames, goal setting, and the value of frameworks, and despite the minor institution-specific variations in their strategic planning perspectives, there was one aspect of strategic planning that almost *all* governors failed to address. Few governors could articulate the intrinsic reasons behind *why* a five year span was best suited for meeting their strategic goals, besides proposing that from experience, less than five years was inadequate and more than five years was too remote. Only one governor, the chair of Redwood, argued for an intrinsic justification for creating a strategic framework within a specific time frame, and a reason for why that time frame was best suited for strategic planning in secondary education. When asked for his definition, he replied:

'Five years. It's basically the first cycle – the main cycle that most people go through is eleven to sixteen. When somebody enters at eleven, you should have an idea of what you expect out when they reach sixteen. So I would think if you're looking at it as a strategist would, you'd tell them where they want to be when they reach sixteen. That doesn't mean to say you wouldn't have smaller cycles and plans within that, but the main strategy would be you want to reach your strategic *outcome*.'

The rarity of this insight, which ties the planning cycle to the schools' reason for being – the welfare of individual pupils – may be part of the reason why governors, although they have a common definition for strategic planning, believed that in practice, their strategic planning was inadequate. It is this recognition of inadequacy that will now be explored.

### 4.3 REALISING THE IDEALS OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

Given the definition of strategic planning provided above, the next step in this research was to attempt to answer the second main research question: whether the lack of strategic planning implied by the existing literature was *actually* evident in the governing bodies of inner London state secondary schools. It will be argued that the great majority of governors felt that *none of the criteria mentioned* in Section 4.2 were employed by their governing bodies to any significant degree during the strategic planning process. Furthermore, while the survey data (based responses from chairs and heads) offers qualified support to this contention, it will be argued that the responses from the *case study* chairs of governors suggested that chairs were much more positive about strategic planning than were governors in general. Given this tendency for chairs to be more optimistic about strategic planning than non-chairs, it is plausible to argue that the issues raised in the survey about strategic planning are even more serious in reality than they might appear at first on paper.

#### 4.3.1 Adequacy of Strategic Planning: Chairs' Views

Initially, the research evidence appeared to offer reasons to be optimistic about the engagement of governing bodies in strategic planning. The responses from four of the five case study chairs suggested governing bodies were doing a fairly good job in meeting their strategic planning obligation, despite their myriad responsibilities. Most enthusiastic was the Whitefrost chair, who when asked about how well his governing body did strategic planning, responded:

'I'm going to be really biased in answering this by saying 'we're fantastic.' We are now on an even keel and making good progress.... I'd say we're on top of things now, [that] we're highly focused, and we all know where we're going, and it's a shared vision.'

Similar positive observations came from the chairs of Greenleaf and Brownstone, as well as a more equivocal – but still broadly supportive – comment from the chair of Redwood:

'I think we're pretty good, actually, particularly on issues like finance. We have a budget meetings, and discuss everything with the head and the governors.' (Greenleaf chair)

'We take our cues on strategic planning from the LEA, and we translate it in the light of our experience at the school. And we have our school development plan. The governing body takes a lot of guidance from the head

teacher on [the development plan]...and they have done the job so far very well.’ (Brownstone chair)

‘It’s been effective, but it’s been a ‘lurching’ process. In other words, there are periods of self-examination when nothing much happens, and then a sudden step forward, another lurch forward, and then another period of introspection.’ (Redwood chair)

Given these generally positive responses from case study chairs regarding the effectiveness of their governors’ strategic planning, it was a bit surprising to find that their surveyed colleagues held a slightly *less* optimistic perspective on the issue (although it is certainly possible that this differential is due to an unintentional bias introduced through the case selection process). When asked to rate the *clarity* of their governing body’s long-term strategic vision for the school, just over half of surveyed chairs (54.7 per cent, N=86) and less than half of heads (45.1 per cent, N=71) thought that this vision was more than *moderately* clear. Furthermore, when asked how effective their governing body was in doing long-term strategic planning, only 46.0 per cent of surveyed chairs (N=87) and 43.7 per cent of heads (N=71) thought that their governing bodies were *highly* effective, while the majority of respondents (54.0 per cent of chairs and 56.3 per cent of heads) felt that their governing bodies were either only moderately effective or ineffective in this regard.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4.3.2 Adequacy of Strategic Planning: Other Governors’ Views

However, the suggestion that governing bodies *were* doing strategic planning effectively was strongly refuted by interviews with non-chair governors at each of the five case study schools. First, it was discovered that the lack of strategic planning was common to *all* five case studies, not just to a select few. In each of the five case study schools, non-chair governors were practically unanimous in their assertion that their governing bodies were failing to adequately fulfil their strategic planning responsibilities. To provide an indication of the breadth of concern, the quotations below are representative of the thoughts of the non-chair governors at each of the five respective case study schools:

‘I don’t think we do *enough* strategic planning, to be honest. We ask questions to convince ourselves that we’ve looked at all the documents like the School Development Plan and come to a good decision, and we ask for three year trends in performance and spending and things like that – but I

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<sup>1</sup> For a review of how data were collapsed for analysis and presentation purposes, see Section 3.4.5.

don't think we're doing strategic planning in the way that we could be.' (Bluewater LEA governor)

'We don't have as much input on the big issues as we should. When we do [have input] we tend to talk about the small issues. If issues are picked up, they tend to be minor issues. We don't get into big strategic discussions at the governing body meetings.' (Brownstone LEA governor)

'We'll often turn to [pupil] exclusions, which generate a lot of discussion – but actually they don't have a strategic value at all! And for all governing bodies in [the borough], the way they write the agenda, [*exclusions* are] always the first item on the agenda!' (Greenleaf parent governor)

'We don't address some of the issues we should do, so therefore we're not thinking two and three years out – or one year out. We're just talking about the immediate issues of running the school. And the trouble is that those [other] things are just being *left* – and therefore, sometime in the future that's going to come [back] to you and you're going to be in difficulty, because you're not well prepared with your plans.... You *do* need to talk about things; you *do* need to debate things for half an hour. Where there's a subject that needs debate, you should be able to put time aside to do that.' (Redwood foundation governor)

'[We're] at the ineffective end of the scale, although somewhat improving.... For me, the issue is more around the terminal boredom of a lot of the stuff that goes on that's just not necessary. The meetings are really boring, and a lot of it is really peripheral stuff – not really strategic, not really decision making, and I think a lot of that can be cut out.' (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

#### 4.3.3 Governors' Perceptions of Strategic Planning in Practice

The evident frustration in these quotations appeared to arise because governors' *conception* of good strategic planning was not being realised in *practice*. As one co-opted governor from Greenleaf complained:

'It is more a question of seeing that the strategy that the school has *signed up* to is *adhered* to, and that progress is being made. I think that's what most of my energy that goes into the school is concerned with.'

To identify the extent of the gap between theory and practice, each of the three criteria for effective strategic planning identified in Section 4.2 is examined in light of governor comments about their governing body's strategic planning (or lack thereof). It was discovered that governors felt that their governing bodies were failing to meet *each* of these three components of strategic planning as defined in Section 4.2. The case study evidence to support this assertion is now presented in relation to each of these three components – setting goals over a long-term time

frame and viewing specific actions within a long-term context (Section 4.2.1), ensuring that the ethos of the school was both protected and advanced (Section 4.2.2), and creating a common framework that would guide both decision making and resource allocation (Section 4.2.3).

### *Strategic Planning and the Long-Term Time Frame*

Governors across this study argued that their governing bodies were not thinking within a long-term time frame – the criteria that governors previously identified as the most important component of strategic planning. Most governors ascribed this problem to a) the number of short-term issues that required immediate decisions and b) the lack of an institutional-structural mindset that would encourage such longer-term thinking. First, governors repeatedly complained that short-term issues took precedence over any strategic planning (an issue that will be discussed in more detail in Chapters Five and Six). As one Bluewater co-opted governor noted:

‘I think the governing body is very badly hampered at the moment due to the infrastructure issues, and because of having to deal with the consistent turbulence – in particular, of staff – and the immediate issues of short-term crises of funding and things like that. I don’t think they don’t *want* to do [strategic planning] – I just think it’s very difficult to do under the present circumstances.’

This last point – that strategic planning was difficult to do under ‘present circumstances’ – describes not only the circumstances of short-term crises that many governors claimed to face, but the circumstances surrounding the institutional approach (or lack thereof) towards strategic planning as well. Many governors noted that their governing bodies lacked any formal mechanisms for *discussing* strategic planning; as one Redwood governor argued: ‘Yes, decisions have to be made about things that need the approval of the governing body, but there also need to be agenda items that are about long term issues.’ It seems evident that if governors are not provided with either the reason or the opportunity to engage in strategic planning, it becomes increasingly unlikely that they will actually decide to do so. Brownstone’s head recognised this structural deficiency in her own governing body, noting:

‘I think we need to be more focused on the future rather than on term times, and that’s partly to do with the structuring of our committees and groups. Maybe what we need to do is to ensure that our [organisational] structures facilitate much more futuristic thinking than they do at the moment.’

Clearly, in both the demands being made on governing bodies and the organisation of the governing bodies themselves, there appeared to be little opportunity for governing bodies to engage in the long-term thinking that governors argued was vital for effective strategic planning.

Furthermore, the dearth of opportunities for governors to *think* long term also meant that governors felt they were ineffective in *setting* meaningful future goals. Although many governors wanted to have the time to deal with the ‘major issues’ facing their school, they felt they rarely had the opportunity to do so in practice. As such, most interviewees felt that governing bodies were drawn towards the smaller issues – which tended to be the easiest to fix – at the expense of engaging in a discussion of longer-term matters. As a Brownstone teacher governor observed:

‘I suppose the governing body is *meant* to be at the macro level, and look at the ‘big decisions’, the ‘big changes’, the ‘big policy’. I think it’s human nature that we get stuck at little things, even when faced with those big problems. I think that’s what happens.’

Even in governing bodies that did seek to define their future goals, many governors felt that the lack of emphasis on the strategic long-term dimension meant these exercises merely resulted in lists of inexact platitudes. In particular, several governors pointed to their ‘mission statements’ as evidence that attempts at ‘strategic planning’ had done little to support their actual objectives of improving the school. ‘You have to make sure the governors aren’t just writing mission statements and failing to connect those to what’s happening at the base,’ noted one Whitefrost governor. Furthermore, a Bluewater co-opted governor illustrated the problems that arose if governing bodies accepted the fallacy of presuming that such statements were synonymous with a school’s strategic goals, arguing:

‘We do have that vision, because we have to have a mission statement – but that’s the thing, everything gets bureaucratised. So you have to have a *statement* about these things, but you’re not actually able to say – at that longer range – what it is you think you want to *do*.’

This evidence suggests that not only did many governing bodies fail to devote adequate resources and energy towards defining their strategic goals, but that even when they did do so, the results were frequently less valuable than they might have been under more positive circumstances.



### *Strategic Planning and the School Ethos*

The next issue is that of school ethos, as governors were clear in their definition of strategic planning that the school's ethos should both guide, and be guided by, the strategic planning process. Unfortunately, this research found that in practice, few governors believed that their governing bodies were effective in translating the frequently ephemeral notion of 'ethos' into identifiable components that could inform the strategic planning process. Indeed, despite the fact that many governors felt *philosophically* that ethos and strategic planning were part of an integrated cycle (as discussed earlier), it appeared that there were myriad problems in actually implementing this symbiotic relationship. First, some governors reported that their governing bodies had difficulties in even identifying the components of their school's ethos. Recalling his first impressions of the Bluewater governing body, one co-opted governor said:

'Frankly, there didn't seem to be *anybody* there who, no matter where their hearts were, had actually got their heads in gear to say 'Why is this school here? What is its five year vision?'

Less dramatically, this research suggested that even when governing bodies could identify the important components of their ethos, these components frequently became lost during the process of creating detailed and complex plans. This inability to 'see the wood for the trees' had the potential to derail the connection between ethos and strategic planning, as this Redwood governor suggested:

'The governing body should, first of all, be defining what the character of the school should be. Our ethos, as a small school, is to knit everybody together and give people a sense of loyalty and enthusiasm for the school, a pride in the school, and a pride in one's self.... [However, then we] come up with this development plan, [with] a whole series of little flags for all sorts of different things – [and] I think people don't really understand what those flags *mean*.' (Redwood co-opted governor)

Second, some governors felt that their governing bodies merely 'operationalised' their school's ethos and identified the results as 'the strategic plan'. However, this often meant that the strategic plan was often as equally vague and generalised as the ethos. In practice, the tautological nature of such an approach meant that the 'cycle' of ethos and strategic planning driving one another could end in stagnation. As the Redwood chair complained about his school's draft development plan (composed by the senior management team):

‘Strategic thinking is not there. They’ve made a mission statement – ‘Learning Together, Achieving Together’...[but] the first aim is: ‘To nurture competent, caring, participating pupils who value and celebrate equality and diversity.’ And I wrote after it ‘Achievement.’ Why are we not celebrating *achievement*? So they want a happy, pleasant environment – which is good – but they’re not clear *why they want it*.’

In general, these discrepancies between the theory of ideal strategic planning and its actual implementation provide further support for the argument that in practice, governing bodies are failing to meet their own governors’ definition of how strategic planning should be pursued.

### *Strategic Planning and Common Decision-making Frameworks*

Governors frequently remarked that their lack of strategic planning meant that there was no decision-making framework preventing them from becoming bogged down in the details of their responsibilities. In every case study school, interviewees felt that this lack of a framework meant their governing bodies spent less time examining ‘important issues’ and more time on what the Redwood head described as ‘lots and lots of minutiae.’ As the comments below indicated, governors suggested that the absence of a strategic framework meant their governing bodies often focused on smaller points rather than larger ones:

‘[Our agenda is] very bureaucratic, basically drawn up according to town hall guidelines and the chair’s view of how schools run...[and it is] concentrated on a whole lot of minor points, in my view.’ (Bluewater co-opted governor)

‘We spend too much of the governors’ meetings looking at trivia [and] we’re not informed in sufficient time to go to governors’ meetings with a clear understanding of what we would be deciding.’ (Whitefrost LEA governor)

In addition, although suggesting that his governing body was slowly becoming more strategically focused, one Whitefrost governor admitted that the lack of a decision-making framework meant that his governing body was starting nearly from scratch. ‘We had a period when the agenda was clogged, and there was very little time spent looking at the longer term stuff,’ he noted. ‘We were [simply] an administrative body.’

It also became apparent that this lack of a decision-making framework affected not only the full governing bodies, but their committees as well. One frustrated Brownstone governor related his own experience:

‘In sub-committee [sic] meetings, we tend to spend a lot of time talking about the minutiae.... On the personnel sub-committee [sic], we’ve spent a lot of time recently talking about the use the school makes of discretionary additional payments to teachers to assist in recruitment and retention. Now, *all* we’re doing is reviewing a very small aspect of the school’s pay policy!’

Furthermore, the lack of a framework for deciding upon priorities means that governors may operate under the impression that all of their responsibilities are equally important. Numerous governors suggested that because governors had so many statutory responsibilities, they often ended up ignoring those that they did not deem important. However, without a common framework to guide governors, there is no shared understanding of what should and should not be given priority. As one Bluewater LEA governor observed, ‘There’s also the fact that if you have too much paperwork, some governors feel as though they have to read through all of it – and that means that we may not get a sense of how it all fits together in the big picture.’ Together, this evidence suggests that without a strong strategic decision-making framework that clearly delineates governors’ responsibilities, many governors and governing bodies ‘default’ to addressing minor issues, administrative issues, or more pressing immediate issues, rather than addressing their responsibility for higher-level strategic issues.

### *Strategic Planning and Long-term Resource Allocation*

Finally, the most common specific frustration amongst governors was that they were unable to use strategic planning to manage long-term financial resource allocations. Governors argued that while financial management would be one of the easiest areas in which to begin implementing a strategic plan, the current governmental funding allocation system was simply not conducive to enabling governing bodies and schools to engage in any serious long-term thinking. As governors from all five schools argued forcefully, the short-term nature of the funding system worked against any substantial attempts to pursue long-term objectives:

‘Finances are very hard to plan a year ahead, because our budget is only a year ahead. We *don’t have* that long-term planning flexibility. So although we have a three-year budget plan, it’s a guess in the dark, it really is. I *do* think we are wasting our time doing *any* advance budget planning, because we don’t know what we’re going to get.’ (Greenleaf parent governor)

‘We’ve seen how this year’s budget works, and we seem to be doing OK – but it’s always fairly late in the day. And long-term planning – because there’s no surplus money, really, you can’t plan *anything* that’s going to be

any kind of venture or investment, because you don't have the capacity to predict a surplus.' (Bluewater co-opted governor)

'A great deal of what's been happening with [the school's] funding has been bits and pieces of grants that come thrown at you from all sorts of directions, you don't know if they're going to be renewed for over one year, you're told you've got them *and* have to spend them within a very short time scale – it's not money that's being incorporated into a thought-out strategy. It's encouraging waste and inefficiency, and I don't think that's at all beneficial.' (Brownstone co-opted governor)

Without exception, and even amongst chairs, governors pointed to the fundamental discrepancy between being asked by government to think strategically, whilst being provided with government budgets on a year-by-year basis. Governors felt that as financial management becomes increasingly integral to the running of schools, the inability of governing bodies to create long-term budgetary plans with confidence was a major obstacle to their ability to engage in effective strategic planning in *other* areas. Chapter Six will discuss this issue in more detail.

#### **4.4 GOVERNORS AND THE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

Although the findings in Section 4.3 strongly suggest that inner London secondary school governing bodies do *not* engage in strategic planning, it was deemed important for thoroughness to investigate the issue of the School Development Plan (SDP). Governors commonly combined their discussion of strategic planning with an analysis of their interaction with the SDP, and as was noted in Chapter Two, it is common for governor advice guides refer to the SDP *as* the strategic plan. As such, two main questions arose: 1) how involved are governors in the SDP process, and 2) *should* the SDP actually be considered a strategic plan? First, it will be argued that while governors are somewhat involved in *monitoring* the SDP, they are relatively uninvolved in *developing* it. Second, it will be argued that the SDP rarely encompassed the strategic issues that many governors identified in Section 4.2, and that the time frame covered by the SDP was usually more limited than the time frame that governors felt was necessary for effective strategic planning. Finally, it will be argued that both these findings serve to reinforce the argument that even in the activity that currently holds the most immediate potential promise for governors to do strategic planning – shaping the SDP – such action rarely materialises in practice.

#### 4.4.1 What is a School Development Plan?

The School Development Plan (SDP) is the main written document for setting out the governing body's vision for the school. Up until the late 1990s the SDP usually encompassed one academic year at a time (Fidler 2002:85), although due to Ofsted's inspection requirements, recently there has been pressure on schools for their SDP to cover three academic years. There is no set format or list of required contents for the SDP, although the SDP will often contain a school's priorities and targets for academic achievement, ICT, staff development, pupil discipline, physical infrastructure, and other similar matters. Of the most direct relevance to this research, a number of writers have suggested that ideally, the SDP should set out the strategic framework within which school staff are meant to operate (Giles 1997:34; Martin and Holt 2002:18).

#### 4.4.2 The SDP and its Connection to Strategic Planning

This research found that – rightly or wrongly – governors viewed the SDP as their main strategic planning document. The survey found clear evidence to this effect, as 80.0 per cent of both heads (N=70) and chairs (N=85) said that they considered the SDP to be their school's *main* long-term strategic plan. Furthermore, an overwhelming 69.4 per cent of chairs (N=85) and 70.0 per cent of heads (N=70) said that they did not have any longer-term written plans besides the SDP, suggesting that in most cases, the SDP is the *only* strategic plan. These findings were supported by the case study interviews, where governors at all five schools echoed the opinion of one Whitefrost co-opted governor:

‘The school development plan *is* the main strategic plan – and it takes hours to put together, and consult, and by the time it's done, it needs to be done again for the next year!’

Although this note of futility often accompanied governors' discussions of the SDP process, it did little to diminish the overall opinion of governors that the SDP was the main avenue through which their governing bodies would attempt to engage in strategic planning.

There were, however, a few governors who questioned whether the SDP alone was an adequate strategic planning instrument. Although they acknowledged the primacy of

the SDP as their school's main strategic plan, they also observed certain deficiencies in having *only* the SDP for guidance. As one Redwood governor complained:

'It's been a thing that the school 'has to have', demanded by the local authority.... And [writing] it was a ritual, a complete ritual. I was very frustrated, because I felt there ought to be some sort of steer from the governors based on [the SDP]. How else would we get a grip on anything? But we didn't.... The school development plan is the *only* plan we have, and that has, in the past, been *very* problematic. Because it's been very, very inadequate.'

Others, particularly at the Greenleaf specialist school, noted that their bid for specialist status had forced them to move beyond a reliance solely on the SDP for strategic guidance. One Greenleaf co-opted governor observed that this realisation had had a positive effect on the overall strategic direction of the school:

'One of the advantages that most specialist schools have is that in order to *become* specialist schools, the governing body, headship team, and heads of departments *have* had to sit down and audit – take stock of where they are, and define where they want to go.'

Yet regardless of their *opinions* about the SDP, this research demonstrated that the majority of governors saw the SDP as their school's main strategic planning instrument. This research now therefore turns to examining what role governors played in actually monitoring and developing the SDP, and whether governors were using the SDP in *practice* for the strategic planning purposes that they claimed it served in *theory*.

#### 4.4.3 Monitoring and the School Development Plan

This research found strong evidence that governors were quite conscientious about their responsibility for monitoring the SDP. Indeed, a majority of both chairs (74.4 per cent, N=86) and heads (51.4 per cent, N=70) surveyed felt that their governing bodies were highly involved in monitoring the SDP. However, a statistically significant difference between head and chair responses was found at the other end of the scale, where while only 8.1 per cent of chairs felt their governing bodies were *uninvolved* in this process, 18.6 per cent of heads felt the same way.<sup>2</sup> This difference between the head and chair responses almost certainly indicates that chairs overestimated the involvement of their governing bodies in this process. For

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<sup>2</sup> Differences between chairs and heads were statistically significant: Mann-Whitney  $z = -3.2$ ;  $p \leq 0.05$ .

example, the explanation of this process provided by chair of Whitefrost was characteristic of the perspective with which many governors approached their monitoring role:

‘The curriculum committee has the main role in monitoring [the SDP], and reports to each governing body meeting. At each governing body meeting, each of the three committees gives a written and verbal report. And then governors have the opportunity to read the [committee] minutes previous to the main meeting, and comment on them. So it’s a fairly systematic approach.’

It should be noted, however, that some governors felt that ‘monitoring’ was a rather flexible term, and one that governing bodies often interpreted with a great deal of latitude depending upon the number of *other* issues they were required to address. When asked whether governors at his school ever referred to the SDP, one Bluewater teacher governor was sceptical – as were a small number of other governors across the case studies – about how well the *theory* of monitoring was put into practice. ‘I think staff, because it’s the nature of our work, we refer back to it because it’s constantly drummed into us,’ he said. ‘[For] most of the governors, it’s a document they ratify once a year, say ‘isn’t it marvellous?’ – and then a year later ask, ‘what happened?’’

Yet regardless of the *frequency* or the *quality* of governing bodies monitoring of their SDPs, it appeared from all of the case study interviews that governing bodies were conscious of the importance of *doing* so. The survey responses offered additional support for this conclusion, as the vast majority of respondents – 86.9 per cent of chairs (N=84) and 87.1 per cent of heads (N=70) – reported that their governing bodies evaluated the SDP at the end of each school year.

However, the comments of one Greenleaf co-opted governor do raise a key point of distinction – that although governors were often engaged in *monitoring* the SDP, governors were not very involved in its *development*. ‘The governors are very involved – it’s a very active governing body,’ he argued:

‘They’re not involved in the sense of actively writing [the SDP], but they’re involved in the sense of being highly aware of it, and being highly informed about the ramifications. [And the school’s] broad strategic lines would be things that were agreed with the governing body in that plan.’

Although this distinction between monitoring and developing might seem a minor issue, it goes to the heart of the question of how governors fulfil their strategic contributions to the school, and whether simply *monitoring* the school development plan adequately meets those responsibilities. This distinction is explored next.

#### **4.4.4 Governor Involvement in Developing the SDP**

If governors claim to be involved in strategic planning via the SDP, it seems reasonable to suggest that the most influential involvement in the *planning* sense would come during the plan's development stage. Monitoring most often entails commenting on existing plans and proposals, which the monitors may or may not have had any role in designing, developing, or creating. Furthermore, monitoring is often a reactive activity, as those carrying out the monitoring are usually asked to examine issues only when those issues are brought to the top of the agenda. If governors were found to be active at the development stage as well, this would be evidence that they were *actively* engaged in creating (or planning) policies, rather than simply monitoring the policies created by others.

However, this research found that governors in four of the five case studies reported *minimal* involvement in the SDP development process, with many governors noting that the development of the SDP was often dominated by the school staff. Interviewees argued that this arrangement meant that governors often had few opportunities to provide meaningful input into the SDP development process. One Brownstone parent governor succinctly summarised the situation in which many governing bodies found themselves:

‘Once we had a lecturer [sic] from the DfEE, and he said ‘the most important function that a governor can play is in the school development plan.’ Unfortunately, not many governors understand it.’

Only in the case of Whitefrost, whose governors had been relied upon heavily by school management in drawing up a plan to raise the school out of serious weaknesses several years earlier, did governors suggest that they had been actively involved in the development stage of the SDP. However, Whitefrost's particular circumstances suggest that such high activity might be the exception rather than the rule, and the survey provides some evidence to support this claim. Only two-fifths of chairs (43.0 per cent, N=86) and one-third of heads (31.4 per cent, N=70) thought



their governing bodies had more than *moderate* involvement in creating their schools' SDP, while 24.4 per cent of chairs and 32.9 per cent of heads felt their governing bodies were relatively *inactive* in this process (differences between chairs and heads were not statistically significant). For most governors, their experience with developing the SDP was similar to that of one Redwood co-opted governor, who commented:

'The problem is that, because of the volume of work that's coming, sometimes on the agenda you don't *get* to [the SDP]. It gets brushed aside very quickly, and therefore you're *not* really developing that plan jointly.'

This issue of not 'developing the plan jointly' was a common concern amongst governors. Governors frequently suggested that any involvement they *did* have often came after the SDP had been largely agreed upon by the school staff and management, meaning that governor contributions to the strategic aspects of the SDP were severely constrained. One Brownstone LEA governor revealed his exasperation with this process, arguing:

'Now, we've got, on the governing body, a number of governors who are interested, committed, and knowledgeable. And yet the school development plan is largely drawn up by the staff – not necessarily only by the senior management team.... So I don't think we were in a position to really suggest any changes to it, or refinements of it. And I think that's the way in which we go about it. We have a little bit of input that has a cosmetic effect, so when Ofsted comes in they can say 'governors have been *involved* in drawing up the school development plan' – which is always good because in most places they aren't – but the extent to which we're involved is pretty minimal.'

Governors from Redwood, Bluewater, and Greenleaf supported this general concern about governor involvement, with a number of them complaining that even in instances where the governing body *was* involved, participation was often limited to those in leadership positions. As one Bluewater co-opted governor complained, governor input was limited to a rather *pro forma* exercise: 'It is handed to most of the governors for comment,' he said, pausing and then adding; 'not to all – but to most of them.' These concerns about equal access to involvement in the process were echoed by other governors, including a Greenleaf parent governor who remarked:

'I don't think that governors are involved *enough* in the school development plan, to be honest. It's formulated by the senior management team, and it's only really seen by the chair and the committee chairs. There's not nearly

enough involvement from the governing body, and I'd like to see [the plan] more widely discussed.'

On this point, the survey results showed that although two-thirds of both chairs and heads felt that their governing bodies should have the *same* level of involvement in creating the SDP as they did currently, 30.6 per cent of chairs (N=85) and 18.6 per cent of heads (N=70) felt that governing bodies should have *more* involvement. Furthermore, only 5.9 per cent of chairs and 15.7 per cent of heads thought governing bodies should have *less* involvement.<sup>3</sup> These results were statistically significant, but the differences clearly came at the edges of the response range; it is evident that heads generally felt that governors should have less involvement in the SDP, while chairs felt governors should have more involvement. Yet given the concerns of governors raised above – that chairs and heads had a disproportionate influence on the development of the SDP – it seems reasonable to argue that amongst *non-chair* governors, the percentage who would like to see a greater level of governor involvement in the development process likely exceeds the reported 30.6 per cent of chairs. Regardless of precise figures, the simple fact remains: in the area that governors reported as having the *most* promise for strategic planning, governors appeared to have very *little* involvement.

#### **4.4.5 Inadequacies of the SDP as a Strategic Plan**

Given the findings above, this research now turns to question of whether the SDP should be considered the school's main strategic plan. The evidence provided in Section 4.4.2 suggested that many governors felt it that this should be the case, yet an analysis of the survey and interview data in the context of governors' strategic planning definitions suggests otherwise. Regardless of the level of governor involvement in the SDP, the evidence suggests that for many schools, the SDP in its present form is an inadequate strategic planning instrument.

One reason is the length of the SDP time frame. When surveyed about how many years their SDP covered, the median and modal response for both chairs (44.2 per cent) and heads (50.0 per cent) was three years, while the mean for chairs was 3.2 years and the mean for heads was 2.7 years. However, a rather high 24.4 per cent of chairs (N=86) and 37.1 per cent of heads (N=70) said that their SDPs covered only

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<sup>3</sup> Differences between chairs and heads were statistically significant: Mann-Whitney  $z = -2.2$ ;  $p \leq 0.05$ .

*one or two years*, despite attempts by central government in recent years to have schools create plans on a minimum of a three-year timeframe.<sup>4</sup> These figures imply that the SDP is often a short-term administrative plan rather than a long term strategic one, an observation made by many governors including this Brownstone parent governor. '[The SDP development process] happens once every year,' he said, 'but that *doesn't* mean that you have to *plan* only for one year, even though you get the money on a yearly basis!' Several other interviewees commented on this point, noting that in their experience, the development of the SDP consisted more of technical revision and less of strategic planning. As one Bluewater LEA governor argued:

'What would be useful is instead of simply updating the SDP every year, if we looked at the previous one and said 'where were the difficulties in implementing this plan,' and looked at how we could fix those aspects in the future.'

Viewing the three-year SDP time frame within a strategic planning context illustrates a second important discrepancy. The time frame that governors most frequently mentioned for effective strategic planning in Section 4.2 (five years) was not the same time frame that the survey revealed (see above) as the length of the average SDP (about three years). Yet *despite* this difference, most governors still insisted that the SDP was their main avenue for strategic planning. As such, a number of governors suggested that even though the SDP was *called* the strategic plan by many schools, the SDP frequently contained very little strategic planning as defined by the three criteria identified in Section 4.2.<sup>5</sup> Instead, the SDP was more frequently a sort of 'technical blueprint' targeted at getting the school and its staff through the coming academic year. As a Bluewater teacher governor sarcastically described the SDP at his school:

'It's a very detailed document, which nobody else would go to the length of properly reading through. So [the governors] see a flashy full document, read it, and say: 'It's marvellous. It's got coloured ink.''

Yet behind such pessimism was hidden a more honest perspective on the problems inherent in expecting the SDP to be both the short-term, detail-oriented blueprint *and*

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<sup>4</sup> Differences between chairs and heads were statistically significant: Mann-Whitney  $z = -2.8$ ;  $p \leq 0.05$ . However, this is due largely to the fact that 21.0 per cent of chairs reported that their SDP covered five years or more, while only 7.1 per cent of heads reported the same. This difference likely indicates that heads were more knowledgeable about the precise length of their SDPs than were chairs.

<sup>5</sup> These were: Setting goals over a long-term time frame and viewing specific actions within a long-term context (Section 4.2.1), ensuring that the ethos of the school was both protected and advanced (Section 4.2.2), and creating a common framework that would guide both decision making and resource allocation (Section 4.2.3).

the long-term strategy. As the Redwood chair noted, a short-term and detail-oriented administrative plan will usually prevail over a long-term and strategy-oriented document if governors are given only one opportunity to put forth a comprehensive document. Noting that the SDP usually follows the short-term administrative route, he (and a number of other governors) suggested the reasons for this short-term focus lay in the inherent confusion of education policy at the central governmental-level:

‘I think that the trouble is at the moment that there’s such restriction coming out of government, and I don’t see that they’re [providing a] clear view of what an education is. I haven’t received anything that I can recall, from the central government or the LEA, that tells me what the *purpose* of education is – and this [SDP draft], I think, illustrates the confusion.... The *detail* of the planning of what [the staff] want to do and how to do it is very good, and I’m fully in favour of it. But there’s no statement of the strategic purpose.’

The research presented in this section suggests that although the SDP is seen as the main avenue for strategic planning by governors, governors have neither substantial involvement in its development nor confidence in its long-term applicability. Furthermore, if it is claimed that a) the SDP is too detailed and focused on ‘primarily education-related issues’ for lay governors to be able to participate substantially in its development, but also that b) the SDP is the main strategic plan, it means that c) governors are being excluded from any serious input into what is – rightly or wrongly – the school’s main strategic plan. However, as was clearly demonstrated at the beginning of this chapter, strategic planning is meant to be one of a governing body’s prime responsibilities. Taken together, these findings and those in Section 4.3 (regarding the implementation of the strategic planning criteria in practice) provide strong evidence that, in response to the second main research question, the lack of strategic planning implied by the existing literature *is* actually evident in the governing bodies of inner London state secondary schools.

#### 4.5 CHAPTER FOUR CONCLUSION

This chapter sought to answer the first two of the four main research questions:

Do governors in inner London state secondary schools view their role as a strategic one, and if so, how do they themselves define strategic planning?

Is the lack of strategic planning implied by the existing literature actually evident in the governing bodies of inner London state secondary schools?

As was noted in Chapter Two, previous research and commentary on governance suggested that strategic planning *should* be an integral part of the governing body's role. The research evidence presented in this chapter provides support for this argument from the governors themselves, and also makes several new empirical contributions to the research literature. First, the evidence presented in this chapter outlines a 'governor's definition' of strategic planning – that strategic planning should be long-term and goal-driven, adhere to and remain consistent with the school ethos, and provide decision-making and resource allocation frameworks. In doing so, this research provides an answer to the first main research question. Second, this research offers empirical evidence that governors did *not* believe that this definition was being fulfilled in practice, thus answering the second main research question. Third, in the course of answering the second main research question, this research provides new evidence in relation to both the involvement of governing bodies in the SDP process, and the role that governors feel the SDP does (or should) play in strategic planning. While this research supports the general finding of Scanlon et al. (1999) that governors often identify strategic planning with the SDP (1999:24), this research also provides additional empirical insight in relation to inner London governing bodies in specific. In particular, this research suggests that governing bodies in inner London tended to have low levels of involvement in the SDP process, and that governors believed the SDPs of their respective schools were often both inadequate long-term planning tools and less strategic than they themselves would have liked.

Having established that governors believed they *should* be doing strategic planning, and that these governors themselves believed that their current strategic planning is inadequate, this research now turns to investigating what factors contribute to this gap between theory and practice. Some of these factors were implied in the evidence presented in this chapter, and the aim of the next two chapters is to make these factors explicit. This research found that these factors could be divided into two main groups: those that manifest themselves at the institutional (and by extension, governing body) level, and those that appear to emanate from the central governmental level. The first of these two categories – those factors relating to the institutional level – are the subject of the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **INSTITUTIONAL-LEVEL STRATEGIC PLANNING BARRIERS**

#### **5.0 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter established that governing bodies did not appear to engage in their strategic planning responsibilities effectively. This chapter therefore attempts to begin answering the third main research question:

If the lack of strategic planning implied by the existing literature is actually evident in the governing bodies of inner London state secondary schools, why is this the case?

After reviewing the research evidence, it was determined that the reasons for why governing bodies encountered problems in strategic planning could be divided into two main sets of barriers – those whose roots (and potential solutions) could be found at the institutional and governing body level, and those whose roots who could be found at the central governmental level. The former will be discussed in this chapter, while the latter will be discussed in Chapter Six.

Section 5.1 provides the context for understanding the approach towards data presentation taken in the remainder of this thesis. First, this section outlines the theoretical framework through which these data will be presented and interpreted – the concept of strategic planning barriers. Second, this section presents the quantitative data on ‘reported hindrances to strategic planning’. Sections 5.2 to 5.5 then identify the four main institutional-level barriers that arise from the survey and interview data, and discuss how these barriers impede strategic planning. Section 5.2 addresses the barrier created by the existence of a ‘monitoring culture’ amongst governing bodies. Section 5.3 addresses the barrier created by the varying level of involvement of various governor subgroups. Section 5.4 addresses the barrier created by the tendency for individual governors to focus on smaller, well-defined ‘task-based’ issues. Section 5.5 addresses the barrier created by the tendency for governors to avoid ‘primarily education-related’ issues – including strategic planning – by allocating responsibility for such matters to school staff. Shifting briefly to the local level, Section 5.6 explains the decision to limit the extent to which this thesis examines the role of the Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in the governing body strategic planning process. Finally, Section 5.7 summarises the chapter findings and

concludes by laying the groundwork for the presentation of the evidence regarding central governmental-level barriers to strategic planning.

## 5.1 BACKGROUND THEORY AND DATA

### 5.1.1 Theory: The Concept of Barriers to Strategic Planning

Before proceeding, it is important to understand the theoretical framework within which the research data will be presented and interpreted. As was noted in Chapter Two, the ‘advice’ literature frequently takes a pragmatic approach towards strategic planning, implying that many of the circumstances in which governing bodies currently find themselves cannot be substantially changed. As such, this literature often limits itself to providing governing bodies with valuable ‘stop-gap’ advice, while avoiding an investigation of the potential systemic causes of these problems. This is certainly not the fault of this kind of literature *per se*, yet the relatively limited state of the literature investigating potential systemic causes (see e.g., Corrick 1996; Creese 1998; Earley et al. 2002) can incorrectly imply that ‘stop-gap’ measures are the only available remedy for addressing institutional problems. As can be seen in the comments below, the current research study found several governors who were frustrated with the fact that their own governing bodies were operating under similar limited presumptions:

‘In terms of long-term planning, we tend to use what I think of as a very English pattern. Which is that we don’t engage big issues except through the pragmatics of small issues. That’s a very English way of solving a problem. If you look at [how a specific problem is solved in] English common law, the way you solve it has *sweeping* implications for every other problem. But you *deny* that this is your focus, and that keeps the conflict to a minimum.’ (Bluewater co-opted governor)

‘What we *rarely* have are *big* debates about the *big* issues – instead [we debate] issues that *impact* upon the big issues, but [these discussions] don’t really consist of a set-piece debate about the future of the school.’ (Brownstone LEA governor)

Given these concerns, and upon thorough examination of the research data, it seemed that there was a valuable alternative approach for evaluating the problems surrounding strategic planning, one that had been neither fully conceptualised nor fully applied in previous research. This alternative approach is the concept of ‘*barriers*’ to strategic planning. While much of the advice literature is devoted to proposing ways for governing bodies to become *more* effective at strategic planning,

the barrier approach takes the opposite tack, seeking instead to determine what structural barriers may be making governing bodies *less* effective. The underlying rationale of this approach is that identifying and eliminating these structural barriers can be just as valuable – if not more so – as proposing short-term solutions for circumventing them. While this approach was employed on a limited scale by Earley (1994a) and Scanlon et al. (1999) in relation to the general issue of governing bodies effectiveness (see Section 2.4.2), it has not been applied in either a systematic or a heuristic manner to the more specific issue of governing body strategic planning.

To illustrate this difference in approaches, the approach of the advice literature is generally to presume that while the *tools* for increasing effectiveness are available, the *thinking* about how to use them is somehow flawed. As such, much of the advice literature suggests that problem solving generally requires convincing governors to act differently within the constraints of their existing resources. In the case of strategic planning, the ‘improvement’ approach might suggest that by providing governors with new ideas for about improving efficiency at governing body meetings, streamlining their record keeping, and so on, strategic planning processes could be improved.

The ‘barrier’ approach acknowledges that some problems can, as with the improvement approach, be solved by convincing governors to act differently within the constraints of their existing resources. However, the barrier approach adds an additional dimension, suggesting that there are situations in which governors *know* what needs to be improved but find that there is a prevailing barrier that *prevents them from doing so*. These barriers make governing bodies *less* effective in their strategic planning, albeit sometimes through no fault of the governing bodies themselves. As such, the barrier approach has two important implications. First, this approach suggests that if a barrier *remains* in place, attempting to implement an ‘improvement-based’ set of solutions (even with the best of intentions) will often be futile, frustrating, and ineffective. The corollary to this implication is that acknowledging and identifying barriers to strategic planning permits an exploration of how to *eliminate* such barriers, opening the way for the implementation of a more traditional improvement-based approach.

Until now, there has not been a systematic attempt to identify the barriers that may impede governing body strategic planning. One reason for this may be that



confidence in having actually identified a barrier (as opposed to having identified an institution-specific idiosyncrasy) is only possible after examining and comparing a number of governing bodies. However, research on the necessary scale to do this has been limited (only Earley (1994a) and Scanlon et al. (1999), and to a lesser extent Shearn (1995) and Creese and Bradley (1997)). Another reason may be that because barriers can be created by entities *other* than the institution, the efforts required to eliminate them might be greater than the efforts that individual institutions can muster. Regardless of the reason, the data in the following chapters is presented and interpreted via the lens of barriers, as it is believed that the barrier concept provides a valuable heuristic device that can assist in the understanding of how problems in strategic planning might be identified and solved.

### 5.1.2 Data: Potential Hindrances to Strategic Planning

Although the barriers that will be identified in this chapter and in Chapter Six were identified after analysing *both* the qualitative and the quantitative data, it is easiest to begin understanding the potential strategic planning barriers faced by governing bodies by examining the survey data presented in Table 5.1 (below). The survey offered respondents a list of 24 potential hindrances to strategic planning, and asked respondents to indicate whether or not each factor hindered their governing body in doing long term strategic planning. Respondents were given the option of choosing ‘not an issue,’ ‘hinders slightly,’ ‘hinders moderately,’ and ‘hinders greatly’; for analysis purposes, the resulting data were collapsed into a dichotomous ‘not an issue’ versus ‘hindrance’ scheme. While the 24 options can be grouped into four broad themes – those dealing with time, those dealing with finance, those dealing with school-specific issues, and those dealing with governors themselves – for presentation purposes, Table 5.1 is sorted by the descending *weighted average* of cumulative head and chair response, as shown in the rightmost column.<sup>1</sup> As such, the rankings in Table 5.1 should be viewed as a rough guide rather than as a rigid hierarchy.

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<sup>1</sup> Calculated as:  $((\text{Chair per cent} \times \text{Chair N}) + (\text{Head per cent} \times \text{Head N})) / (\text{Chair N} + \text{Head N})$ . This approach allowed the data to be presented without having to sort the data based on either the chair rank or the head rank, an approach that might inadvertently suggest that one of these categories has greater importance than the other.

**Table 5.1: Hindrances to Strategic Planning**

*Percentage of respondents reporting that each given issue hindered strategic planning to some extent.*

Issue	Weighted Average	Chairs (%)	Heads (%)	Chairs (N)	Heads (N)
Amount of time required to address statutory responsibilities	92.8	90.4	95.7	83	69
The amount of paperwork	92.2	91.8	92.6	85	68
Amount of time required to formulate and review statutory policies	90.7	89.2	92.6	83	68
The amount of legislation and regulation	89.5	87.1	92.5	85	67
Pressure created by the timing of <i>central</i> government funding decisions	87.1	84.9	89.9	86	69
Pressure created by the timing of <i>local</i> government funding decisions	87.0	89.4	84.1	85	69
Difficulty in recruiting and retaining teachers	84.4	81.4	88.2	86	68
Uncertainty about central government's future funding commitments	84.2	88.1	79.4	84	68
Uncertainty about central government's future education priorities	83.8	82.4	85.5	85	69
Desire not to increase governor workload *	78.6	69.8	89.7	86	68
Amount of time required to monitor targets	78.2	75.9	80.9	83	68
The need to address changes in the National Curriculum and assessment	77.9	75.6	80.9	86	68
Amount of time spent on immediate 'crisis' issues *	77.8	84.7	69.1	85	68
Inadequate knowledge level of governors	71.6	69.8	73.9	86	69
The need to show continuing improvement in the league tables	66.7	61.2	73.5	85	68
Difficulty in recruiting governors	64.6	60.5	69.6	86	69
Difficulty in balancing the school's <i>current</i> budget	63.4	60.7	66.7	84	69
The volunteer status of governors	59.5	56.5	63.2	85	68
The need to make improvements to satisfy Ofsted *	57.8	45.3	73.5	86	68
Uncertainty about changes in the school's pupil intake	57.2	57.0	57.4	86	68
Lack of administrative support for governors	57.1	52.3	63.2	86	68
Difficulty in retaining governors	51.6	46.5	58.0	86	69
Insufficient number of governor meetings per year	35.1	30.2	41.2	86	68
The increase in delegated funding to schools	34.9	30.6	40.3	85	67

\* = Differences between chairs and heads were statistically significant:  $\chi^2 \geq 5.3$ ;  $p \leq 0.05$ .

It is clear from Table 5.1 that there was broad and substantial agreement that many of these issues created hindrances to governing body strategic planning, as evidenced by the fact in only four categories did fewer than 50 per cent of chairs report hindrances, and in only two categories did heads do likewise. To put some of these

extremely high percentages in context, it should be noted that in response to a separate question, only half of both chairs (50.6 per cent, N=87) and heads (49.3 per cent, N=71) surveyed rated their governing bodies as having a *high* ability to do long-term strategic planning, while 49.4 per cent of chairs and 50.7 per cent of heads felt their governing bodies had only a *low* or *moderate* ability to do so. It is also clear from Table 5.1 that time and funding issues, respectively, were those that respondents found to be the greatest hindrances to their strategic planning potential, and well as the fact that the top-rated concerns surrounded issues that were largely in the domain of central government control.

Qualitative evidence from the case studies permits a more detailed analysis of the survey data, and the attempt to answer the third main research question begins with an exploration of the *institutional*-level barriers that might hinder governing body's strategic planning. As was noted in the introduction to this chapter, barriers created at the central governmental level, including those dealing with time constraints (the most widely problematic hindrance in Table 5.1), will be discussed in detail in Chapter Six. At the institutional level, however, four main barriers were identified: the existence of a 'monitoring culture' amongst governing bodies, the varying level of involvement of various governor groups, the tendency for individual governors to focus on well-defined, smaller, and 'task-based' issues, and the tendency for governors to avoid 'primarily education-related' issues – including strategic planning – by allocating responsibility for such matters to school staff. Each of these four barriers is now addressed in turn.

## 5.2 THE 'MONITORING CULTURE' BARRIER

'I think that the governing body should be supportive of the head in general, and provide a monitoring role of what goes on in the school.' (Greenleaf head teacher)

The first main barrier identified in this research was the existence of a 'monitoring culture' amongst governing bodies, which acted as a deterrent to proactive strategic planning. This tendency towards monitoring was first noted in Chapter Four in relation to the SDP, yet the research suggested that this monitoring-focused approach appeared to extend to other tasks as well. It should be made clear that there is nothing wrong with monitoring *per se* – indeed, for strategic planning to have any influence, governing bodies need to know how well their strategic plan is being

implemented. However, it appeared from this research that many governors engaged in monitoring to the *exclusion* of other activities like strategic planning. As such, governing bodies were often largely (if not entirely) reactive rather than proactive in their approach towards their strategic planning responsibilities. In stating his ideal of strategic planning, one Bluewater co-opted governor observed:

‘Strategy, in my language, has something to do with prioritisation of scarce resources, [so] the question is whether you’re managing your board to *key* decisions – the big ones over a period – as *well* as their role in the day-to-day.’

However, this research found strong evidence that many governors were spending a significant amount of time on operational tasks, and very little on ‘managing the key decisions’. The survey provided evidence for this claim in two ways. First, despite 77.0 per cent of chairs (N=87) and 57.7 per cent of heads (N=71) reporting that their governing bodies were generally *proactive*,<sup>2</sup> the survey found that 60.3 per cent of chairs (N=83) and 63.3 per cent of heads (N=69) reported that their governing bodies spent only *30 per cent or less* of their time on long-term strategic planning. This discrepancy implied that some other task is occupying the bulk of governors’ time and ‘proactivity’. Second, as was shown in Table 5.1, 75.9 per cent of chairs and 80.9 per cent of heads said that the time they were required to spend on ‘monitoring targets’ hindered their ability to do strategic planning.

The qualitative data supported these survey findings. While governors indicated that they spent only a *small* percentage of their time on strategic planning, they noted that they spent the *majority* of their time engaged in the more mundane administrative and procedural issues of school operation – often, precisely the type of issues that central government intended governing bodies to leave to school staff. Whilst governing bodies do have a statutory responsibility in many of these areas, it appeared that governors hewed closer to the administrative portion of those responsibilities than to the strategic portion of them. As one Redwood co-opted governor noted:

‘If I [were to] give quite a low percentage for [the time we spend on] fire fighting, then you might conclude that the balance of the percentage is spent on strategic issues – and that’s not true. It’s not a particularly big proportion, but that’s because by far the biggest proportion is absolutely *routine* issues – not even fire fighting, just *time filling*.’

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<sup>2</sup> Differences between chairs and heads were statistically significant: Mann-Whitney  $z = -3.5$ ;  $p < 0.05$ .

Other governors voiced similar dissatisfaction with the ways in which their governing bodies were handling time management (i.e., by giving preference towards monitoring rather than planning). One Bluewater governor used the example of his governing body's approach towards pupil exclusions to illustrate this type of situation. When asked how well his governing body managed its time, he replied, 'Probably not very well. You take the exclusions issue – far too much time was spent on [coordinating] the actual exclusions committee, rather than on the [overall] strategy as to 'how to put it right.' Other governors voiced similar frustrations, as can be seen here:

'Relatively little of this particular governing body's work is concerned with fire fighting or short-term measures.... I think probably a large part of governors' time is spent on monitoring activities – so it isn't necessarily specifically doing *anything* other than reviewing, monitoring, and maybe commenting on, and occasionally offering some advice to the head.' (Greenleaf co-opted governor)

'A lot of the time on the governing body is simply spent taking reports from committee meetings – which is fine. A lot of the governing body [meeting] is simply information. But it's not information presented on *either* strategic issues or short term problems – it's information which is presented as 'this is what the committee did, and this is what we decided in your name, and here's the next draft, would you please sign on to this?'' (Bluewater co-opted governor)

'Certainly, a lot of the things are fire fighting. Some of the things that come up are things you expect – they come up cyclically anyway. But I think we should have plans in place to *deal* with these things that are cyclic, and that doesn't appear to have been the case.' (Redwood parent governor)

In all these instances, governors complained that the 'monitoring approach' taken by their governing bodies meant that the time that could be spent proactively on strategic planning was instead being spent monitoring existing situations and reacting to specific problems as those problems arose. (As an aside, while governors were quick to point out in the qualitative study that they did not necessarily spend substantial amounts of time 'fire fighting' short-term crises, the survey suggests that when 'fire fighting' was necessary, it too contributed to reducing the time that might otherwise have gone to strategic planning. As was show in Table 5.1, 84.7 per cent of chairs and 69.1 per cent of heads noted that time spent on immediate 'crisis' issues hindered their strategic planning ability. This difference between chairs and heads was statistically significant (chi-squared = 5.3;  $p < 0.05$ ), suggesting that chairs saw dealing with crises as a much more time-consuming and diverting problem than did heads. Given the combination of the qualitative and quantitative evidence on this

point, it was concluded that the philosophy of ‘governing means monitoring’ was not only prevalent amongst governing bodies in this study, but that this approach often *impeded* the pursuit of a more active approach towards governing that promoted strategic planning.

### **5.3 THE ‘VARYING LEVELS OF GOVERNOR INVOLVEMENT’ BARRIER**

The second finding was that there were vast differences in the contributions made by the different categories of governors, and that in most schools, the burden of governors’ responsibilities were carried out by a small core of governors. This has several implications for strategic planning, particularly since Table 5.1 illustrates that the desire to avoid increasing governor workload was a strategic planning hindrance to 69.8 per cent of chairs and 89.7 per cent of heads. This difference in responses was statistically significant (chi-squared = 9.0;  $p < 0.05$ ), suggesting first that heads felt that governors required more information in order to fulfil their strategic planning responsibilities, and second that heads were more concerned than were chairs that governors would be unable to accommodate this increased involvement. This section presents evidence for three strategic planning implications of this varying involvement. Section 5.3.1 argues that if the core governors are overburdened, the likelihood increases that the governing body will relegate strategic planning to the background. Section 5.3.2 argues that different types of governors contribute at different levels, that some *types* of governors are more likely to be in the core than others – and that those outside the core are less likely to participate in strategic planning. Finally, Section 5.3.3 argues that differential levels of involvement suggests that only a small number of governors have the understanding or experience to clearly define what their role should be. As such, it is argued that many less-involved governors may be making their limited contributions by sticking to ‘what they know’ – and that their expertise is unlikely to include strategic planning.

#### **5.3.1 Involvement of the Core Governors**

Looking first at the concept of a ‘core’ of governors, there was clear evidence of the existence of a core at all five case study schools. As one Bluewater LEA governor acknowledged, ‘There is inevitably, with twenty governors, a core which tends to do most of the work.’ This use of a core appears to have become increasingly more important since the early 1990s, as governing bodies have been asked to deal with a wider range of administrative and substantive issues. This range means that it has

become increasingly difficult for any single governor (at least amongst those interviewed in this study) to spend the time necessary to understand the relationships between different components of school planning. As such, the high amount of knowledge necessary for making informed decisions meant that responsibilities for planning usually fell to a small core of governors who were sufficiently knowledgeable. Most governors noted that the core was usually composed of the chair and the chairs of the various committees – the Brownstone head suggested that her school had ‘probably a core group of about six or seven governors,’ whilst a supplementary interview chair noted that ‘There’s a small core of governors who do most of the work – about half a dozen.’

Yet there was also an indication amongst interviewees that there were often an insufficient number of governors in the core, given the number of tasks required of them. ‘Does everyone tend to be involved?’ asked one Greenleaf LEA governor rhetorically – ‘No, not really.’ Not only did the survey respondents report that recruiting and retaining governors hindered their strategic planning (60.5 per cent of chairs versus 69.9 per cent of heads, and 46.5 per cent of chairs versus 58.0 per cent of heads, respectively),<sup>3</sup> interviewees frequently observed that there were constantly problems in convincing *existing* governors to contribute more broadly. As one Redwood parent governor observed:

‘I hear it many times when I go to conferences, [where] I’m meeting people of similar ilk to myself – ‘we’re overstretched’. But we tend to shoulder the burden of the majority of the work, because the other governors [are there] just to make up [the] numbers.’

The Whitefrost chair noted that his governing body also suffered from this difficulty; ‘There’s ‘here in name only,’ which is a common concern across governing bodies,’ he lamented. Additionally, one Brownstone LEA governor argued that the trend towards additional responsibility ran counter to the realities of governors’ ability to commit time and energy:

‘This idea that [government is] ‘setting schools free and putting them in the hands of governors’ is completely crackpot, because people are *less* inclined to be involved. *Already* it’s difficult to get people to be governors because there’s more work involved than there used to be.’

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<sup>3</sup> Differences between chairs and heads were *not* statistically significant.

It could be argued that a small operating core of governors makes collective decision-making easier, since doing so requires agreement amongst a smaller number of people. Yet even granting this concession, it appeared that by relying on a core of governors – whether by choice or by circumstance – potential avenues of support and burden-sharing *within* the governing body were often shut off. It is possible that a vicious cycle then ensures, since with fewer governors having input into decisions, governors who are outside the core may feel further disenfranchised in regards having any real impact on governing body decisions. This in turn may require core governors to undertake even *more* responsibilities, and as these responsibilities increased, so to would the likelihood that governors would find less time to engage in strategic planning.

### 5.3.2 Involvement of the Non-Core Governors

The extent of this disenfranchisement of non-core governors can be inferred by examining which types of governors tended to have the greatest involvement on the governing body. As posited above, the core is likely composed of the governors with the greatest involvement, and this research found that certain types of governors were consistently more involved on the governing body than were others. As one Whitefrost co-opted governor noted:

‘It doesn’t surprise me that a core of governors is more involved than others – that’s just the nature of organisations. I think the specific issue [is] that the core governors are generally the ones who *don’t have their kids there*. They’re generally professionals, articulate, often with a business or corporate background, and they feel comfortable in the governing body situation. There’s another group of parents and others who are much less involved, for a whole number of reasons – partly their background.’

This research found that the governors who were selected by the governing body itself (the foundation and co-opted governors) were usually more involved than those governors who were selected by specific constituencies (the teacher, parent, staff, and LEA governors). Table 5.2 illustrates that both surveyed chairs and heads felt that foundation and co-opted governors were significantly more involved on the governing body than were other types of governors, and that only about *half* of chairs and heads surveyed felt that parent, staff, and LEA governors had similar levels of involvement. (In interpreting these data, it might also be valuable to reiterate the background of the 87 chairs who responded: 40.2 per cent were foundation governors, 25.3 per cent were LEA governors, 19.5 per cent were co-opted



governors, and only 3.4 per cent were parent governors. The remainder (11.5 per cent) did not provide an affiliation.)

**Table 5.2: Level of Involvement by Governor Type**  
*Percentage responding that involvement was either 'high' or 'very high'.*

Governor Type	Chairs (%)	Heads (%)	Chairs (N)	Heads (N)
Foundation <sup>4</sup>	76.7	72.7	33	32
Co-opted	72.0	61.3	75	62
Teacher	63.1	53.6	84	69
Parent	55.3	46.4	85	69
LEA	49.4	42.6	85	68

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*Differences between chairs and heads were not statistically significant.*

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Complementing the quantitative findings presented in Table 5.2, one particularly insightful comment by the Redwood chair provided a particularly detailed overview of his perception of how different types of governors approached their responsibilities. While Redwood is a voluntary aided school, substituting 'co-opted governor' for 'foundation governor' in the following comment would provide a fairly accurate representation of the perspective of many governors interviewed in the case studies, regardless of school type:

'The stability [comes from] the foundation governors – that core of people is very stable. Parent governors are also quite stable, but not *as* stable. My view is, of what I have seen of the foundation governors in a voluntary aided school and the foundation governors at a grant maintained school, [that they] were a powerful influence because they were perceived as relatively long-term. They were chosen competently, and play a very serious role. Parent governors are quite willing, but are mostly concerned about their own children. Teacher governors are particularly concerned about their own issues. And LEA governors tend to have their own concerns. I think the independence of a structure of foundation governors, properly constructed, is a powerful entity, and it creates the stability that's necessary.'

While the survey findings demonstrate that foundation and co-opted governors usually had the greatest involvement with their governing bodies, the comments of the Whitefrost governor and the Redwood chair (above) both support this claim and indicate that many governors held additional concerns regarding the low level of *parent* governor involvement. These concerns were also mirrored in the survey data,

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<sup>4</sup> The lower N for responses about foundation governors is due to the fact that only voluntary-aided, voluntary-controlled and foundation schools have such governors, whereas community schools do not.

as Table 5.2 shows that only 55.3 per cent of chairs and 46.4 per cent of heads felt that parent governors were highly involved in the governing body. As one supplementary interview chair argued, ‘most governors who do the work aren’t parents, and most of the parents contribute nothing to the governing body,’ while Brownstone’s head noted the clear discrepancy between parent governors and other governors in terms of involvement:

‘The people who tend to get more involved in that tend to be my LEA or my co-opted governors, which is a real issue. I don’t know what else I can do to try and encourage parents to become involved – there may be something more we can do.’

The strategic planning implications of this relative lack of parent governor involvement are substantial. First, the effect of this mediocre reported level of parent governor involvement is magnified by the fact that parents are allocated the largest number of seats of any single constituency group on a governing body.<sup>5</sup> As such, if parent governors are only partially involved, the effect will be that there are substantially fewer governors available to spread the burden of governing duties than there might otherwise have been. In turn, this has the potential to increase the pressure on the ‘active’ governors, thereby providing less time for the governing body to engage in strategic planning. Second, many interviewees confirmed that, in relation to other categories of governors, parent governors tended to have the highest turnover rate. As one Brownstone LEA governor confided:

‘I’m sceptical about parents, I suppose, because [this school’s governor] parents aren’t very vocal. I suppose there’s one chap, he’s the most active of the parent governors, and the most vocal, but the rest of them tend to have a bit of a turnover. They do a year or two, and drop out.’

While this high turnover is possibly because parents are involved in the governing body only while their child attends the school, high turnover also suggests that the ‘parent governor’ bloc is frequently at the bottom of the ‘learning curve’ regarding the operation of the governing body (in relation to the governing body as a whole). As one Whitefrost LEA governor observed, ‘I think it’s quite hard for parents to very quickly become aware of the responsibilities of being a governor.’ The effect of this

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<sup>5</sup> Although foundation governors are required to outnumber all other categories of governor in schools where foundation governors are required, at least two or three of these foundation governors are required to be parents of pupils. While technically these ‘foundation’ governors, these ‘foundation parent’ operate in practice more as parent governors than as co-opted governors.

higher level of turnover is to prevent the largest single group on the governing body from having the sustained involvement that is necessary for carrying through strategic planning initiatives. Finally, many governors raised the point that parent governors are frequently concerned about the ‘here and now’, since it is the actions with immediate effects that will have the greatest impact upon the experiences of their own children. As many governors observed, but which one Bluewater teacher governor articulated quite strongly:

‘The people who have less of an idea are the parent governors, who can’t see beyond this blinkered path about their child. And they’re really interested about student issues when it comes to finance, or any kind of curriculum planning – if it’s not going to affect their son or daughter, then they’re not interested.’

Although this particular governor was one of the more *critical* governors in this respect, the notion of parents being ‘single-issue’ governors was common throughout the case studies. While this type of advocacy can be important, governors felt that the emphasis many parent governors placed on short-term issues meant that parent governors were unlikely to expend limited governing body time on planning strategically for a school that their children would have left by the time those strategic goals had been reached.

### **5.3.3 Concerns over the Definition of the Governor’s Role**

However, the parent governor conundrum is simply the most obvious example of a more systemic problem: the confusion amongst governors over the definition of their role. While governors were firm in stating that they were not supposed to be addressing ‘day-to-day’ issues, it was also clear that their *own* definition of their role had been diluted by their myriad responsibilities and a frequent lack of clarity as to how to those responsibilities should be executed. One Redwood LEA governor provided her observations of this problem on her own governing body:

‘We’ve got two [parent governors] on our [sub]committee, and I don’t think they’re quite sure what their role is. I don’t think *I* would be quite sure what my role was as a parent governor, to be honest. Do I bring in issues from that? How do I feed that back – do I have meetings with parents? Do I send out a newsletter, do I have reps from every year, do I go through the parent teacher association?’

Furthermore, these concerns not only go beyond parent governors in specific – similar concerns were voiced in relation to the role of co-opted, foundation, and LEA governors as well – these concerns also go beyond the school level. While some governing bodies in this study did a better job than others at delineating the ‘governor’s role’, such institution-level delineation is, almost by definition, both limited and variable.

In comparison, central government policy has a substantial impact on how governing bodies operate and how governors interpret their role. Indeed, many interviewees suggested that institutional-level problems with role definition were adversely influenced by central government’s overall policy approach, as can be seen here:

‘At a lot of the governing body meetings, you’re trying to help people understand not what the *answer* is, but what the *problem* is! I think there’s a fundamental weakness in British education policy in terms of the rhetoric about what the role of governing bodies is – what’s expected of them – and their competence to deliver.’ (Bluewater co-opted governor)

‘The role of governors needs to be more clear, since their roles still [largely] tend to be written by the lawyers. They need their role spelled out in clear language, and governing bodies need to be told what skills are *expected* on governing bodies, instead government leaving it to governing bodies to cobble together.’ (Whitefrost LEA governor)

The issue of role definition and central government will be taken up in detail in Chapter Six. However, the key point for immediate purposes is this: if governors are unsure how to represent – or even *identify* – their constituency, they will be less likely to express confidence in taking actions on behalf of that constituency. If the absence of a well-articulated role means governors are tentative about their authority or their responsibilities, this temerity will likely have a strong influence on the range of tasks that governors feel comfortable undertaking. The implications of this mindset for strategic planning are explored in the next section.

#### **5.4 THE ‘LIMITED TO TANGIBLE TASKS’ BARRIER**

This research suggested that the third main strategic planning barrier faced by governing bodies in this study was that governors limited their expertise and influence to issues on which a visible and relatively immediate result could be expected – referred to henceforth as ‘tangible’ issues. For example, governors can see the new computers they purchased, the budget sheet they balanced, or the

absence of a pupil they excluded for bullying. It will be argued that by limiting themselves to these kinds of tangible issues, fewer governors attempted to work on longer-term and more intangible issues like strategic planning, since issues like strategic planning are highly knowledge- and time-intensive while rarely providing immediately evident results.

The initial evidence demonstrated that in practice, the overall levels of influence and knowledge of governing bodies were often quite limited. For example, Table 5.1 shows that 69.8 per cent of chairs and 73.9 per cent of heads felt that ‘inadequate knowledge amongst governors’ was a hindrance to governing body strategic planning. Additional survey data, as well as qualitative responses, suggest that there is a more nuanced explanation for this broad generalisation – particularly as ‘knowledge’ can be so broadly defined. As Table 5.3 illustrates, the survey revealed that governors tended to have low levels of influence in certain *specific* policy areas. The evidence in Table 5.3 suggests that when governors *were* influential, their influence was usually on issues of finance and premises, rather than on issues like curriculum and pastoral care.

**Table 5.3: Influence of Governing Bodies in Different Areas of Responsibility<sup>6</sup>**

Area of Responsibility	Level of Influence	Chairs (%) (N=86)	Heads (%) (N=69)	<i>z</i>
Finance	High	74.4	59.4	-2.3
	Low	4.7	17.4	
Premises	High	66.3	58.0	-2.2
	Low	7.0	14.5	
Staffing	High	53.5	24.8	-2.6
	Low	12.8	26.1	
Curriculum	High	37.2	24.6	-2.4
	Low	25.6	47.8	
Pastoral Care	High	24.4	17.6	-2.4
	Low	32.6	50.0	

*Differences between chairs and heads were all statistically significant:  $p < 0.05$ .*

<sup>6</sup> For a review of how data were collapsed for analysis and presentation purposes, see Section 3.4.5. Only the two extreme ranges are displayed in this table.

The differences between chairs and heads in *each* of these five areas were statistically significant. This is extremely revealing, given the fact that, as can be seen in Table 5.3, both chairs and heads provided the same *rank* ordering of the five areas in terms of relative influence levels. What this indicates is that while chairs and heads *agreed* that governing bodies were more influential in finance and premises and less influential on curriculum and pastoral care, heads found their governing bodies to be consistently and significantly *less* influential in any given area than did chairs.

#### 5.4.1 Selection for Skills over Vision

The reasons for this imbalance towards finance and premises and away from curriculum are possibly attributable to a certain self-selection bias within governing bodies. First, the selection of governors who have identifiable ‘constituencies’ (i.e., teachers, parents, LEA representatives, and staff) is beyond the immediate control of governing bodies. However, in two categories – co-opted and foundation governors (where applicable) – governing bodies have greater latitude in selecting their members. Such governors are brought onto the governing body *not* in order to provide representation for a specific constituency, but because the governing body decides that they possess some ‘value added’ attribute. As such, this research found that in many cases, governing bodies tended to select these governors for their ‘skills’ as opposed to their ‘vision.’

Of course, many governors said that they did not have the opportunity to select for either skills *or* vision, particularly since their governing bodies were often already under-strength; as one Brownstone governor said, ‘I think, unfortunately, there is no balance. We *know* that there’s a shortage of governors, and beggars can’t be choosers.’ This was reflected in Table 5.1, where 60.5 per cent of chairs (N=86) and 69.6 per cent of heads (N=69) reported that difficulty in recruiting governors hindered strategic planning. Furthermore, governors in all five case study schools agreed that governing bodies often faced significant problems simply in filling the seats, never mind recruiting those who would bring substantial benefits to the governing body. As one Bluewater co-opted governor noted:

‘To be honest, you have such difficulty getting governors; you can’t be too picky, on balance. That doesn’t mean to say that because you can’t afford to

be picky, you end up with a lousy lot of governors – but I don't think you end up with a perfect balance.'

When asked what they would do if given a *choice*, however, it was clear that governors felt their governing bodies required skill-based governors in order to fulfil the tasks that governing bodies were being asked to complete. In some schools, like Bluewater, the skills versus vision debate carried additional political connotations; as one parent governor said:

'For the [criteria in selecting the] one's we co-opted, it's always the same thing – the lefties tend to favour the ethos, and the righties tend to want the professionalisation!'

Yet for the other four case study schools, governors consistently observed that if given the option between skills and vision in the current educational environment, co-opted governor selection was often a strictly pragmatic decision based upon matching governor skills with the immediate needs of the school. One Redwood foundation governor described the needs of his governing body as follows:

'In my twenty or so years there, [I believe that] in the make up of governors, you need certain skills.... You need professional people, there's no question of that. You need someone who's good on the legal side [and] certainly you need financial skills, so banking or accountancy needs to be there. You need industry skills – you need to know what's going on out there, and it's no longer 'we can run this school'.... You need [all those people] because it's not all about *education* – there *are* other issues, and you need their professional skills, which they can contribute very quickly.'

This need for governing bodies to assemble a roster of 'operational specialists' was a view supported almost uniformly by governors across the other case studies, as is demonstrated by the selection of comments below:

'I think in the past, it's very much been looking to fill the skills gaps that you've got.' (Greenleaf parent governor)

'When I got involved, it was most likely that the school was going to be closed down – so in those circumstances we were quite ruthless about co-opting anybody who was going to add something.' (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

'If we were looking for a new governor tomorrow, I'd say we'd want a person with experience in education and the local community.... But that's simply the next choice. If we did lose someone with the exterior skills, I think I'd want them replaced.' (Brownstone co-opted governor)

‘There are issues there that reflect back on finance, and having a business background will help you particularly on finance.... You want governors who have got advisory skills that can be *used*.’ (Redwood LEA governor)

As is evident from these comments, governors were *not* arguing that a more holistic vision of the school was not valuable. Instead, governors appeared to be arguing that under the present circumstances, the ‘luxury’ of vision loses out when placed in direct competition with the need for skills. As one insightful Bluewater co-opted governor observed:

‘It’s a numbers game, isn’t it? I think the governing body ought, in principle, to identify the skills of the governors and the local authority members, many of whom are professional people in their own right, [and ask] ‘what is it we haven’t got around this table?’ But I personally would, if it came to a trade-off, sacrifice one or two of the specialist skills for the broad view.... I think the system *desperately* needs people who can do that – but they’re very difficult to find.’

Not only does this dichotomy of ‘skills versus vision’ help to explain why the influence of governing bodies in Table 5.3 may be tilted towards the ‘task-based’ issues of finances and premises, it also helps explain why strategic planning is relatively underdeveloped amongst governing bodies. From this research, it appears that those individuals who could bring such *non*-task-based abilities to governing bodies are often not sought out by governing bodies for this expertise.

#### **5.4.2 Low Governor Knowledge of ‘Primarily Education-Related’ Issues**

In contrast, Table 5.3 suggests that neither governors nor heads found their governing bodies to be influential on *curriculum* matters. In addition to this finding, the survey revealed that when respondents were asked whether non-teacher governors felt *comfortable* offering their opinions and suggestions about curriculum-related issues, only 57.0 per cent of chairs (N=86) felt that such governors appeared more than moderately comfortable doing so, and only 41.4 per cent of heads (N=70) felt likewise.<sup>7</sup> The qualitative research supported this finding, as governors at four of the five case study schools reported low *knowledge* of curricular issues (the exception was Greenleaf; see below). Furthermore, this research found that few governors who were not current or former education professionals (at any educational level) felt comfortable either in seeking additional information about

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<sup>7</sup> Differences between chairs and heads were *not* statistically significant. However, heads were much more likely than chairs to report ‘moderate’ comfort levels: 37.1 per cent versus 19.8 per cent.



‘primarily education-related’ issues or in offering their opinions on curricular matters. This issue was also one of only a few issues in this research where there were clear institution-specific reasons for differences between governor responses. In contrast to other interviewees, Greenleaf’s governors reported that their colleagues *did* feel comfortable commenting on ‘primarily education-related’ issues. However, it needs to be noted that the majority of governors interviewed at Greenleaf were either current educators, former educators, or held jobs that frequently brought them into contact with either schools or primarily education-related issues.

In the four other case study schools, this research found that not only did governors gravitate *towards* issues with which they were comfortable (as noted above), it appeared that governors (or governing bodies) actively repelled *away* from the issues on which they were least comfortable. When asked about his governing body’s emphasis on curriculum and education issues, one Redwood co-opted governor said, ‘it never really surfaces at governing meetings. It is very much bricks and mortar – and some general staffing things.’ A parent governor colleague of his concurred, noting, ‘I think a lot of [governors] relate the school to their own life and their own knowledge, and they feel happier keeping within an area that they feel safe in.’ Furthermore, this emphasis on ‘skills’ issues was not limited to Redwood – when one Bluewater teacher governor was asked about whether governors felt uncomfortable dealing with education issues, he replied:

‘As opposed to [addressing] things they feel they have some knowledge of? Yes, that’s very much the case. There are very few of them who have any kind of educational background whatsoever.’

This issue of ‘no educational background’ was the other main reason that governors proffered in explaining their lack of activity on ‘primarily education-related’ issues. ‘If you don’t have an educational background, you don’t really know what you’re talking about,’ said one Redwood LEA governor, and many other interviewed governors concurred. As one Bluewater co-opted governor pointed out:

‘In secondary schools, you’re talking about [governors] who are twenty or twenty-five years – at least – away from when *they* were at school. Things have changed a lot, and education uses a language of its own, which many [of them], frankly, don’t understand.’

Because many governors felt unqualified to comment on educational decisions, they reported that they often deferred completely to school staff in relation to educational matters. ‘I think the governors are very much guided by the teachers and the senior management team,’ said one Brownstone co-opted governor. ‘The curriculum details are passed on, in a fairly general sense, to all the governors.’ The issue of how this deference to staff influences governors’ strategic planning will be addressed more fully in the next section. Yet regardless of the reason for this lack of curricular and educational involvement, this research found that few governors had the knowledge of these issues that would certainly be necessary for whole-school strategic planning. Although this knowledge need not be to the ‘expert’ level of the educational professionals, it might reasonably be expected to be of sufficiently high standards so as to allow governors to understand the implications of and reasons for financial, staffing, premises, and other decisions that bore upon curricular provision. While a small number of governors suggested that their lack of curricular and education knowledge *did* prevent them from doing their job better, this view was very much in the minority. However, one Redwood foundation governor argued that without this knowledge, governing bodies would be missing their main reason for existence:

‘The real issue you’re in place, as governors, is to oversee the management of the school and the teaching to the pupils in that school. I think *that’s* the area that’s suffering, no matter *how* you put the governing body together – because the volume [of work] doesn’t allow us to focus on that.’

#### **5.4.3 The Influence of these Findings on Strategic Planning**

As was implied by the definition of strategic planning by outlined in Chapter Four, governors believed that strategic planning was both complex and required long-term patience. However, the evidence presented in this section suggests that in practice, governing bodies often tended towards the opposite extreme, pursuing areas that a) had parallels with their everyday lives and b) provided observable ‘tangible’ outcomes in reasonably short periods of time. Fortunately, this research also provides a potential explanation for this behaviour.

First, this research suggests that governors pursued tasks that had parallels with their own lives because although the order of *magnitude* may be different, the basic *task* in many instances is often quite similar. As the comments below illustrate, governors often drew parallels from their own personal experience when deciding on which issues they were best positioned to contribute. Within this mindset, it appeared that

many governors felt that balancing a school's finances required the same general skill set as managing a large chequebook or set of business accounts, or that managing premises upkeep and repair required the same skills used when negotiating for home improvements:

'If you have a finance problem that comes up, and you ask an accountant, it's his bread and butter – he doesn't need to *prepare* for that, he just says 'this is what we need to do.' But if they're a bank manager, and you're asking about a key issue on fourth year achievement – unless they've done their homework, they struggle.' (Redwood foundation governor)

'Governors have experience in different things – [for example, those] who have financial backgrounds generally go onto the finance committee.' (Greenleaf parent governor)

'If you're involved with property, you can become much more specialist in dealing with the property portfolio of the school, and I think that helps to give people clearer directions to things they should be looking at.' (Whitefrost LEA governor)

However, few of the lay governors in this research suggested that they possessed any similar type of 'parallel' skill set in relation to curriculum or pastoral care issues. As such, it appeared from this research that this lack of transferable skills in these 'primarily education-related' areas made governors more apprehensive about engaging in them, despite the fact that without understanding of these issues, it is nearly impossible to make full and complete decisions about the operation of a school.

Second, the issues of finance, premises, and staffing are 'tangible' issues in the sense that they provide observable outcomes in a reasonably short period of time. It is easy to see the items and services purchased through the budget (or the need for those that were not), the repairs and renovations to the physical infrastructure (or the need thereof), and the addition of new staff members (or the need for more). In contrast, it is more difficult to distinguish between trends and outliers in short-term academic results, to observe additional effort put into homework, or to see the improved attention span of an SEN pupil. As such, this research suggests that many governors, faced with a situation in which they have both limited time and an understandable desire to see their contribution 'making a difference', will gravitate towards spending time on smaller issues, short-term issues, and the 'tangible' issues with which they feel most comfortable. The effect of this limitation appeared to be that governors, often unclear about the specific educational strategy of their school, preferred that

these strategic planning responsibilities be shifted to school staff. This shift is the subject of the next section.

## **5.5 THE 'STAFF DELEGATION' BARRIER**

The previous section noted that governing bodies in this study tended to defer to staff on curriculum matters. This section presents evidence that besides relying on staff for education and curricular information, much of the information governors received *in general* was filtered through the senior management team. In and of itself, this is not unusual, given the volume of material and limited time of governors. However, it appeared that many governors accepted this information uncritically, and rarely took the opportunity (either by choice or by circumstance) to form their own opinions about it. Consequently, it will be argued that governors often felt that the imbalance of expertise between staff and governors meant that strategic planning should be the remit of the head, staff, and chair, rather than that of the governing body as a whole. Furthermore, it is argued that this approach appears to conflict with the statutory role of the governing body as a strategic planning entity, and in particular with the governing body's role as an independent check upon the school administration.

### **5.5.1 Staff Influence on Governing Body Information**

Looking first at the influence of the staff on the supply of information to governors, it was clear that head teachers saw their role as providing 'good information', particularly given the time constraints that many governors faced. The Brownstone head gave the following assessment of how she perceived her information-management role, an approach that was generally shared by the head teachers who were interviewed:

'If there is something the governors have to make a decision on, I suppose I would tend to see my role as the person who needs to ensure that they have that information, that it's been adequately distilled, and that we do make a decision within the timeframe that's appropriate.'

It was equally clear, however, that governors often felt that they had to rely on the staff and chair for guidance more extensively than ideally they would prefer. A significant majority of governors, in all five case study schools, noted that while they welcomed the condensation of the issues they were being asked to decide upon, they also felt that in many cases, governors were not well-informed enough to fully understand whether the decisions they were being asked to make were the *right* ones.

As can be seen from the selection of comments below, governors were often frustrated by the fact that while in *theory* the governing body was responsible for overseeing the operation of the school, in *practice* the governing body was forced to be guided by those it was charged with overseeing:

‘If I have the time, then I’ll go through things. Otherwise, the chair of governors will say ‘this was received; here, you should read this,’ key people will say ‘this is what it means, this is what you’re expected to do,’ and I think people [just] say ‘all right, that’s fine!’ (Greenleaf teacher governor)

‘I don’t think we *are* taking it all in, to be honest with you. We are looking to the professional advisors.’ (Redwood foundation governor)

‘A head can be really gung-ho about something, but we’re there in a responsible role to oversee the life of the school. But we’re not always given enough information at the time when decisions are made.’ (Whitefrost LEA governor)

‘I suspect that most of the time, we very much bow to the head, and to the head’s reaction to documentation. We do challenge the head, but you have to be guided by the people who are taking the time to read all the documentation the way through.’ (Greenleaf Parent Governor)

It should be made clear at this point that this study is not endorsing an adversarial relationship between governors and staff in order to promote better information provision. Indeed, the implications of a situation where staff are the ‘gatekeepers’ of information are probably minimal in the short-term. Yet in the long-term (or when looking at long-term planning), governors need to take some responsibility for informing themselves on these issues by visiting the school and constructing a comparative assessment of the school. If governors do not (or cannot, given time constraints), it is unlikely that they will acquire the knowledge necessary to make independent determinations about whether staff are steering the school in the right direction. However, it appears that this is *precisely* what many governors are content to have happen, as the next section demonstrates.

### **5.5.2 Governing Body Deference to Staff on Strategic Planning Issues**

Although Chapter Four demonstrated that governors recognised that governing bodies had a role in strategic planning, this research found that many governors were reluctant to engage in strategic planning without taking their cues from the school staff. The survey data show this quite clearly, as can be seen in Table 5.4. Not only did chairs suggest that governors rarely initiated the strategic planning process, but

heads were even *more* sceptical three-fifths claimed that their governing bodies were following rather than leading, while less than ten per cent claimed that governors took the lead on this issue.

**Table 5.4: Frequency with which Governors Initiated the Strategic Planning Process**

Frequency	Chairs (%) (N=87)	Heads (%) (N=70)
Never/Rarely	43.7	60.0
Occasionally	41.4	32.9
Usually/Always	14.9	7.1

*Differences between chairs and heads were statistically significant: Mann-Whitney  $z = -2.3$ ;  $p < 0.05$ .*

The qualitative data supported the survey data, as governors at four of the five schools felt that their governing bodies gave staff wide latitude in doing strategic planning. Only at Whitefrost, where governors were previously forced to take an extremely active role in rescuing the school from special measures, did governors report that their governing body had a role in strategic planning equivalent to that of the staff. In the other schools, governors reported (for a variety of reasons) that they acted more as junior partners in the enterprise. For some, like this Greenleaf LEA governors, it came down to practical reasons of expertise and time:

‘I think it’s more difficult to discuss things like the finances and the budget, because it’s not something I’ve spent much time on, so obviously we’re presented with more or less a *fait accompli*...you can make your point, but you can’t oppose something if you haven’t got an alternative that’s clearer.’

Yet for other governors, the issue was tightly bound up with how governing bodies should ‘properly’ relate to the professional educators. As one Redwood LEA governor emphasised, ‘No one wants to be part of a hire-and-fire organisation, and we want to have sympathy for what the difficulties of the [staff] role are.’ One Bluewater governor expounded upon this staff issue, noting the delicate balance that she felt the governing body and the staff – particularly the head – needed to strike in terms of managing long-term and short-term school planning simultaneously. As she observed:

‘The long-term vision of schooling in Britain comes from the head teacher – it’s one of the head teacher’s *functions* to have a vision.... [Besides], nobody has the time to actually be *in* the school to anticipate problems, and we have tremendous respect for the management of the school – they don’t need us breathing down their necks all the time.’

Of course, this comment could also be interpreted as an eloquent abrogation of responsibility on the part of a governing body that does not *want* such responsibilities, even if they were on offer in practice. On this point, one Bluewater teacher governor provided the *staff* perspective on this issue, and pointed the finger at the governing body, arguing:

‘I think the strategic planning is very mixed. It’s the kind of governing body that wants to go there to ratify decisions that have already been made by people in the school, [since the governors] don’t like having to come up with ideas.’

It should be noted that the tenor of these comments was echoed in other case study schools as well, but that the Bluewater example above simply presents the clearest dichotomy. When taken together, the evidence in this section suggests that although lay governors may be wary about infringing upon staff prerogatives, the result is that governors may not be taking the decisive and proactive steps that their responsibilities require (and from which their schools would benefit). As one supplementary interview chair summed up the situation:

‘There is a practical paradox of governors being asked to make broad plans without the knowledge necessary to do so, since they fear that obtaining that information infringes upon the autonomy of the professional staff.’

### **5.5.3 The Influence of these Findings on Strategic Planning**

The main implication of the evidence presented in this section is that it is extremely difficult to conceive of governors being able to challenge or improve the strategic plan if they do not fully understand either their school’s curricular and co-curricular offerings or how those offerings can or should change over time. As a corporate entity, the governing body is designed to provide a level of continuity for the school, and is therefore well placed to design the school’s long-term strategy. However, if this responsibility for planning is delegated to staff with only minimal governor input, there is a risk of losing this long-term perspective. Because staff are necessarily and primarily concerned with keeping the school functioning on a daily basis, their main concern – and rightly so – is often on the short-term. By giving staff primary responsibility for the long-term strategic planning, however, there is the potential that this short-term mindset – which works well on the day-to-day level – will be applied to the strategic planning process as well.

This is not meant to imply that governing bodies do not need staff input and advice in creating the strategic plan, since such information is undeniably crucial. However, it can be argued that the job of the governors is to *complement* the staff thinking by looking far enough ahead to identify and avoid any unintended long-term consequences of short-term decisions. As such, it appears that the staff should be making their short-term decisions within a long-term framework that the governing body has devised. Furthermore, leaving strategic planning to the education professionals may mean that these plans are drawn up to best suit the education professionals – an approach that may or may not coincide with the best interests of the children. It is the governing body's responsibility to make the best decisions for the *children*, not just the staff, which provides an even stronger rationale for why governing bodies need to take more independence in the strategic planning process.

## 5.6 THE LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITIES

Before proceeding to Chapter Six and the strategic planning barriers created by central government, it is necessary to address the reasons for the relative absence of the role of the LEA in this research. As was stated in Chapter Three, the scope of this research was limited to *governors'* perceptions of strategic planning barriers. This approach was underpinned by the belief that regardless of the factual accuracy of such perceptions, it is often such perceptions that determine the extent to which policies succeed. Given this parameter, this research did not pursue the issue of potential LEA-level barriers to governing body strategic planning for one primary reason: few of the governors interviewed in this research felt that the LEA either was the source of, or held the solutions to, any major strategic planning barriers.

This section provides the evidence for the two main factors that led to this conclusion. First, evidence is presented to show that governors believed that LEAs lost a substantial portion of their power after the 1988 Education Act. Since governors argued that the main power bases were now the schools and central government, it seemed reasonable to focus this research on those two poles. Second, evidence is presented to demonstrate that the even in the one area where an LEA-level barrier to strategic planning might be expected to exist – the content and quality of governor training – governors believed that the barrier was primarily about time, rather than content. As will be shown in the next chapter, governors attributed this time barrier to unrealistic central government expectations, not to the LEA. Taken



together, it is argued that although this research in no way *precluded* the possibility of LEA-level barriers, neither did this research find significant evidence to suggest that governors felt LEA-level barriers had substantial influence on their strategic planning processes.

### **5.6.1 Decline in the Influence of the LEAs**

The first factor in omitting an extended analysis of the LEA role was the decline in LEA influence in the education hierarchy. Governors argued that the authority of LEAs had diminished substantially over the past decade, with governing bodies acquiring a significant level of new autonomy and responsibility as a result. ‘In the early days, it was very much that the head and managers were in charge – and also, the local authority had a much stronger role,’ observed one supplementary interview chair. ‘Now, the local authority role is very diminished, the head has a very strong role, still, but the governors also must play a very active part.’ This comment succinctly summarises the views of nearly every governor interviewed in this research, as the breadth of this opinion is illustrated below:

‘Since the government has seen fit to reduce the role played by the LEAs, governors have picked up that slack.’ (Greenleaf parent governor)

‘Although maybe the LEA *should* affect what the governing body does – it doesn’t anymore. Now, governors have more opportunities to set financial affairs and priorities than we did previously.’ (Supplementary interview chair)

‘There have been a lot of responsibilities devolved to governors; formerly, the LEA had staff that was being paid to do the things that governors are now doing for free.’ (Whitefrost parent governor)

‘There are fewer areas where people have to go into the LEA and the LEA’s priorities. On the other hand, there are no clear lines about how these additional functions are to be managed!’ (Blewater chair)

In fairness, governors did recognise that there were both positive and negative aspects of a diminished LEA role – as one supplementary interview chair argued, ‘We have taken on responsibilities that used to be those of the local authority, [and] we have areas that we hold total responsibility for. In some ways, I think it’s unreasonable.’ Furthermore, governors did take pains to acknowledge that LEAs still retained an important administrative and training role, since LEAs provided a set of support services (legal assistance, SEN support, advice on building maintenance,

etc.) that many schools would not be able to obtain or afford if such services had to be purchased separately from outside sources. However, governors appeared, on balance, to conclude that the overall advantages of a less powerful LEA outweighed the disadvantages, with the consequence that few of the governors interviewed felt that their LEA had any significant role to play in regards to *strategic planning* issues. Although most interviewees were respectful of the new LEA role, it was also clear that these governors welcomed the autonomy that devolution had provided:

‘The local authority still plays a key part, but they market their services, [so] you can choose to go it alone. They have a right to inspect, and they still have an involvement in certain staff issues like discipline and redundancy. There are obviously certain areas where they *must* be involved, but *you* are running the school.’ (Redwood foundation governor)

‘It was initially ‘[the governing body] versus the LEA.... Now, [the arrangement is] much more flexible – we can say ‘these things are available, we can decide whether we want to do them or not, and on what terms we want to do them.’ (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

‘If something is a problem, it can be fixed within a week, because it’s *our* responsibility, the bursar gets onto it, and the situation is resolved. Whereas when [these responsibilities] were with the LEA you’d fill out a form, and by the time they’d recognise there’s a problem it would take weeks.’ (Brownstone co-opted governor)

As is illustrated by the comments above, governors simply appeared to believe that the LEA had become a less relevant factor in governing body decision-making than it once had been. Furthermore, governors not only believed that governing bodies had become *more* influential in the decision-making process, but (as will be shown in Chapter Six) that central government had become more influential as well. Together, this evidence provided the rationale for focusing this research on the two places where governors believed that the influential decisions were made – the governing bodies and the central government.

### **5.6.2 LEAs and Governor Training**

The second factor in omitting an extended analysis of the LEA role concerns the issue of governor training. Training is one of the main interactions between governing bodies and LEAs, and should – in theory – have the potential to influence the strategic planning ability of governors. It therefore seemed logical that if there *were* LEA-level barriers to strategic planning, examining the issues surrounding governor training would be a valuable starting point. Yet upon further investigation,

this research revealed that the content of the training did not create nearly as significant a barrier as did the fact that governors did not have the *time* to attend.

If only the issue of the quality and content of governor training were examined, it might seem that a potential strategic planning barrier was indeed present. It was clear from this research that governors felt the quality of training varied greatly, as can be seen from the range of optimism to pessimism in just these four responses:

‘It would be wonderful if governing bodies had more training, and if we looked at the *quality* of that training. In [the borough] it’s pretty good, but I’m not sure it always is elsewhere.’ (Bluewater LEA governor)

‘The LEA provides training for governors to learn different aspects of their responsibility, so [governors] are supported. But still, having done all that, it’s still a big challenge, because education...is more complicated now than it was even five or ten years ago.’ (Whitefrost LEA governor)

‘Trying to get a clear-thinking strategy into a school, or into an LEA, is almost impossible, because it isn’t any of their *training*, as far as I can see – compared to what we do in industry.’ (Redwood chair)

‘Government should do something about training for the governors – there should be a set budget for training.... They should see that ‘this is required of the governors, they’re required to oversee the budget, they’re required to formulate policies for this school, let’s give them the support as well.’ They’re not doing that.’ (Brownstone chair)

However, it soon emerged that improved governor training would likely have only a minimal impact, as there was no evidence that governors were any more likely to attend *improved* courses than they were to attend the *existing* ones. As the comments below reveal, the most common reason in each of the five case study schools for why governors in this research did not attend governor training was because they felt that neither they nor their colleagues had sufficient time to do so:

‘Although [the borough] is very good at providing training services for governors, half the governors probably don’t have the interest in getting the training, and half the governors who may have the interest are working flat-out, because they’re like me, who’s on the board of seven British companies – we just don’t have the time to get there!’ (Bluewater co-opted governor)

‘Often in a school, you’ll have one or two governors who perhaps have the time or commitment to really work well, go to the governors’ training, maybe give training themselves, work closely with the head, they have a head that involves them with things, and they really know what’s what. I *don’t* think that’s the case at the school I’m at.’ (Redwood LEA governor)

‘I think training for governors is a helpful thing. But that’s not to say it’s easy – I think being a governor of a school is quite hard work, and in a sense it’s not too difficult for me because [of my job]. But for some people, with their own lives, families, jobs, and so on, it can be quite a tough assignment.’ (Greenleaf co-opted governor)

‘There’s not very much emphasis laid on training upon appointment, so people who are appointed to the governing body aren’t pressed into it.... They run training courses about once a term, [but] very few people take advantage of them.’ (Brownstone LEA governor)

As such, while governors acknowledged that the quality of governor training – although already generally good – could be improved, this research demonstrated that the primary barrier in relation to governor training was not its *quality*, but the lack of *time* governors had to attend such sessions. As will be argued in the next chapter, the time expectations placed upon governors *did* create a significant strategic planning barrier. However, it is also argued that governors attributed this lack of time to unrealistic central government expectations, not any factor at the LEA level. Clearly, efforts to improve LEA governor training would be extremely valuable to those who attend, but the main barriers to improving strategic planning through training lie with institutions who do not mandate such training, and a central government that fails to provide governors with the time necessary to do so.

Given the two strands of evidence presented in this section, it therefore seemed reasonable to conclude that there was little evidence to suggest that governors felt LEA-level barriers had substantial influence on their strategic planning processes. Rather, governors seemed to report that their governing bodies had relationships with the LEA that, while important, were largely administrative and transactional. As such, it was deemed acceptable to restrict this research to the strategic planning barriers created at the institutional and central governmental levels.

## 5.7 CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSION

This chapter was the first of two in which evidence was presented to support the assertion, made in Chapter Four, that many inner London secondary school governing bodies have difficulty engaging in strategic planning. This chapter first proposed and outlined the theoretical concept of ‘barriers’ to strategic planning, and then presented the survey evidence regarding the hindrances to strategic planning faced by inner London secondary school governing bodies. From this data, and from

the qualitative interview data, this chapter identified four main institutional-level barriers that, it was argued, prevent governing bodies from pursuing strategic planning more effectively. These barriers were the existence of a 'monitoring culture' amongst governing bodies, the varying level of involvement of various types and sub-groups of governors, the tendency of governors to gravitate towards what were termed 'tangible' issues, and the frequent deference of governing bodies to staff on issues of strategic planning.

While some of the *issues* that form these barriers have been pointed out individually in previous governance literature, (the existence of 'passenger' governors (see Deem and Brehony 1993; Earley 1994a; Sallis 2001), the tendency of governors to focus on finance and not on curriculum (see Baginsky 1991; Earley and Creese 1998), and the information gap between governors and staff (see Shearn et al. 1995)) this research presents these issues in a new and different context, as components of a set of institutional-level barriers to strategic planning. Furthermore, this is the first study to outline and explore the issue of governing bodies engaging in monitoring to the *exclusion* of tasks like strategic planning. By proposing the concept of barriers, this research provides a new perspective for interpreting the institutional-level factors that impede governing bodies that might be seeking to fulfil their strategic planning responsibilities.

Yet both the qualitative and quantitative data collected for this study suggest that these institutional-level issues are only *part* of the reason for why governing bodies have difficulties with strategic planning. Despite having identified these more general institutional-level problems (to which the final chapter of this thesis will propose some institutional-level solutions), it is inevitably true that each school's own approach towards strategic planning is dictated to some extent by its own unique circumstances. While it was demonstrated herein that the role and influence of the LEA in relation to governing body strategic planning was frequently quite minimal, the survey data presented in this chapter also illustrated that the most *common* hindrances to long-term strategic planning came from problems created by central government actions. As one Bluewater parent governor pointed out, the problems could not be traced solely to the institutional level, nor could they all be solved there:

'The governors at [the school] are very reactive – they're trying to become proactive, but they're not fast enough or aggressive enough, combined with a

certain level of apathy and resignation about how much can be done at the school level.'

In seeking a solution to the strategic planning conundrum that will help as many schools as is possible, it is logical to attempt to determine how these problems might be resolved at the policy level that *affects* all those schools more or less equally. In the education sphere, that level is central government. Although the issue of central government has been *implicitly* present in the data presentation to this point, it was clear from the literature and the research that central government initiatives and regulations have begun to both describe and prescribe governors' ability to do what is being asked of them. To fully understand the ability of governors to perform the strategic planning responsibilities that are being asked of them, the central government's role must be examined more closely. This, therefore, is the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CENTRAL GOVERNMENTAL-LEVEL STRATEGIC PLANNING BARRIERS

#### 6.0 INTRODUCTION

Complementing Chapter Five, this chapter presents further research evidence in the attempt to answer the third main research question:

If the lack of strategic planning implied by the existing literature is actually evident in the governing bodies of inner London state secondary schools, why is this the case?

While Chapter Five addressed the strategic planning barriers that stem from the institutional level, this chapter identifies and examines the six main strategic planning barriers that stem from the level of central government. Section 6.1 addresses the barrier created by time pressures and the associated expectations of governors as volunteers. Section 6.2 addresses the barrier created by central government paperwork. Section 6.3 addresses the strategic planning barrier created by central government legislation. Section 6.4 addresses the barrier created by the current financing system. Section 6.5 addresses the barrier created by the lack of communication between central government and governing bodies on strategic planning. Section 6.6 addresses the barrier created by the lack of trust between central government and governing bodies. Section 6.7 summarises the research evidence, and concludes by examining these research findings in the context of the existing literature.

#### 6.1 THE 'TIME CONSTRAINTS AND VOLUNTEER EXPECTATIONS' BARRIER

'I do wonder what other governors get out of it. I mean, who in their right mind would volunteer to give up so much time?' (Bluewater teacher governor)

This research found substantial evidence that governors felt overworked and undervalued by a central government that expected governors and governing bodies to do too much, given the time governors were willing to expend. Section 6.1.1 will present evidence that the vast majority of governors *did* wish to be responsible and perform effectively, but that they felt the reality of the current time constraints meant that doing so was often difficult, if not impossible. Section 6.1.2 will present evidence of governors' frustration with what they perceived as central government's lack of appreciation regarding the amount of time that governors volunteer to their

schools. It will be argued that governors felt central government either failed to recognise this contribution or intentionally ignored its implications.

Third, evidence will be presented regarding the implications that these findings have for strategic planning. Section 6.1.3 will provide evidence to show that governors felt that their responsibilities have increased in recent years *without* a commensurate increase in the commitment and support governors require in order to fulfil those responsibilities, leaving them less time for strategic planning. Then, Section 6.1.4 will provide evidence of what the increased demands upon governors mean for future recruitment and retention of governors. This section concludes by pointing to how central government's excessive expectations of volunteers can adversely impact the government's goal of having governing bodies engage in strategic planning.

#### **6.1.1 Governor Responsibility and Time Constraints**

The context of the evidence below must be made clear at the outset: throughout this research, it was apparent that from their demeanour most governors *wanted to do a good job*. As one Whitefrost governor noted, 'at the end of the day, it's legally the governors' fault if something *goes wrong*.' Many governors felt increasingly torn between meeting their statutory and legal responsibilities, yet having had the practical experience that they often could not *meet* all these requirements. This dilemma was also evident in the survey data, which found that, when asked whether central government expects governing bodies to do too little or too much, 66.7 per cent of chairs (N=80) and 91.4 per cent of heads (N=74) responded '*too much*'. The statistical significance of this result (Mann-Whitney  $z = -2.0$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) indicates that although both chairs and heads were concerned about workload, heads were substantially *more* concerned that governors would not be able to cope with any additional responsibilities. The following excerpts demonstrate not only governors' concern about this combination of statutory duties and practical realities, but their concern that governing bodies will be blamed for inadequacies that they themselves could not prevent:

'It's a lot of responsibility. There are so many [training] courses put up there, and there are too many meetings you have to go to. Then you sign on the dotted line – any decision-maker has a lot of responsibility.... And government – either they have left it for schools to sort out on their own governing bodies, or they have a lot of expectations. (Greenleaf teacher governor)



‘[Governors] have got to understand that as part of the community, they are also responsible *to* the community for what actions we take.... But the hours of work that go *into* something like that are such that a lot of governors find that the work is becoming too demanding. (Redwood head teacher)

‘We are responsible for preparing and monitoring the budget, and in other schools, governors do sit in and look at budget drafts and are involved with making budget decisions. But sometimes, you say ‘*prepare*’. From what *stage* do you prepare? Are we expected to start from scratch? (Greenleaf parent governor)

Furthermore, it was clear from the research evidence that the type of people who choose to *become* governors are often fairly conscientious individuals, and that as such, they are genuinely bothered by this discrepancy between expectations and reality. As one supplementary chair interviewee said, ‘I feel perpetually guilty – I have a very demanding, very busy, and very all-consuming job. In terms of the *time* – there isn’t enough.’ Yet in the end, many governors said that in order to prevent paralysis at the point of delivery, they simply ignored government policies when necessary:

‘I would have said that [paperwork was a problem] about two or three years ago, when you had piles of documents coming – now we just ignore them, and get on with our business. You can’t help it!’ (Supplementary interview chair)

‘An awful lot of the time the governors just ignore the legislation – it only comes into being at their governing body two or three years after it should have done.’ (Redwood LEA governor)

Clearly, this is *a priori* not the kind of situation that central government desires, nor does it appear that the perpetuation of this situation would assist governors in reaching the stage where they could begin engaging in strategic planning. In short, while most governors wished to comply with the regulations and requirements to the greatest extent possible, they frequently found that they did not have the time available to meet these demands. Indeed, when asked what *percentage* of its time their governing body spent on long-term strategic planning, 60.3 per cent of chairs (N=83) and 62.3 per cent of heads (N=69) reported spending only *30 per cent or less*, while nearly four-fifths (77.2 per cent of chairs and 79.7 per cent of heads) reported spending *40 per cent or less*.

### **6.1.2 Governing Bodies as ‘Free Labour’**

The research evidence further illustrated that governors were not concerned solely about the time constraints, but also about the manner in which they perceived these

concerns were being addressed by central government. Governors complained that not only did central government fail to acknowledge this situation, but that central government continued to actively exacerbate the gap between the demands being made upon governing bodies and governing body capacity. As such, this research found that governors were overwhelmingly resentful of a central government that, they believed, perceived governors as an unlimited source of free labour. This issue provided one of the most unanimous displays of agreement amongst governors in the entire study; in every case study school, this complaint was raised repeatedly and forcefully by every category of governors:

‘The time and knowledge needed for governors has changed out of all proportion! Central government has taken this reserve of goodwill to the breaking point, since it’s effectively a pool of free labour that central government doesn’t have to pay for.’ (Bluewater LEA governor)

‘I don’t think that the government should be putting more and more on the governor’s role without necessarily fully remembering that it’s a *voluntary evening activity*.’ (Brownstone head teacher)

‘Essentially, central government is getting free professional assistance, and I don’t think they’ve ever stopped to think about what this assistance would cost if these individuals charged for their time instead of volunteering.’ (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

‘[Government is] getting a free service and yet the government makes out that ‘we’re doing [them] a *favour* by being there!’ I think it is an angel from heaven if it’s someone offering that much time – certainly from business co-opted governors.’ (Brownstone teacher governor)

Although the complaint about being asked to ‘do too much with too little’ is not new, the research evidence suggested that this problem has an important influence on strategic planning. On the quantitative side, the survey found that 56.5 per cent of chairs (N=85) and 63.2 per cent of heads (N=68) felt that the ‘volunteer status’ of governors hindered strategic planning. The qualitative research provides further insight into this finding, with two main consequences of the impact of time and voluntarism on strategic planning emerging from this evidence. First, governors felt that this approach by government ignored the fact that there had been an increase in governor responsibility without an increase in governor support. Second, governors felt that the increased time pressure created by central government meant that retention of governors would suffer, as would recruitment of new governors to replace those lost. The strategic planning consequences of each of these two issues are now explored in turn.

### 6.1.3 Strategic Planning and Increasing Governing Body Responsibilities

As was mentioned above, the first of these two time-related consequences is that governors believe they are being asked to undertake more complex responsibilities without the resources and tools necessary to do so successfully. Governors in *every* case study school felt their job had become much more complex in recent years, yet that there had been no concomitant recognition of this fact by central government. This complaint was expressed both philosophically and practically. In framing the former, one governor argued that although central government was asking too much of school governors, ‘I don’t think they *realise* they do. I think a lot of this is unspoken. In a sense, we’re acting out, or working out, what [central government’s proposals] mean.’ In articulating the latter, a Redwood governor point out, frankly, that ‘If you’re like me, with a busy job, long commuting time, not a lot of spare hours, you’re only going to *get* a certain level of commitment!’ Yet governors were broadly in agreement about the end result: that government was increasing its mandates for governors without increasing support for implementation. The following excerpts reveal some of the many examples of this sentiment:

‘I think the government is asking too much, and *I don’t think the government understands what it is asking for*. And I think a large school, with a difficult and challenging intake, takes up *geometrically* more time than a small nursery school with fifty kids.... The complexities get greater.’ (Bluewater co-opted governor)

‘The larger issue is that there have been a lot of responsibilities devolved to governors, and formerly, the LEA had staff that they were *paying* to do the things that governors are now doing for free. A huge amount of money must have been saved – so where did it go?’ (Whitefrost parent governor)

[Government is] in danger of killing the whole process. Far too much to do.... They are too demanding by a million miles – and we’re not paid employees. They’re trying to get us to do beyond the remit that I think should be – making us an independent check as part of the process – and I don’t think that [going beyond that remit] is feasible. (Redwood chair)

This animosity was so unanimous amongst governors that central government’s only support on this point came in the form of ‘damning with faint praise’. One Bluewater governor suggested that governors actually were *not* being asked to do more than was needed, ‘because I think that what’s expected of us *is* what it takes to actually govern the school.’ She immediately added, however, that this was probably of little consolation to her fellow governors on the ground. ‘I do think there’s a sense in which it’s much more taxing than people let on,’ she confided.

#### 6.1.4 Strategic Planning and Governor Retention and Recruitment Concerns

The second of these two time-related consequences for strategic planning is that many governors believed that the increasing governors' workload would simultaneously accelerate governor turnover *and* discourage the recruitment of replacement governors. Governors argued strongly that central government bore substantial responsibility for creating an environment in which recruitment and retention of governors (at least in certain urban areas) was becoming more difficult. There were two main opinions amongst respondents as to why they felt this situation had come to pass. On one hand, some governors felt that the problem had been created through a lack of coherence and direction on the part of a well-meaning but uninformed central government:

‘Obviously central government has to operate on the basis that there will be a governing body for every school, [but] it makes no judgements as to whether or not there's a pool of people out there who *want* to be governors.’ (Whitefrost LEA governor)

‘I'm not sure *what* government expects from governors. Our governing body tends to have the expertise necessary, but there's often a difficulty in getting new governors at many schools in the borough.’ (Supplementary interview chair)

On the other hand, some governors felt that central government was simply arrogant in its attitude towards governing bodies. These governors suggested that far from attempting to accommodate governor concerns, central government was overestimating the capacity threshold of governing bodies while underestimating the antagonism created by such actions. In effect, these governors believed that the simple *symbolism* of government ‘ignoring the needs of governing bodies’ was an additional disincentive towards both encouraging the involvement of new governors and perpetuating the involvement of existing ones:

‘I think we've probably crossed the line already where we've got into areas where we're trying to do things that are beyond our scope. And government is continuing to make claims on behalf of governing bodies that they won't be able to fulfil – and which they will increasingly *fail* to fulfil, because increasingly they will be loathe to continue their terms of office. (Brownstone LEA governor)

‘I gave up executive work when I was sixty – so I've been able to sort of fit it in. But there's no way that [one of the other co-opted governors] is going to fit that in. There's no way working mothers are going to fit that in – so I

think the time expectation *is* unrealistic if you're going to do what you *should* do.' (Bluewater co-opted governor)

This dearth of governmental understanding about the recruitment and retention issue is a problem in its own right. However, the more important issue for this thesis is the link between the adverse effect of central government policy on governor recruitment and retention, and the impact that recruitment and retention problems have on strategic planning. As was noted in earlier in Section 5.4.1, the survey found that 60.5 per cent of chairs (N=86) and 69.6 per cent of heads (N=69) felt that difficulty in *recruiting* governors hindered strategic planning, while a substantial minority of chairs (46.5 per cent, N=86) and a majority of heads (58.0 per cent, N=69) felt that difficulty in *retaining* governors hindered strategic planning.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, as was argued in Chapter Four, long-term planning requires a measure of stability in the governing body itself, in order to set frameworks and pursue long-term objectives. The evidence presented above demonstrates that governors were troubled by the practical implications of central government's approach (or lack thereof) to concerns about recruitment and retention. As such, it seems valid to posit that the government's current position and policies may lead to both fewer qualified governors and less capacity within governing bodies to engage in long-term thinking. The Redwood head teacher captured the essence of this apparent conflict between strategic planning and government policy, arguing that he had, unfortunately, experienced this problem first-hand. 'The governors have got a key strategic role to play, and the government has just tried to use them as agents for [itself],' he said. 'As a result, we've lost governors.'

## 6.2 THE PAPERWORK BARRIER

This research next found that the effects of two additional and related barriers – those of paperwork and legislation – often compounded the time barrier. As is evident from Table 6.1 (extracted from Table 5.1), the categories that ranked as the top four greatest hindrances to strategic planning – out of 24 options – were all categories that dealt with how both government paperwork and government legislation or directives impacted upon adversely upon governors' time.

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<sup>1</sup> Neither difference between chairs and heads was statistically significant.

**Table 6.1: Hindrances Related to Paperwork and/or Legislation**  
*Percentage of chairs and heads reporting the given issue as a hindrance.*

Issue	Chairs (%)	Heads (%)	Chairs (N)	Heads (N)
Amount of time required to address statutory responsibilities	90.4	95.7	83	69
Amount of time required to formulate and review statutory policies	89.2	92.6	83	68
The amount of paperwork	91.8	92.6	85	68
The amount of legislation and regulation	87.1	92.5	85	67

*Differences between chairs and heads were not statistically significant.*

From the qualitative data, it became clear that complaints regarding paperwork and legislation were often complementary. This was not surprising, since in the context of governors' responsibilities, 'paperwork' provides the delivery vehicle while 'legislation and regulation' provide the content. Yet the evidence from the case studies strongly suggested that governors were not uniformly critical of *all* paperwork or *all* legislation. Instead, it appeared that the barriers of paperwork and legislation were caused by more targeted problems. The following two main sections present the evidence for these concerns about paperwork and legislation, and examine their implications for strategic planning. For clarity of presentation, the paperwork barrier is discussed in this section (6.2), while the legislation barrier is discussed in Section 6.3.

### 6.2.1 Paperwork and Volume

As is illustrated by the survey data in Table 6.1, 'amount of paperwork' was the highest-rated strategic planning hindrance for chairs, and the second highest-rated such hindrance for heads. It will be argued that governors' two main concerns about paperwork were a) the volume of paperwork they received (to be discussed in this section), and b) the format of the paperwork itself (to be discussed in Section 6.2.2). The combined adverse influence of these two issues on governors' information assimilation is then discussed in Section 6.2.3.

First, governors from each case study complained overwhelmingly about the sheer volume of material that they received as part of their duties. One Whitefrost governor neatly summarised both the sentiment and solution of most governors in this study: 'At the moment, you have a ton of paperwork – and I'm not going to read most of it, I chuck it in the bin.' It was clear that governors felt central government was inundating governors with paperwork, without having assessed whether the

paperwork was either a) necessary or b) capable of being completed by volunteers who had limited time available. The frustration with this excess *volume* of material – regardless of its format or content – was made most vividly by those respondents who illustrated their burden through exasperated gesticulation:

‘Governors are capable, but the amount [of paperwork] they’re given is ludicrous. There’s a photograph of me with six month’s of paperwork I’d received, and it’s about this high [*indicates about five feet*].’ (Redwood chair)

‘I’ve been a governor for 18 months, and I’ve probably got a pile of paperwork this big [*indicates about three feet*] – and most of it is not worth reading. Totally ineffective.’ (Whitefrost staff governor)

‘This is the [amount of] literature just from the meeting last night [*indicates about ten inches*].... Last year we had a doctor we co-opted into the governing body. After two meetings, when he saw the pile of documents and papers that were arriving, he said ‘enough is enough, I don’t want to be a governor.’’ (Brownstone parent governor)

Physical indications aside, almost *every* governor in this research voiced a similar complaint about the quantity of material received. ‘The amount of paper that flies around is incredible, it’s ridiculous,’ said the Whitefrost chair, reflecting the thoughts of many. ‘You should only have a small amount; otherwise it becomes meaningless, and you just drown in it.’ So if there really is a problem with the volume of paperwork, why did not more governors simply ignore it or throw it out? As noted above, some did. But there seemed to be two reasons why many of them did not. First, it appeared that more experienced governors found it easier to distinguish between important and unimportant material. Yet if there is frequent governor turnover, individual governors may not be in post long enough to learn how to engage efficiently in this sorting process. The following comments point to this concern, particularly regarding the relevance of many documents to the needs of individual schools:

‘I’m not retired. I travel *thirty-five* miles from where I work to get to a meeting at six o’clock at [the school]. And then I’m faced when I get in the room with all these papers I haven’t got time to read! So we’ve gone from the point of not getting anything to the point of getting a lot – but is the ‘lot’ you get the *right stuff*? I think that’s an issue.’ (Redwood LEA governor)

‘If you get too much paper, you don’t read *any* of it! And so much of it is not relevant to most governors. It would be valuable to have a central log of all the paperwork for reference, but most individual governors would prefer to have a summary of what they truly need instead.’ (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

Second, as was noted in Section 6.1.1, this research suggested that governors appeared to be generally responsible people. As such, governors often felt that they had a *responsibility* to read all the paperwork, a point illustrated by a Whitefrost parent governor. ‘Governors get too much stuff, and I get very angry about that,’ he said. ‘But you know that you *have* to read all the papers – it’s your duty, your *obligation*.’ This research suggested that even though governors may think a lot of the material they receive is not very useful, they also did not want to ignore the *wrong material*. Given this level of concern, it is perhaps unsurprising that when asked whether the desire to avoid increasing governors’ workload hindered strategic planning by their governing bodies, 69.8 per cent of chairs and 89.7 per cent of heads agreed (chi-squared = 9.0;  $p < 0.05$ ). The statistical significance of this result suggests that while heads were much more pessimistic than chairs regarding the workload that governing bodies could reasonably undertake, the difference was more in terms of scale than perspective. One Redwood governor offered this simple plea to central government: ‘What you can’t do is load it all on governors and expect them to read it – [that] doesn’t work!’

### 6.2.2 Paperwork and Format

Although governors felt that a reduction in volume *alone* would give them more time to consider strategic planning issues, this research found that the problems associated with governors’ paperwork extended to quality as well as to quantity. Governors frequently complained about how the *format* of the paperwork they receive – in both its style and its structure – created additional problems. First, governors reported that the linguistic style in which many of the documents were written often led to confusion, exclusion, and exasperation amongst governors who were unfamiliar with government terminology and ‘jargon’:

‘There is information overload, most of it is complete nonsense, [and] it’s not written well.... The stuff is all written in committee language; it’s all in local government and central government terminology, which – unless you’re familiar with it – is *completely* over everyone’s head.’ (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

‘That’s the problem with it – it’s not in layman’s terms. So consequently, a lot of governors skim-read it, read part of it, don’t really understand it, and just wait for the next meeting of the governing body for someone who *has* read it and *does* understand it to encapsulate, in a brief report, what you need to do with that information. So it effectively comes down to a few people who can digest, understand and assimilate information, and then regurgitate it



back to us at governing body so we can understand it. And that is a *major* problem.’ (Redwood parent governor)

‘The correspondence that we get, the paperwork that we get, [it is] not all the time ‘user-friendly.’ When we say that the governors come from ‘different walks of life’, the government should appreciate that governors *really* come from different walks of life! [A governor] may be a street trader, and a street trader can have a lot of things to contribute to these schools...[yet] if [government officials] expect that we will read all the jargon, they are living in a different world.’ (Brownstone chair)

Second, governors felt that the lack of structure – and particularly the lack of clear prioritisation – in central government documents often made it difficult for governors to determine what central government was actually asking them to do. A number of governors felt that they had successfully negotiated the linguistic barrier of civil service jargon (as discussed above) only to become stymied by the general lack of prioritisation in the paperwork they received. In one instance, the Whitefrost chair illustrated this problem by pointing to a DfEE document he had pulled from his briefcase, inquiring:

‘So [this is categorised as] ‘Strongly Recommended’ – it would be nice to know, *what does that mean?* Does that mean strongly recommended that you *do* something about it, or that you *read* it, or...?’

Levelling a similar charge from a slightly different angle was a Redwood parent governor, who complained:

‘In some cases [the paperwork] is ‘information-only’. [But then] you find that, in one *small* paragraph in a very *large* document, there’s something you actually need to do, that’s a legal *requirement* – and I wish they’d actually put it in bold type and put it in front, rather than on page ninety-four, as is their wont.’

As these comments illustrate, the favoured linguistic and structural approaches of civil service policy drafters are often completely at odds with the needs of those for whom the policies are being written. As a consequence, a substantial number of governors felt that these twin problems of language and structure not only often left them with a sense of central government having wasted their (limited) time, but often served to exclude the very types governors – parents and minorities – that central government had been making a concerted effort to recruit.

### 6.2.3 Paperwork and Problems of Information Assimilation

The third and final component of the paperwork barrier is the problem of information assimilation. Almost all case study governors felt that due to time constraints, they (personally) were often unable to assimilate the information they received in order to make informed decisions about it. When asked if governors had enough time to do so, one Redwood governor noted wryly, ‘Not governors who work for a living.’ Other governors concurred, arguing that it was time, not intellectual ability, which prevented governors from assimilating the information they received:

‘I think it’s chicken-and-egg – I think we probably *need* the amount of information we’re getting, in *order* to make good decisions. The problem is, does any human being have the amount of time to actually use that [information]? The issue then is, how is that information managed for the use of the governors?’ (Supplementary interview chair)

‘[Governors] assimilate it if they get it in enough time. Most of our governors are very good at reading stuff if they have the time. They’re an intelligent enough body to assimilate it.’ (Bluewater teacher governor)

‘The only person who [has the time to assimilate the material] is the person who says ‘really, I’ve got nothing to do, and reading these papers is taking two hours’ – that’s the retired, special type of person, and then he goes into it in some detail.’ (Redwood foundation governor)

‘It is too much. The way I work – and I don’t know how other governors work – [means] the most I can do is skim read. There’s no way I can get through most of that – I just don’t have the time. *Certainly* not as a teacher.’ (Brownstone teacher governor)

How does this assimilation problem impact strategic planning? One implication is found in the survey data, as Table 6.1 shows that 89.2 per cent of chairs and 92.6 per cent of heads felt that the ‘amount of time required to formulate and review statutory policies’ hindered their ability to do strategic planning. Together, the evidence presented above suggests that when governors *already* do not have the time to assimilate the information they receive, for central government to expect that governing bodies will *also* engage in strategic planning appears to be somewhat unrealistic. It appeared from this research that governors devoted much of their limited time towards constructing the statutory framework in which they operated, leaving less time to engage in activities like strategic planning.

### 6.3 THE 'LEGISLATION AND STATUTORY RESPONSIBILITIES' BARRIER

The previous section demonstrated that governors were adversely affected by the volume and format of the paperwork that they receive. However, governors also displayed a concern over volume and *content*, which is grounded in their apprehension about government legislation and regulations. Legislation is the foundation of the policies that *comprise* the volumes of paperwork, and it will be argued that central government's approach towards education legislation and regulation creates two distinct problems for any attempts by governing bodies to engage in strategic planning. The first problem concerns the frequency and complexity of legislative initiatives, a factor that governors felt contributed to increased governor workload while reducing opportunities for strategic planning. The second problem concerns the intended time frame of legislation, as governors felt that central government was demanding 'quick results' from its legislative programme, an approach that governors often felt was contradictory to taking a longer-term view of their schools. Both factors these are now discussed in turn.

#### 6.3.1 The Frequency and Complexity of Initiatives

This research found that governors felt overwhelmed by the number of new education initiatives from central government, the overall lack of apparent cohesion between them, and the time it took governors simply to comprehend what these initiatives meant, both in terms of their own statutory responsibilities and in what needed to be done to secure the benefits of these initiatives for their schools. Interviewees felt that not only did the plethora of government initiatives often failed to provide the desired results, but that the frequency and complexity of these initiatives meant that fully understanding them was often beyond the capacity of volunteer governors. As can be seen below, governors' frustration about 'initiative overload' was both strong and frequent:

'To get people in and involved takes a *much* more radical view, and my problem with the incrementalist view is that schools are in *initiative overload* – and what you actually need is a *big* initiative, rather than a load of small ones.' (Bluewater co-opted governor)

'Although the initiatives sound good on paper, and I would never say 'no, I'm not going to go for this,' in terms of the workload for the teacher, it's getting too much. It's getting unbearable.' (Brownstone teacher governor)

'There are a lot of [initiatives] that are coming in that are affecting how you manage the staff, and which affect the professional side. And they're also

giving certain rights to parents – and [these changes] are coming at you *one after the other*.’ (Redwood foundation governor)

‘There are so many new initiatives – gifted and talented, mini-EAZ – there are *so* many things. I think there was too much in too little time. I think that to [expect you to] give your thoughts and time effectively to each of those issues is not fair.’ (Greenleaf teacher governor)

Governors consistently argued that the frequency and complexity of legislative initiatives was leading to scepticism amongst governors about a) central government’s insistence on using initiatives as a way to increase institutional-level accountability, and b) central government’s overall education reform strategy. First, governors argued that if the aim of central government was to increase institutional-level accountability through a larger number of smaller, targeted, initiatives, this strategy was failing to produce the desired results at the institutional level – usually because more programmes meant more time spent on applying for bids and monitoring progress:

‘Every time you have a new initiative you have different ways of evaluating that initiative. So you’ve got more forms to fill in, each individual student needs to be evaluated, and *that’s* where the red tape happens and *that’s* where the accountability gets a bit overwhelming.’ (Brownstone teacher governor)

‘There’s [so much] *energy* that you have to expend – the governing body not so much, but certainly the paid staff – doing what I call the ‘tap dance for government’.’ (Redwood head teacher)

More troubling, however, was the finding that several governors felt that the multitude of initiatives indicated that central government *had* no clear overall strategy for education reform, but was instead desperately ‘casting about’ for potential legislative solutions. As some argued, governors were being forced to deal with the consequences of central government’s indecisiveness: ‘I just don’t see a *strategy* [from central government] – I see a whole bunch of *initiatives*,’ complained the Redwood chair. ‘So there’s a false urgency put on things, because the strategy is not clear.’ To others, central government’s apparent strategy of ‘governing through initiatives’ suggested that central government was trying to have it both ways: seeking to retain central *control*, while foisting the burden of *accountability* onto local governing bodies. This is a theme that will be returned to in Section 6.6.

### 6.3.2 Strategic Planning Consequences of this Frequency and Complexity

The adverse impact of the frequency and complexity of legislation on governing body strategic planning can be summed up as follows. In quantitative terms, the survey results (Table 6.2, extracted from Table 5.1) indicated that approximately *nine out of ten* chairs and heads felt that both the amount of legislation and the time required to address statutory responsibilities hindered their governing bodies in doing strategic planning.

**Table 6.2: Hindrances Created by Legislation and Statutory Responsibilities**  
*Percentage of chairs and heads reporting the given issue as a hindrance.*

Issue	Chairs (%)	Heads (%)	Chairs (N)	Heads (N)
Amount of time required to address statutory responsibilities	90.4	95.7	83	69
The amount of legislation and regulation	87.1	92.5	85	67

*Differences between chairs and heads were not statistically significant.*

In qualitative terms, this Bluewater LEA governor expressed these difficulties succinctly, arguing that ‘[Recent government initiatives] are designed to hinder any long-term planning. They are a *fundamental constraint* to any serious long-term planning.’ Similarly, interviewees throughout the case studies felt that the time required to understand and implement new initiatives was usually spent on administrative, rather than strategic, objectives. Dealing with what one governor termed the increase in ‘straight business’ created by new legislation was seen to be taking up more – and in some cases, all – of governing bodies’ time:

‘The main governing body still [has] to deal with ‘straight business’; you’ve got to *do* it, because it’s required by either the LEA or the government. Some of that stuff is operational, really – not strategic or policy making.’ (Supplementary interview chair)

‘A lot of it is what I would call ‘medium term framework setting.’ We have to have equal opportunities policies, we have to have pay policies...there’s a lot of work involving the governors in that, [and often] this in my view is not strategic....’ (Bluewater co-opted governor)

‘You should have time to deal with...thinking about where the school is going in the future, what are the major issues. But we don’t get a lot of time to do that. And if we [do] spend an hour debating that, everything else is being left.’ (Redwood foundation governor)

Given this evidence, it appeared that the opportunities for governors to engage in strategic planning were often circumscribed by frequent government initiatives that governors felt were often uncoordinated and time-consuming.

### 6.3.3 Short-Term Timetables and Priorities

The second major problem created by the legislative programme of central government was the difference in time frames of expected results. First, governors argued that the targets for short-term ‘results’ being set by central government were incompatible with asking governors to do strategic planning over a longer time period. Second, governors argued that the deadlines set by legislation and regulations often forced governing bodies to make trade-offs in favour of meeting a short-term target rather than planning for a long-term benefit. Third, governors argued that they felt this short-term prioritisation was indicative of a government that was using its legislative programme to seek political successes rather than offer substantive educational improvement. Each of these points is examined below.

First, almost every interviewee felt that central government legislation and regulation encouraged the pursuit of short-term results over long-term gains. Governors suggested that when an initiative did not produce the expected advantages quickly, government was prone to abruptly abandon it and propose new ones. As many governors pointed out, this short-term approach meant that governing bodies had less of an opportunity to determine how well individual policies were working:

‘They’re doing all these soaring initiatives and ideas – it’s ludicrous. You’re working on a *minimum* five-year time scale, but they’re trying to come out with an initiative *every year*. You’ve got *no* chance to see what the outcome is. So I think it’s disastrous.’ (Redwood chair)

‘Five to seven years ago, the directives started coming at such a rate that the teachers were losing sight of teaching because of the administration.... [Now], I think the administrators in the education field are seeing how some of the policies are either not working in practice, or are counterproductive to what [was] intended.’ (Whitefrost LEA governor)

‘I think everything in education changes too quickly. There needs to be a period of stasis. We’ve got to get focused on teaching, and not be obsessed with funding. There’s got to be a period of no change to the exam system, the national curriculum, everything else.’ (Bluewater teacher governor)

Second, governors felt that government was contributing to an atmosphere of instability and confusion at the institutional level by failing to give consistent and long-term support to its own initiatives. A substantial majority of interviewees noted that their governing bodies were constantly being asked to meet short-term targets at the expense of taking longer-term decisions. These governors were also quick to emphasise that this confusion had an adverse impact not only on *own* administrative responsibilities, but also on educational provision at the classroom level as well. By seeking short-term results, respondents felt that governors, staff, and students alike were paying the price for the indecisiveness of central government policy makers. As one supplementary interview chair pointed out, ‘Even if we *decided* to go for [a new initiative], [our governing body] would *already* be behind the curve. The problem with many of these initiatives is that the government wants the results yesterday!’ Other respondents, like the Redwood head, took an even harsher perspective of this burden being placed on governing bodies, arguing:

‘Government is continually changing things, but I think what they’re actually trying to do is make governors *tools* of their own policy.... And governors resent being used as tools to direct all the different initiatives. The government has overburdened governing bodies with changes, rather than making the changes more broad-brushed and supportive.’

This comment leads to the third point, as many governors, although admitting the cynical nature of their response, felt that government was too intent upon conforming its legislative programme to the political timetable, and less intent upon targeting its legislation to assist the students in the classroom. As one Whitefrost parent governor argued, many governors felt recent legislative changes were largely cosmetic: ‘They’re new words to replace old ones in order for the government to have ‘progress’,’ he said. Other governors agreed, suggesting that central government was generating ‘newness’ and ‘excitement’ at the expense of those who were being asked to go beyond the hype and actually grapple with the implementation of these initiatives. As one chair of governors argued:

‘I don’t think they really *are* urgent issues. They’re *made* urgent by deadlines being imposed on them [by government]...but in reality, they’re not genuinely urgent! And that’s largely because there’s a huge lack of [government] strategy.’ (Redwood chair)

Not only did governors think that government lacked a coherent education strategy, governors also argued that at the implementation stage, it quickly became apparent

that legislation was often more style than substance. The comment below illustrates how many governors felt that this approach revealed an emphasis on short-term political gains rather than long-term educational achievement:

‘Everything the government does – particularly this one – is very focused on being re-elected. You can’t have something that reproduces itself quietly over in the corner. Everything has to be ‘new’. So there’s no *re*-production, there’s only *production*. And that’s extremely destabilising.’ (Bluewater co-opted governor)

#### **6.3.4 Strategic Planning Consequences of Short-Term Timetables and Priorities**

Once again, the quantitative and qualitative data provide clear evidence of the adverse affect that central government’s short-term legislative priorities have on the ability of governing bodies to do longer-term strategic planning. Looking first at the quantitative data, the survey found that 82.4 per cent of chairs (N=84) and 85.5 per cent of heads (N=68) felt that ‘uncertainty about central government’s future education priorities’ hindered their ability to do strategic planning. Qualitatively, the response was similarly strong, as governors felt that central government’s priority on achieving quick results made it extremely difficult for governing bodies to allocate time away from activities that would assist in meeting those short-term targets. As the Brownstone head remarked:

‘Inevitably, those structures lead to more pragmatic-type decisions based on what is required at the *time*, rather than on ideals and visions for the *future*.... But increasingly within the UK – because there is a greater degree of centralisation of control – you’re working within a political framework that’s incredibly short-termist. [As such], I can understand governors and myself being frustrated by an inability to put [our] best-laid plans into action.’

Other governors noted that the proliferation of short-term-focused initiatives meant that it was extremely difficult to draw up longer-term *financial* strategies, since governors were unsure of how much money would be available, how long that funding stream would last, or how they might be required to allocate their finances in the future. This lack of budgetary planning capacity, which will be addressed more fully in Section 6.4, was viewed as a critical barrier to strategic planning. Yet the comments of the governors below illustrate the difficulties that year-to-year budgeting created for governors who were attempting to be strategic and innovative:



‘I want to know what I’m going to get, money-wise, this year, next year, and even three years out, so I can make adequate plans. Central government will do things for only one year out, and that doesn’t help.’ (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

‘We don’t have any capacity to find new things, wholly unthought-of new things. That definitely is not part of how we are able to proceed. Because we don’t have any kind of predictable budget, and because our only kind of predictor is that we’re never going to have a surplus, then we can’t really begin to imagine anything.’ (Bluewater co-opted governor)

Lest the evidence above appears to document only a minor complaint about workloads and administrative responsibilities, it is important to recognise the overarching reason for why many governors felt long-term consistency in legislation was so important. As one supplementary interview chair – and parent – argued, such consistency would enable governing bodies to engage in strategic planning on the timescale that served the interests of students rather than the interest of legislators:

‘With education, if you say that a child comes in at eleven and goes out at eighteen, then it seems clear that you should be looking at a *seven* year plan – so that child has some kind of *consistency* throughout her education. If government is re-jigging all the time – even with the best of intentions – it’s the students who suffer, as the guinea pigs for new every government initiative.’

#### 6.4 THE ‘FINANCING SYSTEM’ BARRIER

‘One of the major changes which actually [adversely] *affects* classroom teaching today is the financial changes. The way in which money is held, the way it’s issued by central government, and in some cases the difficulty schools have in actually *obtaining* extra resources, extra finance.’ (Whitefrost staff governor)

The fourth central governmental-level barrier to strategic planning is the current financing system. Although governors largely welcomed the increased fiscal autonomy granted by the 1988 Education Reform Act, they also felt that this autonomy had become a double-edged sword. First, it will be argued that governors had three interlinked complaints about the current use of ‘bid’-based financing programmes (such as the heavily-promoted specialist schools programme): the time required to investigate and apply for these funding programmes, the sheer breadth of the options available for bid, and the lack of flexibility in how the money they received from these bids could be spent. Second, it will be argued that governors were concerned about the short duration of many of central government’s finance

initiatives, as well as the uncertainty surrounding the continuation of any given finance initiative. It will therefore be argued that together, these features of the current central government financing system made it difficult for governors to engage in effective long-term financial strategic planning.

#### **6.4.1 Bid-Based Financing Problems: Time, Breadth, and the Lack of Flexibility**

The first complaint by governors was that bid-based financing programmes required both governors and staff to devote a disproportionately large amount of time to the process of seeking additional funds or resources. As the Whitefrost chair noted:

‘The amount of time schools are spending – you have to put in a bid document for each different thing, and each one’s got a different slant, and it takes time, you don’t know whether the bid’s going to be successful – it’s gone too far.’

Although central government has recently taken steps to ‘streamline’ this process, many governors felt that the application system was still far from the point where the advantages of a successful bid outweighed the time and effort necessary to both make the bid and comply with its conditions upon receipt. Illustrating this difficulty, Greenleaf’s head argued:

‘On the government funding programmes, the big issue has been that often there’s not much lead-in time that you have to make the bid within. Sometimes it has been *ridiculous*, and there’s been no time for preparation.’

In short, governors felt that the additional time required for this short-term process was yet another drain on the time they had available for long term planning. Furthermore, even success in bidding for a programme like the specialist school status did not mean a reprieve from the time that schools and governors needed to allocate towards *continuing* to remain qualified and to receive funding. As one supplementary interview chair pointed out, the pressure of remaining eligible for such funding was substantial; as she noted, ‘it’s a lot of money to *lose!*’ Yet the ultimate paradox appeared to be that the schools that required the most urgent infusions of financial support were often those schools most desperately in need of a strong overall future vision. These two issues may then link to form a vicious circle – a problem apparent to many governors, including this Whitefrost co-opted one:

‘Writing that [bid] takes a lot of time, and the best [bids] are about planning for what you *want* to do. And when you’re in a position like this school has

been for the last few years – having to react to situations in order to address major issues – you don’t have the time to *do* that kind of planning!’

The second complaint about bid-based programmes was that the breadth and range of available initiatives made strategic planning extremely difficult, reiterating the issue of ‘initiative overload’ raised in regards to paperwork (Section 6.3.1). When applied to finance, governors argued that even if they *could* become fully informed as to the full range of funding options available, the breadth of these offerings meant that they would need to spend an inordinate amount of energy simply selecting the most appropriate programmes for which to bid. To many governors, this situation was both discouraging and disheartening:

‘The standards fund has just been a nightmare. There are so many initiatives, and of course, government has adopted this approach because the best way of being shown to be meeting your promises is to parachute money into schools for specific activities.’ (Bluewater LEA governor)

‘You can’t go for everything – you’d spend all your time filling the forms in, setting your outcomes and milestones, get a member of staff to monitor it, get the evidence together. It’s almost unbelievable.’ (Redwood LEA governor)

‘Rather than lots of people flooding in, with lots of little bits and projects worth £100, or a day here or a day there, [the government] actually [needs] to integrate its initiatives.’ (Bluewater head teacher)

The third concern governors raised about bid-based programmes (and the financing system in general) was the lack of flexibility, in conjunction with what governors perceived as central government’s overemphasis on accountability. Overall, governors felt that central government was using the financing system to demonstrate its apparent commitment to ‘local accountability and choice,’ while in reality forcing schools to select their funding streams from a pre-selected set of government initiatives. As one Whitefrost governor complained, ‘It’s not that *governors* decide what they want to do – it’s more that government tells us what they *have* for us!’ Governors argued that this approach meant that the advertised flexibility of Fair Funding – and with it, governors’ ability to be innovative in their future planning – was being limited by the rigidity of the financing system:

‘Recently we’ve had this plethora of initiatives...some initiatives can be contradictory to others, and it’s made it very difficult to have the whole picture. Because the funding has been so tied to a particular initiative, we haven’t had, as a school, the flexibility to...be able to use it in a way we think is best to raise achievement.’ (Brownstone head teacher)

‘I think that’s a Treasury issue where they’ve kept too tight a control on spending where it’s needed, and they’ve not been flexible about relaxing regulations where such relaxation is necessary.’ (Bluewater LEA governor)

Furthermore, governors felt that if central government’s intent in creating numerous small bid programmes was to increase local accountability, this result was not forthcoming. Instead, governors felt that not only did this approach actually *increase* the time that they were forced to devote towards demonstrating continuing ‘compliance’ with the terms of the financing arrangement, it also ignored the realities of the situation on the ground. Governors argued that in practice, their schools usually used these initiatives to fund areas where there was the greatest actual need, regardless of the ‘official’ purpose of the bid:

‘They say it’s accountab[ility], but the way most schools do it is that the money gets siphoned off into wherever it’s needed. I know we get all this money for special needs, but special needs gets nowhere *near* the amount of money that’s designated for it!’ (Bluewater teacher governor)

‘There are too many initiatives – they are too difficult to keep on top of...[and] as a result, it’s ‘grab all the money that’s going, and not pay too much attention to devoting the money to what it was intended for.’ (Brownstone LEA governor)

In short, governors felt the current structure of the financing system offered the worst of both worlds, neither delivering accountability nor permitting flexibility. In the words of one Bluewater co-opted governor:

‘[The current financing system] hugely complicates the planning process, and indeed the management process. Because the nature of the bidding process is that by the time you know the outcome, it’s actually too late to make the best of it! And what you were doing was diverting a *huge* amount of already-stretched management time in schools to concocting yet *more* arguments for often relatively *trivial* sums of money. So I think the whole thing has been over-complicated and bureaucratic, and over-uncertain in its outcome, and that is a *real* inhibition to taking a long-term view as to what the school is about.’

#### **6.4.2 The Short-Term Approach to Finance**

Second, the research evidence demonstrated that both the timing and the uncertain long-term viability of bid programmes and other government funding schemes severely hindered attempts to plan strategically for the long term. Both of these issues were near the top of governor complaints about hindrances to strategic

planning in the survey, (see Table 6.3 (extracted from Table 5.1)), and these data were strongly corroborated by the qualitative evidence.

**Table 6.3: Hindrances Created by the Central Government Financing System**  
*Percentage of chairs and heads reporting the given issue as a hindrance.*

Issue	Chairs (%)	Heads (%)	Chairs (N)	Heads (N)
Pressure created by the timing of central government funding decisions	84.9	89.9	86	69
Uncertainty about central government's future funding commitments	88.1	79.4	84	68

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*Differences between chairs and heads were not statistically significant.*

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The first of these ‘short-term’ problems was the *timing* of central government funding decisions. Governors constantly argued that they were being asked to set their own preliminary institutional-level budgets well in advance of receiving their predicted (or actual) funding allocation from central government. Additionally, governors argued that a year-by-year funding system often prevented them from engaging in multi-year financial commitments, even where this approach might provide the best value. Because governors felt forced to make educated guesses about their available finances (even for just the coming year), many of them noted how futile they thought their efforts would be were they to attempt to plan any further into the future:

‘You have no idea in April when you’re setting your budget how much you’re going to get. You *assume* you’re going to get the same the following year. So it’s nigh on impossible to know what special grants are going to come through.’ (Bluewater teacher governor)

‘The government is not sure what they’re doing or what they’re telling or giving us before they’ve done it – but we’d actually like to plan *ahead* of that. So we’re actually not able to plan with specific numbers as much as we’d like, because government doesn’t know what they’re giving us – or we don’t know what the numbers are.’ (Brownstone co-opted governor)

‘This whole question of ring-fencing funds is a nightmare. The money has to be spent by a certain time – whereas you’d get better value for money if you carried it over, but [the response is] ‘I’m sorry sir, you’re not allowed to do that.’ It’s a bureaucrat’s nightmare, and it’s getting worse.’ (Bluewater co-opted governor)

Yet even when budgets and bids had been allocated and settled, governors suggested that this was only the beginning of their problems. As one Greenleaf governor

summed up the second ‘short-term’ problem: ‘When there are lots of pots of money, it makes planning difficult, [because] you don’t know if that money is going to be there in a few year’s time.’ This uncertainty over how long funding streams would last led to an aversion by governing bodies to plan strategically regarding the use of this money over the long term. Instead, some governors reported spending the money on ‘safe’ short-term or one-off improvements, while others reported trying to plan long-term, but being forced to alter those plans when funding schemes were discontinued or altered. As the survey data showed, nearly 90 per cent of chairs and 80 per cent of heads felt that ‘uncertainty about future funding commitments’ hindered governing body strategic planning, and this finding was well-supported by the numerous reports of difficulties experienced by case study governing bodies:

‘Once you start something, you want to be able to carry it on. In one case, we had the money to train a teacher for Reading Recovery, so we hired the teacher, trained her – and then our budget got cut and we didn’t have the money to keep her on.’ (Greenleaf chair)

‘We’re covered by Excellence in Cities, and we’ve just got money coming at us from all *sorts* of directions. We haven’t got a bloody *clue* how long it’s going to carry on for, or really what they want to give us the money for.’ (Brownstone LEA governor)

‘Sometimes you’re not sure how long it’s going to last, so you might make a bid for a year, but you’re not sure if it’s going to carry on after that, so it’s quite difficult to set things up and develop them.’ (Greenleaf head teacher)

‘You get £50,000 off the Chancellor one year, and you spend it, you have to make sure it’s a one-off purchase – you can’t do anything that’s going to have any developmental effect.’ (Bluewater teacher governor)

In sum, governors argued that the short-term instability of many government funding schemes created a substantial barrier to governing bodies that sought to engage in strategic long-term planning. Furthermore, when these broader financial concerns are combined with the specific problems created by the bid system of financing, the role that the current financing system plays in hindering strategic planning at the governing body level becomes even more apparent.

## **6.5 THE COMMUNICATION BARRIER**

The fifth central governmental-level barrier to strategic planning related to the breakdown in communication between governors and central government. This research found that each case study governing body perceived the existing

communication mechanisms between central government and governing bodies to be either deficient or non-existent. Governors further argued that the communications channels that *did* exist were primarily ‘one-way’ – from government to governors – and that the current communication system lacked internal coordination between central government agencies. Overall, this research suggested that these communication breakdowns created a general lack of responsiveness on the part of central government in relation to local level concerns, as is evident from the tenor of the comments below:

‘The communication process, in the main, is *totally* inadequate. There is no way of passing concerns back up the chain to the people that matter....The trouble is, the communication link [still] goes via the local authorities. They haven’t got a direct one from schools to government.’ (Redwood parent governor)

‘To be quite honest, I don’t think central government *knows* what governing bodies do. I can’t see how they *can* do, because it doesn’t seem to me that they have any feedback loop.’ (Whitefrost finance chair)

‘In the education department, part is coming out of here, part is coming out of there, part is coming out of there. When you get down to the *school*, it’s all hitting the school at once. That’s the funnel. That hits the governors, and that hits the management team. Now *that’s* the problem.’ (Redwood foundation governor)

This research identified two main strands of evidence to support the assertion that central government was failing to communicate effectively with governing bodies. The first was central government’s lack of knowledge of how its policies affected governing bodies, and the second was the failure of central government to adequately clarify and communicate the governor’s role to governing bodies. These two issues and their consequences for strategic planning are now discussed in detail.

### **6.5.1 Central Governmental Understanding of Policy Effects**

Governors felt that one clear indication of the poor state of communication between government and governing bodies was that central government appeared to have little understanding of the effects that its policies had at the institutional level. As one supplementary chair said simply, ‘They don’t have a clue.’ Looking at the quantitative data, the survey found that 79.5 per cent of chairs (N=83) and 77.1 per cent of heads (N=70) felt that central government had an extremely *low* understanding of the effects that its policies had on governing bodies and schools. In

contrast, only 4.8 per cent of chairs and 5.7 per cent of heads thought that central government had a *high* level of understanding. The interviews provided further support for this perceived lack of understanding, as can be seen in these comments:

‘The DfEE hasn’t got a clue. They’re off in cloud-cuckoo land. Central government has *no idea* what they’re putting students and teachers through.’ (Greenleaf parent governor)

‘Ah, joined-up management. Policy makers have a lack of understanding of what’s happening on the ground, and as a result plan policy that just doesn’t match reality. And therefore, they have a lack of understanding of incentives, and unintended effects.’ (Whitefrost chair)

‘We’re always chasing the government for numbers that they haven’t come up with when we well and truly have our plans underway.’ (Brownstone co-opted governor)

‘I think they [government] *try* to make things easier and simplify things, but I don’t think they really clearly visualise what it’s like to be in a position that’s *legally* constrained but which you’re doing on a *voluntary* basis.’ (Bluewater co-opted governor)

This research also found that governors felt there were two main *reasons* for why central government had a poor understanding of how its policies affected schools and governing bodies. First, governors felt that central government rarely engaged in effective ‘on the ground’ observation of policy implementation. Governors argued that this lack of local-level communication and on-the-ground evidence gathering meant that central government often devised its policies without having heard the concerns of those charged with implementation. As such, governors felt that central government frequently formulated policies that neither understood nor met the needs of individual schools. When asked if central government understood the effects that its policies had on schools and governing bodies, the responses from these three governors were representative of governor sentiment throughout the case studies:

‘In a word, no! Because they aren’t ‘in the field’, they don’t necessarily see how the proposals that they’re making would actually work – or not work – in practice.’ (Whitefrost LEA governor)

‘How can it? You never get anybody from DfEE [to] come down and visit the school, and they’re totally detached, as I see it.... My perception is clearly based only on my own school, and I don’t know whether DfEE personnel go to *other* schools, but *we* have never seen anybody. So my perception is that they don’t really understand.’ (Redwood co-opted governor)



‘I think [government] feels that as long as they’ve funded it, put the money in, and they’ve got a form back saying what you’ve done, then everything is hunky-dory.... [But we] know that as long as schools have got a nice little paper saying ‘we’ve done something’, there’s no one checking it. It’s a complete work of fiction.’ (Bluewater teacher governor)

Second, governors thought that the problems inherent in the lack of an on-the-ground perspective were compounded by an overly-idealistic ‘Whitehall mentality’ amongst those actually drafting the policies. Governors argued that policies often appeared to focus more on the rhetorical and political value of policies than on the mechanisms that would be required to actually implement the policies themselves. In effect, governors were arguing that the absence of strategic planning at the central governmental-level was directly responsible for hindering strategic planning at the governing body level. Governors felt that this approach often led to the creation both of policies that appeared strong in theory but fell apart in practice, and policies that contradicted one another. Because these potential problems were not addressed at the policy inception stage, governors felt forced into spending their *own* time weaving together the intentions of various central government entities:

‘DfEE is not a customer-focused department – it generates papers and initiatives and things like that, without real reference to [actual] governing bodies.’ (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

‘There’s nothing wrong with change, but it’s got to be at a pace so the *sharp end*, where it all comes together, can handle it. I would suspect that when you get to the DfEE and the ministers, there are six major departments handling these things – and I *don’t* think they’re really sitting down to say ‘I’m launching this, does it clash with anybody?’ They just plough ahead.’ (Redwood foundation governor)

‘My perception is that on the one hand, you’ve got departments competing against each other in the DfEE, and you’ve got different ministers with different ideas, and they hold onto that idea that is *theirs* in order to prove their success. I don’t think there is this ‘joined-upness’ of thinking at the DfEE level, partly because of people wanting to make their own political careers.’ (Brownstone head teacher)

Finally, governors believed that consequences for strategic planning of this lack of understanding were unambiguous. In one respect, governors felt that the lack of understanding and communication meant that central government did not realise when the point had been reached where schools and governors felt overburdened:

‘The amount of work that the government imposes on the school – I don’t think they *realise* how much pressure it puts on individual teachers, not to mention the students and the school as a whole and the governors.’ (Greenleaf LEA governor)

‘I really don’t think they [understand] – not to the fullest extent. I think they’ve got their set of policies, and they ‘must carry those policies through.’ I don’t believe they *realise* the seriousness it can have on the pupils.’ (Whitefrost staff governor)

In another respect, governors argued that if central government continued producing initiatives without communicating with schools and governing bodies, attempts by governing bodies at strategic planning ran a high risk of being rendered prematurely obsolete:

‘What I really want to know as a governor is: how much money am I going to get each term, what are the key statutory things I need to implement, and what are the initiatives for next year.’ (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

‘The lack of timely communication is an issue. [Although] it doesn’t necessarily stop us from doing anything – we still have our plans, our thoughts, our strategies – sometimes they cannot be put in place until we really know what the [next] policy is going to be.’ (Brownstone co-opted governor)

‘Government is producing so many things that we ‘ought’ to do. Many of them are sensible requirements, but the difficulty is fitting everything in. For example, we would have liked to do more in the arts – but then the government gave us *other* priorities!’ (Supplementary interview chair)

Given the evidence presented above, it was clear that governors felt central government’s lack of understanding about policy impacts created two significant problems. First, governors felt central government was not providing them with a sense of how individual initiatives meshed with broader strategic vision for education improvement – partly because governors felt that central government *itself* had no broader strategic vision on this front. Second, governors felt that central government was not providing a sense of how governing bodies would be expected to accommodate those new initiatives into the existing framework. Without this vital information, many governors felt that planning was being forced into a short-term time frame, simply due to the uncertainty surrounding central government’s future plans and the lack of meaningful dialogue between central government and schools in this arena.

### 6.5.2 Central Government and the Definition of the Governor's Role

Governors felt that the other indication of the poor state of communication between government and governing bodies was the gap between central government's rhetoric about the governor's role and the reality of the operating as a governor at the institutional level. As was outlined briefly in Section 5.3.3, if the absence of a well-articulated role means governors are tentative about either their authority or their responsibilities, this temerity will strongly influence the range of tasks that governors feel comfortable undertaking. This research found that there was substantial evidence for the absence of a well-articulated role, since interviewees throughout this study felt that the discrepancy between rhetoric and reality left governing bodies confused and hesitant about what they were actually meant to be doing:

'There's a lot of confusion with governing bodies across the country as to what they should and should not be doing.' (Whitefrost staff governor)

'I'm not really sure what the government *wants* out of governors, really. I don't think it's clear.' (Redwood LEA governor)

'It seems that it's very difficult for governors to always tell where their remit extends and where it doesn't, even though they know what the *formalities* are.' (Bluewater co-opted governor)

'The way to reduce the pressure would be to have greater *clarity* of what governors are expected to do, rather than [asking governors to do either] less or more. It's about clarity in terms of *what* is expected.' (Greenleaf LEA governor)

Governors acknowledged that central government did provide governors with a substantial amount of information regarding governors' responsibilities. However, governors frequently pointed out that merely *providing* large quantities of information did not necessarily lead to greater clarity. As one Whitefrost LEA governor noted, 'There's a huge vacuum between understanding the government's 'good practice' guides on running meetings and understanding what's required to manage a £3 million budget.' Governors argued that paradoxically, this relentless barrage of information from central government actually *increased* the potential for contradiction and confusion:

'[Regarding my] role as a governor, I have folders full of leaflets of what I *should* be doing, what I *shouldn't* do, and so on – guidelines for this, guidelines for that – there's a lot [to go] through.' (Greenleaf teacher governor)

‘When my colleagues on the governing body find out, [they] are horrified of what their liabilities and responsibilities are. I think the government is just naïve about the role of governing bodies.’ (Bluewater co-opted governor)

Governors felt that the *reasons* for this lack of clarity were similar to those raised about the lack of understanding of policy effects – little on-the-ground observation and a bureaucratic mentality at the central governmental-level. Additionally, governors criticised government for failing to recognise that schools in poorer urban areas like London often faced problems and challenges that were quite different from those in either non-urban or more affluent areas. As one Bluewater governor noted:

‘This whole concept of pushing power down to the governing body and parent governors worked well in a tight, cohesive community with fairly well-educated parents.’

Such governors argued that a uniform central government approach to governing body responsibilities often ended up frustrating governors whose schools’ problems demanded more flexibility in the governors’ mandate. As the governor quoted below pointed out, many governors felt that they were being told by central government that they were both capable *and* incapable of carrying out their responsibilities. Such inherent contradictions from different entities within central government therefore made it difficult for governors to determine precisely what role they were being asked to play:

‘You’re told that ‘you’re the governors, you’re in charge of the school,’ but in regard to everything else, they tell *you* what to do! It’s not as though the governors tell government what the school’s problems are, and then government responds to the *governors*. It’s really that the government tells the school what its problems are, and governors respond to the *government!*’ (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

Finally, governors felt that the lack of role clarity had two main strategic planning consequences. First, although governors felt that they should be doing strategic planning in *theory* (as shown in Chapter Four), this lack of role clarity meant that governors were not entirely confident that central government, despite its overt claims, actually wished governing bodies to be doing strategic planning in *practice*. Second, the research suggested that the lack of role clarity created a perverse incentive for governing bodies to pursue the safest and most uncontroversial options – even though these options might not be most advantageous ones in the long-term – in order to avoid being criticised for stepping outside their jurisdiction. ‘The real

question is ‘what do you want the board of governors to *do?*’, said one Whitefrost governor. ‘One problem with governing bodies at the moment is that few governors can tell you why they’re there.’ This comment speaks to an important point. Governors were extremely worried about being seen as doing ‘day-to-day’ managing, but, being unsure of which tasks qualified as such, erred strongly on the side of caution. As one Bluewater governor noted:

‘One of our favourite things to say, when we’re a *step away* from doing something, is that someone will say ‘we don’t want to micro-manage this.’ But we’ve already *looked* at the thing right down to the ground, had *every single thing* explained, and we’re sufficiently informed – but we hold back.’

Ironically, this cautiousness also incriminated some governing bodies, who found that the lack of clarity in their role mean that they were caught in a ‘no-win’ situation. While governors, in their caution, frequently restricted themselves only to the administrative-type tasks where they felt certain of their responsibility, (thus avoiding responsibilities like strategic planning), they also found that this caution (and lack of strategic planning) could be construed as dereliction if things went wrong. As one governor pointed out:

‘When there are problems in a school, the government lets the load fall on the governors like a ton of bricks. What we really need is advice *beforehand* from the government on where we might be going wrong.’ (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

In summary, by *de facto* encouraging governing bodies to be reactive, this lack of clarity by central government served to stifle attempts at innovation or long-term planning. Instead, governors kept within the confines of the administrative tasks that they knew fell within their remit. As the Brownstone head teacher argued, this mentality, created by ambiguous role definition, had severe consequences for strategic planning on the part of governing bodies:

‘If you don’t have creativity, and experimentation, and the ability to make mistakes sometimes, then you’re not going to learn, and you’re not going to be able to think ‘yes, it is better to do it that way.’ (Brownstone head teacher)

## 6.6 THE TRUST BARRIER

Finally, this research found that both the consequence and cause of many of the problems that have been raised in this section appeared to rest on one underlying issue: governors believed central government did not trust governing bodies. First,

this section will present the evidence for governors' perception of a lack of central government trust in governing bodies. Second, it will be argued that there were two main reasons for this lack of trust: the centralising tendency of the present government, and the perception of governors that government thought governing bodies were incapable of all but the basic administrative responsibilities. Finally, this section argues that this perceived lack of trust both exacerbated the frustration of governors and increased their resignation regarding what governing bodies could achieve, thereby becoming a crucial barrier to strategic planning.

### 6.6.1 Evidence for a Perceived Lack of Trust

The evidence for a perceived lack of trust in governing bodies comes from both the qualitative and quantitative data. Table 6.4 shows that when asked how much trust respondents felt central government had in governing bodies, only 15.5 per cent of chairs and 17.9 per cent of heads felt that the level of trust was high. Although the overall differences between chair and head responses to this question were statistically significant, it is evident from Table 6.4 that the main difference between chairs and heads was regarding whether they felt the level of trust was *low* or *moderate*. In practice, this difference is somewhat moot, as neither 'low trust' nor 'moderate trust' suggests a ringing endorsement on the part of respondents regarding central government's attitude towards governing bodies.

**Table 6.4: Level of Trust that Respondents Believed Central Government had in Governing Bodies**

Reported Level of Trust	Chairs (%) (N=84)	Heads (%) (N=70)
Low	59.5	41.8
Moderate	25.0	40.3
High	15.5	17.9

*Differences between chairs and heads were statistically significant: Mann-Whitney  $z = -2.0$ ;  $p < 0.05$ .*

Similar results were found when respondents were asked whether they felt that central government trusted governing bodies, as is demonstrated below:

'No. Is that a clear enough answer?' (Bluewater head teacher)

'They should learn to trust. They should be able to look at a school – they've got Ofsted as well – and say 'this school has an adequate governing body,' and then let us do it. And then tolerate some differences.' (Redwood chair)

‘It’s about time that central government started to have some confidence and trust in local education authorities and governing bodies. They don’t really have trust in either.’ (Bluewater co-opted governor)

‘No. Central government is central government – it doesn’t *want* to trust anyone else!’ (Supplementary interview chair)

‘No, [but] in a school like this, they should allow and trust people. It’s a bit like trusting the twelve jurors on a trial – you’ve got to trust people to do it.’ (Redwood head teacher)

A small number of governors thought that the main issue was more about a lack of central government *engagement* with governing bodies than about a lack of *trust*, and a few others felt that while central government was not overly trusting, neither was it overly mistrustful. However, the majority of respondents felt strongly that central government had displayed an abiding and systematic absence of trust in those whom it was asking to implement its policies.

#### **6.6.2 Reasons for this Perceived Lack of Trust**

This research discerned two main reasons for the perception of a lack of trust, both of which were founded in one overriding belief amongst governors: that central government was seeking to retain central *control* over education, while placing the burden of *accountability* and *responsibility* on local governing bodies. Although the strength of this sentiment will become apparent through the evidence presented in this section, the two comments below frame the overall issue quite clearly:

‘By imposing so many regulations, DfEE has acquired implicit authority over the control of schools, by so highly constraining the explicit authority it claims that governing bodies have.’ (Supplementary interview chair)

‘If central government wants to run schools, they should just run schools, and get rid of the governing bodies. But if they want governing bodies to reflect the individuality within each school – then reduce the number of initiatives and keep out of it, really.’ (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

The first reason for governors’ perception of a lack of trust surrounded what governors saw as the centralising tendency of the present government. As is demonstrated below, governors resented what they considered to be a central government that paid lip service to local accountability and autonomy when politically expedient, while simultaneously pursuing a strategy of national solutions and consolidated central authority:

‘This government wants as much central control as is possible, but centralisation is a massive burden to carry.... So while *they* write the *guidelines*, I have to write the *policies*. Governors are there to determine the strategy and the long-term policy, but there is too much knee-jerk centralisation on the part of the government.’ (Supplementary interview chair)

‘You can see quite clearly the logic they’re using...and it has to do with the logic of re-election. And that pisses me off, I have to say. They’re not thinking locally, [and] in many respects, they’ve continued a hostility towards local control that was very much a mark of [the Conservative government].’ (Bluewater co-opted governor)

Governors further argued that this penchant for centralised control not only demonstrated a lack of trust in governing bodies, but that it often *prevented* the implementation of flexible, locally-tailored approaches that would do the most to assist individual schools. Governors argued that the success or failure of individual schools often depended upon intensely localised factors, and that a ‘broad brush’ approach from central government was therefore not always the best solution. As one Whitefrost governor argued: ‘You can’t penalise schools with a blanket order. It’s no good saying ‘schools have got to achieve this right across the country’ without considering things that would influence achievement.’ Yet because central government insisted upon continuing to centralise control over education, governors felt that central government was tacitly implying that governing bodies and schools could not be trusted to succeed if left to their own devices:

‘[Government has] seen so much money wasted that they believe the only solution is control – by handing out little sums of money dedicated to do A, B, C, et cetera.... But it’s the total opposite of good management, it really is. I don’t think the civil servants in the DfEE know what good management is, and they wouldn’t recognise it if it stood up and hit them.’ (Bluewater LEA governor)

‘This is a very centralising government...[and] you can see a structure where everything leads up to this peak at the top, at national level...I think we just haven’t worked out a better way of doing it. And meanwhile, it gives them the ability to say ‘there’s lots of local involvement in education, it’s all terribly democratic, there’s possibility for parental involvement’ – it’s bollocks!’ (Supplementary interview chair)

Second, there was a perception amongst interviewees that central government treated governing bodies as inferior amateur players, who were to be *tolerated* for the sake of local accountability, but not to be *respected* in the policy process. The majority of interviewees thought that central government acted as though it was being ‘forced’



into trusting governing bodies due to the clamour for local accountability, but sought to rectify this ‘problem’ by minimising the ability of governing bodies to actually make substantive changes. When asked whether central government trusted governing bodies, governors were pointed in their opinions about central government’s patronising attitude towards governing bodies:

‘Because of the amount of policy involvement there is [by central government], I don’t think governing bodies are trusted 100 per cent by central government to be doing an efficient and effective job.’ (Whitefrost staff governor)

‘It trusts them, to an extent, simply because it *has* to trust them. The power is split between the governing bodies and the local authorities. And they already know that in the main, the local authorities don’t always tell them the truth.’ (Redwood parent governor)

‘No. That’s why there’s all this framework and detail – I think it’s a lot like ‘two cheers for democracy! ([But then saying] if we could find a better way of doing it, we would get rid of them).’ (Supplementary interview chair)

‘There’s not much of a *relationship* between governing bodies and the government, and that in itself is counterproductive.... I don’t know how much *value* central government puts on governing bodies.’ (Whitefrost LEA governor)

‘I feel they do [think that] giving [responsibility] to governing bodies seems the right thing to do. It’s politically correct. [But] at the end of the day, whether they feel that all the governing bodies out there – or 90 per cent of them – are capable of handling this well – no.’ (Redwood foundation governor)

Why did governors feel that government took this somewhat patronising approach towards governing bodies? One Greenleaf co-opted governor stated explicitly – and succinctly – what many other governors implied. When asked whether central government trusted governing bodies, he replied:

‘I doubt it. Because governing bodies are a mixed ability group, and governing bodies vary enormously in their effectiveness.’

In general, governors argued that central government needed to clearly articulate in which situations – if any – governors were supposed to be quasi-administrators and in which situations governors were supposed to be governors. Governors also suggested that it was detrimental to all sides for central government to expect governors to act like governors while treating governors like administrators, since doing so meant that neither side wins. Instead, this breakdown in trust meant that

governors felt mistreated and government failed to receive the optimum administration (or governance) that it desired.

### 6.6.3 Strategic Planning Consequences of this Perceived Lack of Trust

The main strategic planning consequence of this perceived lack of trust in governing bodies was an overwhelming sense of frustration and resignation (both metaphorical and literal) amongst governors. Because governors did not feel trusted, they often felt that they would be wasting their time and energy if they engaged in anything other than the most uncontroversial short-term administrative responsibilities. This research found that many governors were frustrated by the lack of respect they felt governing bodies received from central government, arguing that central government both ignored governing bodies when making major decisions and disregarded their concerns when problems arose:

‘They do not seek our advice, they lay down these edicts and put down what should be done, and there’s never any direct consultation at the governing body stage. They may speak to the Grand Lodge of Governors, or whatever they’re called, but my perception is that they have only just directed how *they* see the policy should *be*, and have not gone down to how this could be *applied*, and what practical problems exist within that approach.’ (Redwood foundation governor)

‘If they don’t [trust governing bodies], that’s their loss, isn’t it? At the end of the day, if the governing body is making a decision in the interest of the school, and the school is progressing, [then] central government shouldn’t have a *problem*.’ (Greenleaf teacher governor)

‘We really are being inundated by this ‘incompetent administrative approach’ – where there’s enormous regulation about how you must behave, everybody’s got to be the same, there’s no difference to be tolerated at all – ‘you all have to conform to this standard.’ And people are not *like* that.’ (Redwood chair)

Furthermore, governors were frustrated by their sense that central government was wasting a valuable resource by not trusting governing bodies. Governors felt that because central government treated governing bodies paternalistically, innovation and creativity that governing bodies could potentially contribute to education improvement was often stifled or discouraged:

‘Governors bring a whole range of abilities to the school and the governing body, which is something that should be valued by government. They may be amateurs, and not have a great deal of knowledge about some aspects of the school, but that can be important sometimes.’ (Bluewater LEA governor)

‘Government doesn’t seem to recognise that in governors, they have a select group of people who have both an interest in the school and who want to ‘do good’. That’s a fantastic resource, and I don’t think the government understands how valuable governors are.’ (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

‘[The governing body] *should* be quite a powerful force. But I think because, on the whole, most governors are focused only on their school...they just don’t have time to take a broader role in terms of education development. And on the whole, why should they? The framework doesn’t allow for that.’ (Supplementary interview chair)

In conclusion, the lack of trust led to a sense of frustration and resignation amongst governors regarding what governing bodies had the opportunity to achieve. Governors believed that if central government trusted governing bodies, then central government would give governing bodies authority and make them accountable to their local communities, rather than reserving the right to both demand increased central accountability *and* to shift the blame onto governing bodies should things go wrong. In sum, governors in this research felt that central government viewed governing bodies as a force to be contained, rather than as partners to be valued. This approach increased governor frustration, leading many governors to wonder: why they should even bother with strategic planning at all. As such, this research suggested that the governors’ perceived lack of trust in governing bodies by central government might be the most significant – and the most difficult – barrier to be overcome in encouraging governing bodies to engage in strategic planning.

## 6.7 CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSION

This chapter was the second of two in which evidence was presented to support the assertion, made in Chapter Four, that many inner London secondary school governing bodies have difficulty engaging in strategic planning. The evidence presented in this chapter provided four main new insights. First, this chapter identified six central governmental-level barriers to strategic planning that, it was argued, prevent governing bodies from pursuing strategic planning more effectively. These barriers related to time and volunteer expectations, paperwork, legislation and regulation, the structure of the current financing system, communication, and trust. By viewing these barriers as complementary to the institutional-level barriers identified in Chapter Five, it therefore becomes possible to begin understanding interrelationship between these two sets of barriers. For example, the institutional-level barriers of the ‘monitoring culture’ and the preference that governing bodies

give to governors with ‘tangible’ skills are barriers both inextricably related to the demands placed on governors by central government.

As with the institutional-level barriers identified in Chapter Five, some of the issues that form these central governmental-level barriers have been suggested in previous governance literature. For example, nearly *every* researcher on governance has argued that governors have too little time in which to fulfil their responsibilities, while others have pointed to problems with paperwork (Keys and Fernandes 1990; Education and Employment Committee 1999), legislation (Mahoney and Riley 1996; Creese and Bradley 1997; Glatter 1999), and, to a lesser extent, the financial system (Marren and Levacic 1994; Saran and Taylor 1999). Yet as was noted in Chapter Five, this research presents these issues in a new and different context, presenting them as interrelated components of a set of central governmental-level barriers to strategic planning. While previous researchers and observers have pointed to some of the issues identified above, these issues have usually been discussed individually in isolation, and have not been referred to (or interpreted within) the overall context of strategic planning barriers. Additionally, this research identifies and discusses two new factors that impede governing body strategic planning: those of communication and trust, respectively. As such, this research provides both a new context in which to interpret the interaction between governing bodies and central government, and new evidence regarding the types of problems that governing bodies face within this relationship.

Second, Kogan observed in his study of governing bodies that ‘No matter how free standing, the governing body will be strongly affected by the political and administrative systems which surround it’ (1984:168). This research provides substantial new information about the influence of central government on governing bodies, and suggests that Kogan’s observation is as true today as it was then. However, this research also provides evidence to suggest that one of Kogan’s main observations – that governors generally had low expectations of what they could achieve – may no longer always be the case. In particular, the evidence in this chapter demonstrated that while governors often *wanted* to act upon the autonomy that they now possess, they increasingly found themselves constrained in what they were actually able to pursue (and achieve).

Third, this research provides new insight into how governors' perceptions influence their actions. Although some might criticise this research for seeking out only the *perceptions* of governors and not pressing to determine whether these perceptions were objectively 'valid', it essentially does not matter (for policy purposes) whether these perceptions are objectively valid or not. The crucial point is that this research found that governors *believed* and *acted* as though these perceptions were true. Consequently, this research suggests that if governors cease to believe that central government can or will address their concerns, governing bodies may increasingly engage in only the minimum that is required, resigned to the fact that their best efforts may be overruled by central government in the future. Given this state of affairs, for central government to ignore the concerns raised in this chapter suggests that governors will continue to harbour discontent about the system in which they are required to operate. In this kind of an environment, the strategic planning that is necessary for future innovation and progress will often fail to materialise – to the detriment of all involved.

Finally, it is argued that these six central governmental-level barriers, in conjunction with the four institutional-level barriers identified in Chapter Five, offer a robust, integrated and systematic evidence-based answer the third main research question:

If the lack of strategic planning implied by the existing literature is actually evident in the governing bodies of inner London state secondary schools, why is this the case?
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While it is obviously impossible to state with absolute certainty that this set of barriers constitutes the *complete* set of strategic planning barriers faced by governing bodies, the evidence presented herein strongly suggests that these barriers are the *major* ones. Having identified these barriers, the final phase of this thesis now seeks to answer the fourth and final main research question by applying these barriers to an actual issue of practical policy relevance: business involvement in education.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### STRATEGIC PLANNING AND BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

#### 7.0 INTRODUCTION

The first three data chapters – Chapters Four, Five, and Six – confirmed the lack of strategic planning amongst governing bodies in inner London state secondary schools, and proposed ten barriers that might explain this absence. Yet if these barriers are merely theoretical or abstract, and do not adequately or accurately reflect the main reasons for the absence of governing body strategic planning on real policy issues, then their practical value is clearly reduced. Therefore, in order to demonstrate the practical value of these barriers, the final two data chapters seek to answer the fourth and final main research question:

Can it be demonstrated that the identification of these strategic planning barriers has practical policy relevance and importance?

The purpose of this question is to address two issues: First, whether the systematic application of these barriers to a policy issue of practical importance *does* provide a robust explanation of the reasons for the absence of governing body strategic planning on that substantive policy issue. Second, whether the systematic application of these barriers provides a valuable heuristic analytical tool for understanding the absence of strategic planning on *other* substantive policy issues, which in turn can offer policy makers new perspectives on how to better remedy such absences. While these issues will be addressed directly in Chapter Eight via the presentation of the relevant research evidence, Chapter Seven lays the groundwork for this presentation in two important ways.

First, as was noted in Chapter Two, the existing literature on central government's increasing interest in business involvement in education suggested that business involvement was an issue on which governing body strategic planning was desirable yet potentially absent. As such, Section 7.1 seeks to confirm through research evidence that business involvement does provide an appropriate lens through which the practical policy relevance of the strategic planning barriers can be examined. Second, Sections 7.2 to 7.5 provide the context for interpreting the evidence on business involvement and strategic planning that is to be presented in Chapter Eight. These sections present governors' perceptions of business involvement in education,

outline the views of governors regarding business involvement, and present what governors saw as the four main potential advantages of incorporating business involvement issues into their strategic planning processes. Section 7.6 summarises the research evidence and concludes by providing the transition to Chapter Eight.

## **7.1 STRATEGIC PLANNING IN THE BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT CONTEXT**

In order to confirm that business involvement was an appropriate lens through which the practical policy relevance of the strategic planning barriers can be examined, two criteria needed to be met. First, it needed to be demonstrated that governors and governing bodies believed that business involvement *was* an issue where strategic planning was desirable, particularly as business involvement is not specifically mentioned in government policy guidance as an strategic planning issue. If the absence of strategic planning on business involvement was ‘issue-specific’ – absent simply because governing bodies did not view business involvement as being either relevant enough (or important enough) to merit consideration within their strategic planning remit – the question about why governing bodies were not engaging in strategic planning on this issue would be moot. Second, it needed to be demonstrated that governors and governing bodies were *failing* to address business involvement as a strategic planning issue. Clearly, unless there was an absence of strategic planning on this issue, the application of a set of barriers meant to illustrate the reasons for such an absence would be meaningless.

Before continuing, it is important to define the term ‘business involvement’ as used in the remainder of this thesis. As the research literature outlined in Chapter Two suggests, there are varying interpretations and definitions of the term ‘business involvement.’ As such, it was deemed vital to have a consistent baseline definition in order to ensure that responses would be comparable. Drawing on both suggestions from the preliminary study and observations from the existing literature, the following common definition was created for both the interviewees and the survey recipients:

‘Business involvement/links’ includes, but needs not be limited to: mentoring of students by business, in-kind and/or financial donations, Private Finance Initiative, work experience, for-profit management, teacher placements, and curriculum assistance.’

### 7.1.1 Business Involvement and Strategic Planning in Theory

In order to meet the first criterion outlined above, it was necessary to determine whether governors and governing bodies believed that business involvement *was* an appropriate strategic planning issue. Clearly, if governors did not perceive business involvement as being either relevant or important enough to merit consideration in the strategic planning context, then business involvement would not be a suitable lens through which to examine the influence of the strategic planning barriers identified earlier. However, this possibility was rejected because of strong quantitative and qualitative evidence to the contrary, as governors in both the interviews and the survey reported that they believed business involvement *was* an issue that required strategic planning. Looking first at the quantitative evidence, 82.8 per cent of chairs (N=80) and 71.6 per cent of heads (N=67) believed that the governing body's philosophy and approach towards business involvement *should* form part of the school's strategic plan.<sup>1</sup> Similarly strong sentiments were found in the qualitative responses, as a substantial majority of interviewees stated that a governing body's philosophy and approach towards business involvement *should* form part of its school's strategic plan:

‘[Business involvement] should absolutely be part of the governors’ strategic plan. Because if the perspective isn’t clarified at the outset, it’s likely to all go pear-shaped when a specific situation arises. And it’s important for the school to sort out what it wants *and why it wants it*.’ (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

‘I think we *should* have that say [as governors, about engaging in business involvement] – I think it’s a philosophical decision that needs to come from the governors, and there are implementation issues that have to come from the head and the executive team. But you can’t expect them to do it if there hasn’t been a philosophical discussion, and examples of where that really works. So I absolutely agree with that.’ (Bluewater co-opted governor)

‘A good governing body *will* have a strategic plan for the school. And I think the idea of business partnerships, [and] the extent to which activities like that relate to the school, would be seen as strategic.’ (Greenleaf co-opted governor).

‘Plainly, if the governing body *matters*, then necessarily its view on business involvement should *also* matter, and we should also accept that it will be different from school to school. Because business will be active to different extents in different geographic areas. So therefore, yes, the answer should be that the view of the governing body on business involvement should have a large part to play.’ (Redwood chair)

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<sup>1</sup> Differences between chairs and heads were *not* statistically significant.



As can be seen from this evidence, governors believed that if governing bodies had any relevance at all, it resided in their ability to make the philosophical decisions that influenced a) the strategic direction and b) the overall ethos of their respective schools. Given this evidence, it appeared that governors believed that the issue of business involvement *was* sufficiently important within both of these contexts to require the attention of the governing body.

### **7.1.2 Business Involvement and Strategic Planning in Practice**

In order to meet the second criterion outlined in the introduction to this section, it was necessary to determine whether governors and governing bodies were *failing* to treat business involvement as a strategic issue. Despite the evidence from Section 7.1.1 that governors believed business involvement *should* be a component of strategic planning, there was strong evidence that in practice, governing bodies did *not* generally incorporate their philosophy and approach towards business involvement into their strategic planning process.

Examining the qualitative evidence first, the majority of interviewees stated that they were largely unaware of the processes by which their schools engaged with business. Some felt that the reason for this was that the ‘process’ was often informal and *ad hoc*, and as such depended greatly on the independent momentum generated by individual governors. Others felt that governor understanding of business involvement processes suffered from the issue being too ‘cross-cutting’, since the issues surrounding business involvement did not fall neatly into the remit of a single standing committee (commonly finance, curriculum, staffing, or premises.) However, regardless of the cause or causes, interviewees were nearly unanimous in their opinion that these processes were frequently either amorphous or non-existent:

‘I’d be interested to know the answer to [how proposals for business involvement are addressed], because there’s never been such a discussion while I’ve been there! It’s never really got into the priority items for the school. The school has never got its head sufficiently above water to ask itself that question.’ (Bluewater co-opted governor)

‘There’s no policy on this at the moment – it’s really done *ad hoc*. We probably should have a policy, but I know very little about this area.’ (Greenleaf parent governor)

‘I suppose business partnerships have a strategic dimension that could involve governors – but it’s never been discussed.’ (Supplementary interview chair)

‘There’s no sort of strategy for dealing with the involvement of business in the school at the present.... But I think there would be – should be – some sort of policy on the involvement that business has at the school.’ (Greenleaf co-opted governor)

‘Right now [business involvement] is done on an ad hoc basis, and I think that’s something we might have to look at as things develop and evolve.’ (Supplementary interview chair)

The quantitative evidence provides additional support for the qualitative findings. First, it was clear that business involvement was often an *ad hoc* process, as fewer than *one-third* of survey respondents – 30.6 per cent of chairs (N=85) and 32.4 per cent of heads (N=71) – felt that their school had links with business that were structured systematically. Second, although 76.7 per cent of chairs (N=86) and 87.3 per cent of heads (N=71) claimed that they *knew* how their school decided whether to pursue proposals for business involvement, it appeared that there was no regular mechanism for conveying that knowledge to the governing body as a whole. When those same survey respondents were asked whether their governing bodies had any *written policy* on business involvement with the school, nearly nine out of ten of chairs (N=85) and heads (N=71) reported *no such written policy existed* (85.9 per cent and 88.7 per cent, respectively). Furthermore, less than ten per cent of either group (5.9 per cent of chairs and 9.9 per cent of heads) actually reported that their school *had* a written policy on this issue, while the remainder – 8.2 per cent of chairs and 1.4 per cent of heads – were not even sure if their school *had* such a policy.

Taken together, the evidence presented above and in Section 7.1.1 indicates that business involvement is an issue on which governing bodies believe strategic planning is desirable, but on which strategic planning is also largely absent at present. As such, these findings suggest that business involvement is an appropriate lens through which the practical policy relevance of the previously-identified strategic planning barriers can be examined.

As was noted in the introduction to this chapter, it would be possible at this point to proceed directly to determining whether the strategic planning barriers identified earlier provide a robust explanation of the reasons for the absence of governing body

strategic planning on business involvement issues. However, in order to interpret the evidence in relation to this point, it is essential to understand how governors themselves perceived both the issue of business involvement in general, and the potential advantages that strategic planning about business involvement might bring in specific. The remainder of this chapter attempts to provide this context, as it emerged from this research that governors saw four main potential advantages in engaging in strategic planning on business involvement issues: that such strategic planning would *enable* increased involvement, *guide* existing or future involvement, help build community, and allow governing bodies to prepare for future challenges. The evidence for each of these advantages is now presented in turn.

## **7.2 ENABLING BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT THROUGH STRATEGIC PLANNING**

The first potential advantage was the benefit strategic planning could have in *enabling* business involvement. As the survey discovered, current attempts to enable business involvement revealed somewhat mixed results. On one hand, 77.6 per cent of chairs (N=85) and 73.9 per cent of heads (N=69) reported that their schools had *actively* sought business involvement in the past few years. Additionally, 65.9 per cent of chairs (N=85) and 56.5 per cent of heads (N=69) stated that they *personally* would like more such links, while only 11.8 per cent of chairs and 7.2 per cent of heads reported wanting to see such links reduced (differences between chairs and heads were *not* statistically significant). Yet despite these encouraging percentages, approximately two-thirds of both chairs (N=83) and heads (N=70) reported that their school's existing links with business were *not* substantial (67.5 per cent and 64.3 per cent, respectively). Data from governor interviews seemed to support these findings, as governors noted that current methods for seeking and managing business involvement frequently lacked any forward-looking perspective. As such, governors drew attention to the importance of creating a framework that would permit their schools to approach business involvement in a more systematic and orderly manner. In its simplest terms, some governors perceived such a policy as a sorting device, as did this Greenleaf governor:

‘Yes, we could benefit from having a certain kind of framework. If any businesses fall into our framework, then we could say ‘this is the right move.’ We *do* need some kind of framework, some kind of criteria to say ‘this one fits, this one doesn’t.’’

However, governors also suggested that strategic planning could be used as a more sophisticated tool for enabling increased business involvement. In specific, governors argued that better strategic planning by governing bodies might allow business involvement to be used more *intelligently* than it was at present. For example, when asked about whether the governing body should include business involvement in its strategic planning, one Bluewater co-opted governor argued:

‘Yes. I think it helps with the strategic planning, but also insofar as a strategic plan will open up the various divergences between aspiration and realism, it then gives a framework within which business involvement can help fill some of those gaps. Business involvement, or any other involvement that can make a contribution. But [strategic planning] *should* identify what the school can do under its own resources and capabilities, and what additionality is required to deliver the full aspiration.’

This response was echoed by a Whitefrost LEA governor, who suggested that ‘a lack of clear aims will usually lead to a lack of clear results’ – and that this maxim was certainly applicable to a governing body’s approach regarding business involvement:

‘If we don’t have a very clear approach to bringing business into the school – not just to advise the school in all kinds of areas, but just to connect with the school, and to make the school aware and alert to the changes taking place in the world of work – *then I think the school will suffer*. Both in terms of the education that it offers children, [and] because we won’t be equipping them with the expertise to tackle the kinds of problems they’re going to face.’

Overall, governors acknowledged that without a strategic framework within which to evaluate business involvement opportunities, there was a greater likelihood that valuable opportunities might be lost. In order to put this desire for an enabling framework into the proper context, however, it was also important to demonstrate that governors actually had some level of interest in how business involvement might assist their school. The evidence for this interest is therefore provided below.

### **7.2.1 Governor Opinions About and Support for Business Involvement**

In both the interviews and in the survey, respondents were extremely positive about the potential role that business could play in education. This finding was important because it indicated that governors a) cared *significantly* about the role that business did – or might – play in their school, and b) recognised the significance that business involvement might hold for education. Both of these sentiments are evident in the comments made by governors throughout this research:

‘I think that we should be developing links more with places like local hospitals, local IT employers, the few multinationals in the area – BT and the like. [We need] more joined-upness.’ (Whitefrost chair)

‘I think we should try to get as much partnership with the schools, and with businesses it’s even better – it’s preparation for the kids, the links are good for work experience, and certainly even jobs.’ (Brownstone teacher governor)

‘I think business *has* played an increasingly important part, and that work experience, business links, and partnerships are all very, very valuable.’ (Bluewater head teacher)

‘I would like more of the local businesses to have more to do with the school. Possibly in terms of representation on the governing body, having good links with the school, offering more work experience placements for kids.’ (Redwood parent governor)

There was similarly strong survey support for six of the eight main types of business involvement on which respondents were questioned (see Table 7.1). The two types of business involvement on which there was substantially greater opposition – Private Finance Initiative and for-profit management – are discussed in more detail in Section 7.3.5.

**Table 7.1: Respondent Opinions about Business Involvement Activities**  
*Percentage supporting, neutral about, or opposing each given issue.*

Business Involvement Activity	Support (%)	Neutral (%)	Oppose (%)	(N)
Work experience/careers advice (Chairs)	98.8	1.2	—	81
Work experience/careers advice (Heads)	96.6	3.1	—	64
Mentoring of students by businesses (Chairs)	74.4	20.5	5.1	78
Mentoring of students by businesses (Heads)	88.7	9.7	1.6	62
Mentoring of staff / teacher placements (Chairs)	62.3	31.2	6.5	77
Mentoring of staff / teacher placements (Heads)	65.6	32.8	1.6	61
Curriculum assistance (Chairs)	41.8	41.8	16.5	79
Curriculum assistance (Heads)	56.7	35.0	8.3	60
In-kind donations (Chairs)	87.3	8.9	3.8	79
In-kind donations (Heads)	79.7	20.4	—	59
Financial donations / matched-funding (Chairs)	80.5	14.3	5.2	77
Financial donations / matched-funding (Heads)	78.9	17.5	3.5	57

*Differences between chairs and heads were not statistically significant.*

These survey results demonstrate extremely high support for a wide range of business involvement activities amongst *both* chairs and heads. Furthermore, even including the case of curriculum assistance products – where outright support (around 40 per cent) was lower than for other types of involvement – the percentage of respondents who were *opposed* outright to any of the six types of involvement was extremely low. In the case of curriculum assistance, only 16.5 per cent of chairs and 8.3 per cent of heads were opposed – and in no other business involvement category did opposition rise to above 6.5 per cent amongst either heads or chairs. Together with the qualitative responses, these findings provide robust evidence for the potential value that governors see in business involvement.

Furthermore, in interview after interview, respondents weighed the advantages that business involvement could provide for children against the disadvantages – and calculated that in most cases, children would benefit. This desire to improve children’s opportunities was reflected in the survey responses as well, as survey respondents were asked their opinions of the educational value to *students* that each type of business involvement activity provided. Table 7.2 shows the results for the five business involvement types that most often have a direct day-to-day impact upon classroom education.

**Table 7.2: Perceived Educational Value of Business Involvement Activities**  
*Percentage responding ‘moderate’ or ‘high’.*

Business Involvement Activity	Chairs (%)	Heads (%)	Chairs (N)	Heads (N)
Work experience/careers advice	96.3	94.2	81	69
Mentoring of students by businesses	73.6	80.6	68	67
Curriculum assistance	51.9	49.1	52	57
In-kind donations <sup>2</sup>	72.3	52.4	65	63
Financial donations / matched-funding	63.6	67.7	66	62

As can be seen in Table 7.2, a majority of chairs in all cases, and a majority of heads in four of five cases, believed that these activities had a moderate or high educational value to students. The only statistically significant difference between the two groups came in the category of in-kind donations, which chairs were much more likely to perceive as having educational value than were heads. This difference may be due to chairs viewing such donations as inherently supportive of the classroom

<sup>2</sup> Differences between chairs and heads were statistically significant: Mann-Whitney  $z = -2.0$ ;  $p < 0.05$ .

environment, whereas heads may have encountered logistical, administrative, or pedagogical difficulties in integrating in-kind donations into the classroom.

### 7.2.2 Governor Opposition to Business Involvement

Interestingly, both the survey and the case studies found an extremely *low* level of outright opposition to business involvement amongst respondents. As was shown in Table 7.1, the opposition amongst chairs and heads to the six classroom-related business involvement activities – 1) work experience, 2) student mentoring, 3) teacher placements, 4) curriculum assistance, 5) in-kind donations, and 6) financial donations – was extremely low (usually around five per cent). Furthermore, as can be seen in Table 7.3, a majority of both chairs and heads expressed a personal desire for more involvement, while only approximately ten per cent wanted less.

**Table 7.3: Personal Desire for More or Less Business Involvement in Schools**

Personal Desire	Chairs (%) (N = 85)	Heads (%) (N = 69)
More	65.9	56.5
Neutral	22.4	36.2
Less	11.8	7.2

*Differences between chairs and heads were not statistically significant.*

This low level of outright opposition was evident in the interviews; of the 47 institutional-level interviewees, only three (approximately six per cent) expressed a philosophical opposition to business involvement in education; the gist of their opposition can be seen in the comments below:

‘I think education should be run by people purely who see education as the goal. I think other organisations have different targets, different goals, different perceptions, and see schools perhaps as an easy target.’ (Bluewater teacher governor)

‘When you’re looking at input from the private sector, you’re then going to have a *third* body [in addition to the state and the community]; only that third body will be much more powerful once they’re putting money and resources into the school.’ (Whitefrost staff governor)

‘I’m against them in principle. I think all schools should be completely funded by the state – because unless you have a rigid code of practice, there could be pecuniary interests of some of the businesses who would have more of a say in the running of schools that I would like.’ (Greenleaf chair)

Interestingly, these three governors were all current or former education professionals: a former primary school head teacher (now a chair of governors at Greenleaf), a staff governor, and a teacher governor. Although this suggests that proposals to increase business involvement in education might meet with resistance from educators within the system, it is also worth noting that even these governors acknowledged that a) the pragmatic realities of the current system and b) the general support for some form of business-education linkage amongst chairs and heads, meant that their own energy was best spent in *monitoring* and *managing* business involvement, rather than in opposing it entirely.

The survey evidence also helps put the *overall* level of governor concern about business involvement into a broader context. Amongst survey respondents, only 24.7 per cent of chairs (N=85), and only *seven per cent* of heads (N=71), reported feeling ‘generally suspicious’ of the reasons why businesses became involved in education. In contrast, nearly *half* of both groups (48.2 per cent of chairs and 47.9 per cent of heads) were ‘generally supportive’ of business motives in education. The remainder of the respondents (27.1 per cent of chairs and 45.1 per cent of heads) were neutral on the issue.<sup>3</sup> As such, these findings suggest that survey respondents who expressed limited concerns about business involvement were also generally confident that these concerns could be addressed if a commitment was made to do so.

### **7.3 GUIDING BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT THROUGH STRATEGIC PLANNING**

Second, governors recognised that without a strategic view of what business involvement could offer their schools, there was a greater potential for their school to engage in business involvement activities that did not fit with the school’s overall ethos and character. Whereas Section 7.2 addressed the *proactive* advantages of thinking strategically about business involvement, governors also acknowledged that there were *defensive* advantages of such planning as well. As one Whitefrost governor argued, it was the responsibility of the governing body to make clear ‘both ‘How far are they going to let [business involvement] go’ and ‘what does [that involvement] mean to the school,’ whilst a supplementary chair provided a somewhat different rationale for having a policy and plan:

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<sup>3</sup> Differences between chairs and heads were *not* statistically significant.



‘We have had, in the past, some rather odd people who wanted to work with us, and you need a way of being able to say ‘no’ politely!’

In general, governors suggested that there would be significant value in having a strategic framework that could guide staff and governing bodies both in evaluating potential business involvement proposals and in determining the compatibility of particular projects with the broader strategy of the school. As these governors argued:

‘Schools should absolutely be in a position to judge whether they want to be involved with a business, instead of possibly accepting business support ‘on the hoof’ without having thought through all the issues attached to it.’ (Bluewater LEA governor)

‘Although strategic planning should be about the *school* and where it would like to go – rather than about business involvement *per se* – when governors looked to ‘how you’d go about getting [to that strategic end], obviously you might say ‘looking into businesses’, or ‘bidding for funds’. And that’s where the [strategy] would come in.’ (Brownstone teacher governor)

Understandably, governors expressed their concerns about some facets and types of business involvement, and were clear that these concerns should be discussed and addressed before their school engaged in any substantial business involvement. These concerns were identified by asking governors where they would ‘draw the line’ between business involvement being valuable or supportive and such involvement being intrusive or undesirable. Besides governors’ common (if overly hopeful) sentiment that they would ‘know the line when they saw it’, their most prevalent concerns about business involvement fell into five main categories: Advertising, curriculum control, independence and autonomy, over-dependence, and profit making. The evidence for each of these concerns is presented below.

### **7.3.1 Concerns about Advertising**

The most common concern amongst interviewees was that businesses might use their relationships with schools as a marketing tool targeted at an impressionable and captive audience. According to one Bluewater co-opted governor, ‘I feel anxious about advertising, which pretty much limits everything – because nobody’s going to give you money without wanting other people to know that they’ve done it!’ The interviews clearly indicated there was widespread opposition to advertising amongst governors at all five schools, yet the qualitative data also suggested that governors differed as to when acceptable ‘recognition of business assistance’ crossed the line

into unacceptable ‘advertising’. As one Whitefrost LEA governor argued regarding the value of business involvement for students:

‘It’s still *important* that you have a perspective of the business world – but it’s not packaging a commercial product. You’re dealing with a much more sensitive quality than soap powder!’

However, many governors recognised that there might be a necessary trade-off in negotiating business involvement projects, and acknowledged that there were some types of *quid pro quo* that might – albeit reluctantly – be acceptable:

‘If they’re providing something useful to the school and it just happens to have the logo in the corner, then all well and good, but there must be a line drawn between the altruistic things and those that have too much of an encouragement to link to a product.’ (Brownstone LEA governor)

‘If a company wanted to help create a brochure for the school, and they wanted to have their name and logo tastefully displayed on the bottom saying ‘sponsored by so and so’, then I wouldn’t have any problem with that.’ (Bluewater LEA governor)

Governors were more unified in their concern over advertising that was unrelated to a specific academic project or programme, and which might therefore be interpreted as the ‘general’ promotion of the company within the school. A related concern was voiced over ‘permanent’ advertising, where logos would become a fixture on either the school’s physical infrastructure or its curriculum materials. In both cases, governors were often quite forceful in their opposition to any attempt to turn their schools into high-profile ‘billboards’:

‘One of the things that we wouldn’t see as appropriate would be any sort of advertising in the school, *particularly for something that wasn’t educationally orientated*. We would see that as quite inappropriate.’ (Brownstone co-opted governor)

‘The boundary I would draw is that what we’d like is to be a facility for the local residents and business community, but I wouldn’t want us to have adverts all over the children’s books – or ‘this dining room is sponsored by McDonalds’, that sort of thing.’ (Redwood head teacher)

In effect, governors argued that they did not want to subject their schools to ‘branding’, as they were very keen to avoid creating the visual impression that their school had been ‘captured’ by outside interests. Furthermore, governors were keen to prevent business from parading under the banner of ‘community involvement’

whilst using schools to promote their products. As one Brownstone governor put it, 'it is not an opportunity for self-advertisement.'

### 7.3.2 Concerns about Curricular Control

The second concern that arose was that businesses might attempt to alter or impose upon the curricular direction of the school. In general, this concern was not over *incorporating* business involvement into the curriculum, since (as argued in Section 7.3.1) many governors argued that business involvement had an important role to play in supporting and *enhancing* the curriculum offer. Indeed, the survey data (Table 7.2) showed that 51.9 per cent of chairs and 49.1 per cent of heads found business-produced curriculum assistance products to be of either moderate or high educational value – as one respondent even argued, business involvement had not been integrated into the curriculum well *enough*:

'If the involvement of business is in things like careers fairs, then that's a bolt-on activity. 'If they have an involvement through the whole *range* of activities and work placements, that is seen as very useful.' (Bluewater chair)

Instead, governors' main concern was that businesses clearly understood that their role should be what might be termed 'supportive yet subordinate'. As can be seen below, governors voiced a strong desire to avoid any involvement that gave businesses the opportunity to prescribe the way in which the curriculum offer was delivered in the classroom:

'As long as there's not inference with decisions regarding curriculum, in terms of what we should be doing in our curriculum offer...then I wouldn't mind.' (Greenleaf teacher governor)

'While [businesses] may commit to specific projects, the control of [those projects] is within the school [and] the governors of the school. We're an educational establishment and they're helping to support what we do, but what we do [needs to be] decided by the people who run this place, not [by] people who are external.' (Supplementary interview chair)

'So long as it doesn't divert resources away from the basic educational task, I think that's been our watchword.' (Brownstone LEA governor)

Many governors also raised a related concern – that increasing the level of business involvement needed to be balanced with the concerns of teaching staff. Governors frequently noted that they believed teachers might fear that their curricular autonomy regarding decisions about content and/or presentation would be undermined by

increased business involvement. Several interviewees, including the one quoted below, acknowledged the tightrope they felt they were walking in order to balance the educational needs of students with the professional needs of staff:

‘I think the teachers are worried that they would be *training* rather than *educating*, and I think that’s a legitimate fear. They’re worried that they would just be formulaic, turning out fodder to go into [being] supermarket staff.’ (Redwood chair)

However, this research also revealed that governors believed that teaching staff were less wary of business involvement than they had been in the recent past. Although several governors commented that educators still had a ways to go – as one supplementary interview chair warned, ‘it’s going to take quite a long time for businesses to be trusted in schools in a way which is more to do with involvement and partnership-working,’ – most governors felt that the atmosphere amongst educators had *improved* considerably from that of a decade ago. When asked about whether teachers were more accepting of business involvement, the long-time chair of governors at Redwood commented, ‘Oh yes – and in the most enlightened schools, very *much* so. I think it *has* been – where it’s occurred – a successful experience for most people.’ Largely, as the comments below illustrate, governors felt both that the issue of business involvement had become less ideological over the past decade, and that such involvement was now more often able to be evaluated on its merits, rather than summarily dismissed due to stereotypes about what such involvement entailed:

‘People were very cynical in the early years about why business got involved in education, and we can *all* be cynical – but actually sometimes we need to recognise private companies when they *do* good work.’ (Supplementary interview chair)

‘Schools have genuinely become more interested in active cooperation with a whole range of people in the world *outside* the institution.’ (Bluewater chair)

‘I think that [the change in control of the local council in the late 1980s] helped to make the business connections much more acceptable again – people started to realise that there are a lot of good practices and support elements that they’d been missing out on.’ (Whitefrost LEA governor)

In general, the case study evidence suggested that governors felt that while the concerns of teachers about the influence of business involvement on the curriculum needed to be given substantial consideration, governors also believed that educators felt less threatened by business involvement than they may have been previously.

### 7.3.3 Concerns about Independence and Autonomy

The third concern surrounded the desire amongst governors to ensure that business involvement would not impinge upon the independence and autonomy of the school, the administration, or the governing body. Governors had three main contentions in this regard. First, governors argued that they would be worried by any restrictive conditions or constraints that might be placed upon their schools in exchange for business involvement:

‘I would not want to become involved with a business that put conditions on getting involved with [the school].’ (Brownstone parent governor)

‘I don’t think we’d ever allow anything that gave businesses to control activities of the school because they had provided assistance.’ (Greenleaf parent governor)

‘My worry [is] that if we start doing [more business involvement], and businesses start putting conditions on their funding, then we’ll start going down the line of some American schools...[where] because of funding, for the sake of *getting* funding, the schools have then had to compromise their status.’ (Brownstone teacher governor)

Second, governors clearly felt that for certain types or levels of business involvement, there needed to be an opportunity for the school to veto specific proposals. Every governors interviewed felt that if his or her school were to engage in business-education relationships, the school should also retain the freedom to *decline* offers of assistance from companies. As one interviewee noted, without a system or policy that allowed for checks and balances:

‘There could possibly be questions about whether the ethos of the business is the same as the ethos of the school, because businesses and schools make decisions based on different aims.’ (Supplementary interview chair)

Similar concerns were voiced by a supplementary interview chair, illustrating the delicate balance that governors throughout the case studies felt their schools would need to strike between ‘supportive assistance’ and surrendering a level of control:

‘We’ve got a breakfast club here at 6.00 in the morning, and suddenly Kellogg’s has decided to send us lots of breakfast cereal, and McDonalds sent us lots of polystyrene cups. And that’s been perceived as a foot in the door at the moment, but we’re watching it, very carefully. We’ll take off them what they’re prepared to give, but we’re not going to allow them in to tell us at the school what to do.’

This issue of the ‘foot in the door’ captures the third concern: that governors wanted to be able to identify and avoid relationships with companies whose philosophical aims or ethical standards diverged from those of the school. Many governors named specific companies and industries of whom they were somewhat wary, frequently mentioning petrol companies such as Shell and BP, soft drink manufacturers, tobacco corporations, and, perhaps unsurprisingly, the ubiquitous McDonald’s. Because these kinds of major multinational companies also often have the most well-developed business involvement programmes, governors were also concerned that these companies might try to use any ‘foot in the door’ to leverage more pervasive kinds of involvement in the future. As such, governors expressed a desire to ensure that any potential business involvement met certain minimum criteria of acceptability (although no governing body in this study had actually codified what these standards would be!) Whilst this concern was shared by governors in all five schools, it was most often cited by governors in schools who had sought (or were seeking) matching funding in their bid for specialist status – Greenleaf, Whitefrost, and Brownstone. Referring to their list of potential donors for their specialist sponsorship drive, Greenleaf’s head said:

‘It didn’t arise, but I would have thought the ‘not environmentally friendly and not politically correct’ – we didn’t write to [such companies], actually, and I can’t imagine that they would have said yes!

Other governors voiced similar worries about the involvement of certain *kinds* of companies, as illustrated below. Together, these comments underline the value that governors saw in having a framework and policy that would permit them to deal with such potential involvement proposals in a consistent and systematic manner:

‘I would worry if BP or Shell came and said ‘we’ll give you money or resources if you take it from us directly.’ And then you’d think ‘what’s their interest?’ (Brownstone teacher governor)

‘Certain multinationals I would have problems with.... [Or if] a body that was identifiable as racist, or supporting racist policies, or behaving that way. The school has enormous commitment to equal opportunities, and [I would not support] anything that would go against that.’ (Supplementary interview chair)

‘When people have gotten concerned about it here in the past, it’s always been that fear of the McDonald’s School, sponsored by Burger King, that kind of thing.’ (Bluewater teacher governor)

### 7.3.4 Concerns about Over-Dependence

The concern raised in the previous section – the desire of governors to be able to decline offers of involvement – dovetails with the forth concern of governors: the desire not to become *over*-dependent on business involvement. Although few governors felt that their schools were at a point where over-dependence was an issue, many wanted to ensure that if their schools *did* begin forging substantial business relationships, they would not be exposed to serious difficulties in their educational offer if there were a sudden inability of businesses to continue these commitments. Other governors were concerned about the unpredictability of business priorities – particularly if businesses perceived involvement in education as an ‘extra.’ As can be seen below, this concern of ‘here today, gone tomorrow’ was shared by a number of governors, particularly given the troubling signs of a slowing national and international economy that were emerging whilst this research was underway:

‘I don’t think we’d ever want to be in a position where we were so dependent on funding from a business source that an area of the curriculum would collapse if it was pulled out.’ (Brownstone LEA governor)

‘You get a major recession [and] one of the other things [companies will] do is look where else the money is going, and if they’re putting a couple of million into a school, they’ll say ‘what result have we got from that?’ Once they start equating all this, they may say ‘it’s not worth putting all this money in, we’ll pull the plug.’ (Whitefrost staff governor)

‘It depends upon how reliable they are. It’s all well and good to have people coming in, but you can’t necessarily *count* on it. We had good links with [one firm] but they relocated.... So you don’t have the stability in planning.’ (Brownstone LEA governor)

‘I think with increased involvement of business, you must ensure a diverse element across the [business] spectrum. It’s too easy to get locked into almost incestuous relationships with a small core of businesses.’ (Redwood parent governor)

While being able to guard against over-dependence was clearly an important issue for governors, most saw over-dependence as the least of their concerns regarding business involvement. As one supplementary interview chair noted wryly:

‘Even the *basics* of business involvement don’t really happen in schools, so talking about potential worst-case scenarios may be jumping the gun a bit!’

### 7.3.5 Concerns about Profit Making

The fifth and final concern focused on business involvement activities that governors perceived as carrying an overt profit motive. Many governors were extremely uneasy about potentially profit-making business involvement activities, which were often viewed by respondents as an unwelcome attempt at the ‘privatisation’ of education. Two particular activities bore the brunt of this suspicion: central government’s proposals for paying for physical infrastructure improvement via the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and the for-profit management of schools. Looking first at the issue of for-profit management, many governors felt that significant uncertainty surrounded central government’s position. As can be seen below, governors expressed concern that a strong endorsement of for-profit management by central government might negatively affect the school ethos or create a situation in which profit – rather than education – determined policy decisions:

‘I would be concerned about business consultancies that are interested in following the course of privatisation – the public private partnership type things.’ (Redwood LEA governor)

‘[If] you have a company rather than a school controlling things – then maybe you’re going into a more contentious area where schools are being run by business motives.’ (Greenleaf head teacher)

‘There is fear that [business involvement is] a way of the government running away from its responsibilities and wanting to privatise education generally – that it’s ‘thin-end-of-the-wedge-ism.’ (Brownstone LEA governor)

‘I can only talk about the abstract, [but] if privatisation of school management was on the agenda, then.... I’d be nervous.’ (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

‘If you can deliver a better education at the end of the day, then that’s fine. But I am concerned about any move towards privatising schools or LEAs.’ (Bluewater LEA governor)

Governors concerns about the potential impact of PFI on the ethos and independence of their respective schools were even more pronounced than their concerns about for-profit management, as is illustrated by the comments below. Many governors expressed misgivings about the basic philosophy of PFI,<sup>4</sup> arguing that the government should not encourage profit-making incentives in state education, as well as that such initiatives should not force schools to surrender a measure of their fiscal

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<sup>4</sup> See Section 2.4.3 for a brief explanation of how PFI is intended to operate.



autonomy and administrative flexibility. Reflecting the beliefs of many interviewees, one Bluewater co-opted governor noted that:

‘[What] makes me object to [PFI] is that [it] is really a way of *not* spending public money, and not negotiating the bigger issues of the role of taxation and wealth transfer in maintaining a quality of life for the public.’

However, many governors also recognised that despite these concerns about profit-making types of business involvement, the current political climate meant that PFI was often the only way to obtain much-needed infrastructure improvements:

‘We’re just about to sign a PFI.... I’m opposed to PFI in principle, but if we don’t do it, the school will fall apart, literally.’ (Supplementary Interview Chair)

‘ I think in sheer economics, [PFI] is not particularly good terms for the public sector to buy resources – but if it’s available and there’s no other choice, the choice is either we can have crap buildings or we explore PFI.’ (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

‘We might, a few years ago, have had a lot of difficulties about [PFI], but now let’s be real. We need a [new] building, and if this is the way we’re to get it, for heaven’s sake, there’s no point in shooting ourselves in the foot.’ (Supplementary interview chair)

‘If we needed a new gym and the only way we could get it was through PFI, I suspect in the end it would come – but there would be an interesting debate on it.’ (Brownstone head teacher)

These concerns over potentially profit-making types of business involvement were also reflected the broader survey group. Of the eight types of business involvement on which governors were surveyed, Table 7.4 shows that opposition to both PFI and for-profit management was markedly higher than was opposition to the other six types of business involvement (see Table 7.1), where opposition was only approximately five per cent. Although Table 7.4 demonstrates that PFI and for-profit management were the types of business involvement opposed by the largest percentage of respondents, it should also be noted that opposition to these activities was not as overwhelming as might have been expected. Not only were a significant majority of both chairs and heads either neutral or supportive of PFI (70.3 per cent of chairs and 70.2 per cent of heads), but on the issue of for-profit management, a *majority* of heads surveyed (52.7 per cent) were either neutral or supportive.

**Table 7.4: Opinions about For-Profit Management and the Private Finance Initiative**

Business Involvement Activity	Support (%)	Neutral (%)	Oppose (%)	(N)
For-profit education management (Chairs)	9.3	36.0	54.7	75
For-profit education management (Heads)	10.9	41.8	47.3	55
Private Finance Initiative (Chairs)	33.8	36.5	29.7	74
Private Finance Initiative (Heads)	38.6	31.6	29.8	57

*Differences between chairs and heads were not statistically significant.*

### 7.3.6 A Note about Pragmatism

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, governors felt that a strategic framework would be a valuable tool for both evaluating potential business involvement proposals and determining the compatibility of particular projects with the broader strategy of the school. In light of the more targeted concerns elaborated upon above, it seems even more reasonable that governors would want to ensure that policies were in place to address such concerns. This seems particularly true since governors admitted (as illustrated below) that even where they harboured concerns, they were prepared to be pragmatic and *consider* all forms of business involvement, particularly if doing so might prove to be the only viable way to provide a better educational experience for students:

‘The involvement of business in schools is largely on the basis of needs and musts rather than cans and shoulds.’ (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

‘The word ‘privatisation’ is my scare, and I’m worried about that. [But] I think that as long as there aren’t any conditions, I really don’t see the problem.... Why should we say no to the resources coming in as long as they’re condition free?’ (Brownstone teacher governor)

‘Our basic approach is that we’ve excluded nothing – we haven’t necessarily signed up to everything, but we’ve excluded nothing, and I think that’s the kind of healthy approach we want to take.’ (Whitefrost LEA governor)

This pragmatic approach was also reflected in the survey, as a substantial minority of respondents felt that the financial and resource realities of running a state school had led them to examine business involvement in some form. When asked whether financial or resource constraints had ever resulted in their governing body considering business involvement or links that it might otherwise *not* have considered, 45.2 per cent of chairs (N=84) and 35.7 per cent of heads (N=70)

responded in the affirmative.<sup>5</sup> Given that governors were prepared to be pragmatic in their approach towards business involvement, it is not surprising that many governors felt a ‘defensive’ component to a business involvement strategy might be beneficial.

#### **7.4 BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT, COMMUNITY BUILDING, & STRATEGIC PLANNING**

The third advantage was that governors felt business involvement could be an important strategic tool in developing relationships between schools and communities. First, it will be argued that governors felt governing bodies themselves had a responsibility to build relationships with the community – not least because governors felt that effective strategic planning should consider community needs. Second, it will be argued that governors perceived business involvement as an important component in the general process of engaging the wider community in the life of the school. Finally, it will be argued that governors saw business involvement activities – if properly implemented – as a way to build community by breaking down the traditional mutual suspicion between the state schools and the private sector.

##### **7.4.1 Community Involvement and Strategic Planning**

Although the composition of governing bodies is supposed to provide a reflection of the various communities that the school serves, governors acknowledged that the relationship between schools and their surrounding communities was frequently underdeveloped. As is illustrated below, it was clear that interviewees felt that governors and governing bodies should be more proactive in both seeking to understand the needs of the broader community and considering those needs when making decisions about the school:

‘Without the perspectives of the...members of the community, the governing body can’t make decisions that it can confidently *believe* to reflect the opinions of these stakeholders.’ (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

‘[There should be] community involvement in looking strategically at how the school operates.’ (Redwood LEA governor)

‘I think there needs to be a greater coordination of the community’s view, *strategically*, of what they want from their [local] education establishment.’ (Bluewater co-opted governor)

‘We have set ourselves the task of being a good community school and serving the needs of the community immediately around us. So within that,

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<sup>5</sup> However, while respondents *considered* such activities, there should be no presumption that respondents believed that such activities would be either beneficial or detrimental if *implemented*.

our strategic planning is about setting the priorities we need to concentrate on to achieve those general aims.’ (Brownstone LEA governor)

‘Ideally, [the school] being a community resource, the community should be allowed to feed into what they see as the role of their local school.’ (Whitefrost chair)

This evidence suggested that governors recognised the general planning benefits that could result from improving school-community relationships. Governors were also specific in relation to business involvement, noting that strengthening their schools’ relationships with the business community was an important component of this broader community-building process:

‘I believe that it *should* be part of the governors’ role to look at the community side of their job, in a much stronger way than they do [now] – community meaning firms *and* people.’ (Redwood co-opted governor)

‘My view is that if part of our strategic plan is around getting closer links with the community...then it’s inevitable that you’ll get more involvement with business.’ (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

‘I think the [school’s strategy regarding] interaction with business partnerships is part of a wider issue, which is really the interaction [of the school] with the real world.’ (Greenleaf co-opted governor)

Given the responsibility that governors felt for acting as a liaison between the school and the community, the comments above suggest that governors felt it was important to engage the community in the life of the school. The next two sections examine the ways by which governors believed business involvement in *particular* might help schools become more integral members of the community whilst simultaneously eroding the perception of state schools as insular and change-averse entities.

#### **7.4.2 Business Involvement as a Community Building Tool**

First, governors noted the potential value of using business involvement to build or strengthen relationships with the community in *general*. Whilst governors acknowledged that building relationships with the local resident community was extremely important, they also argued that gaining the support of the business community was equally as valuable. Because businesses are frequently integral components of the local community, governors recognised that strong connections with business could provide an important base of community support for the mission of the school. As is evident from the comments below, many governors saw business

involvement as a way for their schools to demonstrate their commitment to broader community involvement in the life of the institution. Governors hoped that this demonstration would not only create a positive image of the school in the broader community, but would also encourage *other* community stakeholders to become more engaged with the school and to view the school as a community resource:

‘[We’re working on] improving the relationship with the community generally – and I think local businesses are quite important, because they’ve potentially got quite a high profile.’ (Supplementary interview chair)

‘One of the issues about becoming a technology college school is that we want to open the facilities to the community, so the idea is that we will have a relationship with both the local *resident* community and also the local *business* community.... If we draw in the local business community, that draws in a whole range of experience for the children’ (Redwood head teacher)

‘[The head] is quite into these things, having links with different businesses.... It brings a good reputation for the school as well, and makes the school quite proactive on that front.’ (Greenleaf teacher governor)

‘I think there *has* to be [business involvement], because it’s about the community, isn’t it – and business is a key player in the community. I think it’s about aspiration for young people, really, in its widest sense.’ (Redwood LEA governor)

#### **7.4.3 Business Involvement as a Bridge between Business and Education**

Second, governors believed that besides demonstrating the school’s *general* interest and willingness to become an active member of the community, business involvement was a potential vehicle for assisting in fighting a more *specific* problem: the traditional mutual mistrust between industry and education. In its simplest terms, governors felt that increased familiarity was one of the strongest ways to engender and increase trust between both camps. Governors argued that business involvement activities, if properly designed, could provide both schools and businesses with an opportunity to work together in a specific and limited manner. By building relationships and trust through such small-scale and well-monitored interactions, governors believed that schools and businesses could begin forming a broader basis for mutual understanding:

‘Anything which breaks down the barrier – well, there’s no barrier, it’s just another world – anything that breaks down the difference between academic life and industry, etc. is a *good* thing.’ (Redwood foundation governor)

‘I think the ways that we have business contacts at the moment is very valuable, hopefully for both sides. As for us, it’s most definitely [valuable], especially for staff and student development...[and] if you have a positive relationship with business, it helps.’ (Greenleaf head teacher)

‘The school isn’t the only educational institution, and I think that links with the community *enrich* the learning environment for the students. In order to achieve excellence, you *need* partnership with all concerned.’ (Brownstone parent governor)

While governors noted the opportunities that such an approach could offer to students, as well as to staff in terms of professional development, they also noted the benefits that mutual trust and sustained involvement might offer to school management. As these respondents noted, improved relationships between schools and businesses could eventually provide schools new perspectives on administrative issues as well:

‘I certainly think that at the level of management, *huge* opportunities are [currently] lost for senior management teams in schools to observe and share with senior management teams in business.’ (Bluewater head teacher)

‘I think business *does* need to be involved in schools; [business] brings an expertise to education which education doesn’t otherwise have. [And] it’s also about finding a meeting point between the needs of schools, the needs of education, and the needs of business.’ (Redwood parent governor)

‘Britain has a voluntary sector ethos, and business can provide the *people* who can assist in education management. These individuals can possibly help the management of schools be more efficient, effective, and visionary.’ (Whitefrost LEA governor)

Given the pressure from central government for schools to manage themselves more efficiently and effectively, such benefits – if they were to be realised in practice – might prove extremely valuable if the traditional suspicion between schools and businesses could be jettisoned in favour of a more harmonious relationship. Acknowledging the advantages that schools could gain by being more open to working with businesses and other community groups, Brownstone’s head summed up the rationale for using business involvement to foster stronger community relationships:

‘My increasing perspective is that if any initiative [for business involvement] is supportive of the achievement of the children, then I’m personally not opposed to it. Because clearly, we’re all here to support and raise achievement.’

## 7.5 PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE OF BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT THROUGH STRATEGIC PLANNING

Finally, governors argued that business involvement should be addressed strategically because it was their responsibility, as governors, to be prepared to contend with issues that were poised to impact upon the school in the future. Both the survey and interview respondents indicated that they felt that business involvement in education was a growing phenomenon. Given this trend, they further believed that they had a responsibility as governors to determine the extent of, and their school's approach towards, business involvement in the coming years. However, governors also acknowledged the general *absence* to date of any substantial strategic planning regarding business involvement. Each of these issues is now examined in turn.

### 7.5.1 Governor Opinions about the Future of Business Involvement

Survey and interview respondents overwhelmingly felt that business involvement in education would become more common in the near future. First, 91.5 per cent of surveyed chairs (N=82) and 95.6 per cent of surveyed heads (N=68) saw business involvement becoming more common 'over the next few years'. Second, nearly two-thirds of both chairs (63.5 per cent, N=85) and heads (65.7 per cent, N=70) saw their *own* schools increasing business involvement over the next two years, while only 4.7 per cent and 2.9 per cent, respectively, felt that such involvement in their own schools would decrease. The interview data strongly supported this finding, as respondents felt (see below) that business involvement in education was poised to increase in the coming years – and that their respective schools would need to determine the approach they would take towards this broader trend. Notably, *none* of the 47 interviewees suggested that they expected a *decrease* in the levels of business involvement their respective schools:

'At this point, we want more and more business involvement, leadership involvement, so that expertise *can* be imparted, and the children *can* be motivated. I think at this moment you don't have that.' (Brownstone chair)

'[Business involvement] is not something, really, that we've talked a great deal about, but as we develop I think we will have to do that. Because as we improve our success as an institution, we become more attractive to other people [who will want to] work *with* us, and we *will* need to have a framework in which we do that.' (Supplementary interview chair)

One reason why governors felt business involvement would become more commonplace was because they believed that the advantages of business involvement often outweighed the disadvantages. As Table 7.5 illustrates, nearly two-thirds of survey respondents felt that business involvement activities were worth the effort necessary to sustain them. The interview data supports this survey evidence, as can be seen in the comments below.

**Table 7.5: Opinion on Whether Education-Business Links are Worth the Effort Required to Sustain Them**

Response	Chairs (%) (N=85)	Heads (%) (N=71)
Yes	64.7	63.4
No	18.8	11.3
Unsure	16.5	25.4

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*Differences between chairs and heads were not statistically significant.*

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‘I, personally, would be a *huge* supporter of increased business involvement in the school. I think there’s an awful lot they could do – not just as a supplier, but in a *relationship* way.’ (Bluewater co-opted governor)

‘I think [business involvement] should stay. I think it’s a superb way of broadening the offer we give the kids. As long as the businesses continue to support it, I think the schools will.’ (Brownstone head teacher)

‘I would like to see a marked increase in business involvement [and] I think the governing body *must* be involved in that. Because it is something which is still to be fully explored.’ (Redwood parent governor)

A second reason why governors may have felt business links were poised to increase in the future was because a substantial minority of survey respondents reported having *already* seen a positive change in the ethos of their school as a result of business involvement. While three-fifths of survey respondents (58.2 per cent of chairs (N=79) and 61.2 per cent of heads (N=67)) reported not seeing any such change, 35.4 per cent of chairs and 35.8 per cent of heads felt that such involvement had already led to a *positive* change in school ethos, while only 6.3 per cent of chairs and 3.0 per cent of heads felt that such involvement had led to a negative change. Presuming that the level of business involvement in each respondent’s school was sufficient to permit an informed response, it appeared that although existing business involvement was rarely seen as having a *negative* effect on school ethos, many respondents did not see it as having either a positive *or* a negative effect. However,



it was also possible that some schools may not have yet had *enough* business involvement for such involvement to have *had* an discernable impact on the overall school ethos. If this was the case, then – extrapolating from the instances in which respondents indicated either a positive or a negative change – there appeared to be a trend amongst chairs and heads towards feeling that business involvement often has a positive impact when it reaches a ‘measurable’ level.

The third reason for why governors may have felt business involvement was poised to increase was because they perceived that central government *supported* such an increase. As can be seen in the comments below, governors noted that they felt the current Labour central government was strongly promoting public-private partnership initiatives in the social services. Given this governmental support for increasing private sector involvement in areas like education, governors felt that it was quite likely that the levels of business involvement in education would increase. As such, governors wanted to ensure that their schools were in a position to handle this potential increase if and when it materialised:

‘[I think] government has the view that if they can *get* more business involvement in schools, they’d be interested in doing so.’ (Supplementary interview chair)

‘They [central government] can see scope for the private sector to get involved in the delivery of education, and they’re going with it firmly down that road.’ (Brownstone LEA governor)

‘One of the things is that [government is] very frustrated with what they see as the lack of progress – [so they are encouraged when] they see the successful parts of the private sector doing things very quickly, and throwing money at things when you want to get things done.’ (Supplementary interview chair)

‘I think government feels that successful businesses are successful because they’ve got the right people in charge, and that some of these people ought to be looking in at these schools.’ (Redwood foundation governor)

### **7.5.2 Future Responsibility and Strategic Planning**

The evidence above suggested that governors found the issues surrounding business involvement to be of growing importance, not least due to the potential increase in frequency and scope of these activities in coming years. Because of this perceived growing importance, the evidence also suggested that governors believed it was the within the remit of governing bodies to define the policies of their respective schools

in this regard. Governors acknowledged that whilst the current approach of many schools and governing bodies towards business involvement was *ad hoc*, it *was* important for schools to have guidance on how to manage these activities more systematically in future. As is illustrated below, governors believed that providing this guidance and planning was, at least partially, within the remit and responsibility of governing bodies themselves:

‘I think one of the difficulties is that [business involvement activities] are nearly always add-on, additional projects. I think there is much to be gained by trying [in future] to make as many of those links as is possible *integral* to the structure of the school.’ (Bluewater head teacher)

‘There’s an awareness that we [on the governing body] need to be a bit more professional about tapping into the business community.... There are concerns that we haven’t really done as much as we *could* have done with the funding and the connections with the business world. [Particularly because if] we *didn’t* have interaction, I think it would be seriously detrimental to the future of the school.’ (Whitefrost LEA governor)

## 7.6 CHAPTER SEVEN CONCLUSION

This chapter was the first of two chapters designed to answer the fourth and final research question, and in so doing offers both a conclusion *and* a transition in relation to the issues of school governance, business involvement, and strategic planning. First, the conclusion. In the course of providing the context necessary for interpreting the evidence to be presented in Chapter Eight, Chapter Seven also provides a distinct new contribution to the literature in its own right. The research evidence presented in this chapter offers a thorough exploration of governors’ opinions about, concerns regarding, and perspectives on business involvement in education. The research evidence also outlines four potential advantages that governors felt would result from engaging in strategic planning in regards to business involvement. As such, the research in this chapter provides substantial insight into an area of emerging policy interest in which no substantial empirical research has been conducted since the brief survey research of Baginsky et al. (1991). Evidence presented herein therefore supports the main thrust of this thesis, while simultaneously making a unique contribution to both the school governance and the business involvement literature.

Yet Chapter Seven also provides a transition. The main purpose of Chapter Seven was to use empirical data to confirm that governors in this study actually supported

the suggestions of Glegg (1997) and Tulloch (1999), who argued that governing bodies should take a strategic role in determining the level and type of business involvement in their schools. Evidence presented in this chapter confirmed that governors believed business involvement was a legitimate strategic planning issue that *should* be incorporated into governing body strategic planning processes, yet also confirmed that these same governors agreed that there was an *absence* in their schools of strategic planning on business involvement issues. This empirical discrepancy between theory and practice therefore demonstrated that business involvement *was* an appropriate lens through which to examine the practical policy relevance of the strategic planning barriers identified earlier. These findings therefore allow for the transition to the final data chapter, in which further research evidence on business involvement and strategic planning will be presented in an attempt to illustrate the practical policy relevance of the strategic planning barriers identified in Chapters Five and Six.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### STRATEGIC PLANNING BARRIERS AND THE BUSINESS INVOLVEMENT CASE

#### 8.0 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter demonstrated that business involvement was an issue on which governors believed that strategic planning was desirable yet absent. It was therefore argued that business involvement was a suitable policy lens through which to address the fourth main research question:

Can it be demonstrated that the identification of these strategic planning barriers has practical policy relevance and importance?

Building upon the background information of Chapter Seven, this final data chapter seeks to demonstrate that the previously-identified strategic planning barriers have practical policy relevance and importance. This chapter seeks to do so by illustrating that the systematic application of these barriers provided a robust explanation of the reasons for the absence of governing body strategic planning on business involvement issues. By thus demonstrating that the strategic planning barriers identified earlier in this thesis *did* exist as practical and significant barriers to governing bodies in relation to their strategic planning on business involvement issues, it will be argued that the fourth main research question can be answered satisfactorily in the affirmative.

In order to fulfil this task, the absence of strategic planning on business involvement will be examined in the context of each of the strategic planning barriers. These respective assessments will seek to determine whether each barrier was influential in inhibiting governing body strategic planning. Sections 8.1 through 8.4 will seek to determine the influence of the four institutional-level strategic planning barriers (identified in Chapter Five) on strategic planning about business involvement. Section 8.1 presents evidence for the influence of the ‘monitoring culture’ barrier on strategic planning about business involvement. Section 8.2 presents evidence for the influence of the ‘varying involvement’ barrier on strategic planning about business involvement. Section 8.3 presents evidence for the influence of the ‘tangible-task-based results’ barrier on strategic planning about business involvement. Finally, Section 8.4 presents evidence for the influence of the ‘staff delegation’ barrier on strategic planning about business involvement.

Sections 8.5 through 8.8 will then seek to determine the influence of the six central governmental-level barriers (identified in Chapter Six) on strategic planning about business involvement.<sup>1</sup> Section 8.5 presents evidence for the influence of the ‘time constraints and volunteer expectations’ barrier on strategic planning about business involvement. Section 8.6 presents evidence for the influence of the ‘financing system’ barrier on strategic planning about business involvement. Section 8.7 presents evidence for the influence of the ‘communication’ barrier on strategic planning about business involvement. Section 8.8 presents evidence for the influence of the ‘trust’ barrier on strategic planning about business involvement. Section 8.9 summarises these research findings and concludes by addressing the value of using such a heuristic approach in illustrating the theoretical framework identified earlier in this thesis.

Finally, while quantitative and qualitative data are used in conjunction when possible in this chapter, in some contexts quantitative data were not available. In these instances, evidence was derived solely from the qualitative portion of this research.

## **8.1 THE ‘MONITORING CULTURE’ BARRIER**

The first institutional-level barrier identified in Chapter Five was that of a ‘monitoring culture’ within governing bodies. It was argued that in many governing bodies, there was a tendency to prioritise monitoring activities over strategic planning activities. It was also argued that whilst governors did have statutory responsibilities in many of these areas, it appeared that governors often hewed closer to the reactive administrative portion of those responsibilities than to the proactive strategic portion of such responsibilities. The influence of this barrier on business involvement and strategic planning is illustrated below.

### **8.1.1 The Influence of Monitoring Impediments**

Despite the fact that governors thought business involvement was a legitimate and important strategic planning issue, it was apparent that in *practice*, the habit of taking a reactive monitoring approach rather than a proactive strategic approach still prevailed. Furthermore, this appeared to be the ‘best-case’ scenario, as the survey data suggested that in many instances, governing bodies had not even *reached* the point where a monitoring culture would begin to impede strategic planning. When

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<sup>1</sup> The barriers of paperwork and legislation will be discussed in the broader context of the time barrier for the purposes of the business involvement issue. Section 8.50 provides the rationale for this decision.

respondents were asked whether they (or any other governors) were involved in monitoring business relationships with their school, fewer than half of both chairs (45.2 per cent, N=84) and heads (47.9 per cent, N=71) reported that monitoring by the governing body even took place. As the following comments illustrate, governors usually reported that their activities related to business involvement – where such involvement even existed – focused around monitoring the outcomes of existing (and often *ad hoc*) business involvement activities, rather than around a proactive assessment of how those activities might fit into a broader and integrated strategic framework for the future of the school:

‘We do have reports to the governing body [about business involvement] – but they seem to go in one ear and out the other. So I’m not very well aware of [business involvement]. I think it doesn’t tend to be discussed very much *in* the governing body, and...there isn’t really an area where it slots neatly into the sub-committee [sic] structure.’ (Brownstone LEA governor)

‘If [business involvement] did arise in our discussion, it would just be for information. So we’d probably be told about [business involvement activities], but I’m not sure they would really be discussed, or that the *reasons* for them would be discussed.’ (Greenleaf LEA governor)

‘On the question of how much our governors know about [business involvement] – if there’s been a key event that has been sponsored by the EBP, then clearly they would be made aware of that. [And] some of them represent business, so in that sense they are directly involved in the governance of the school....’ (Brownstone co-opted governor)

Additionally, this research suggested that this propensity to monitor meant that even if governors *did* pay attention to business involvement issues, they rarely treated these issues strategically. Instead, the influence of a monitoring culture tended to mean that governing bodies treated potentially strategic issues in an *ad hoc* and reactive manner, dealing with such issues only when they were presented *to* the governing body by staff or external parties. In practice, the monitoring culture meant that governors frequently treated reports about business involvement as administrative records of past activities, rather than as lessons and blueprints for determining potential future ones. The comments below exemplify this tendency, as these respondents noted that how governors tended to approach business involvement issues in an *ad hoc* manner, rarely perceiving how such matters might be integrated into a greater strategic framework:

‘I think [business involvement] would be addressed on a very specific, case-by-case basis. Just because it really is a standard pattern. You discuss a specific case, and then you end up having a wide-ranging discussion of all the issues, and you close that discussion with a particular decision about a particular issue.’ (Bluewater LEA governor)

‘Rather than governors seeing [business involvement] as ‘oh, that’s something separate with business’ – it’s really *part* of the process of strategic planning.’ (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

### 8.1.2 The Example of Work Experience

One key example of this monitoring tendency in relation to business involvement can be found in the issue of work experience. Initially, the survey appeared to provide encouraging signs regarding the approach of governing bodies towards strategic planning about business involvement. Indeed, over seven out of ten chairs (N=86) and heads (N=70) (74.4 per cent and 72.9 per cent, respectively) reported that their governing bodies did *discuss* their school’s business involvement or links, an impressively high – although somewhat unexpected – response. However, it soon became apparent that the dichotomous response option of the survey question itself might have created an overly-optimistic impression regarding the extent of governing body discussion about business involvement. Because the wording of the survey question asked respondents to simply report the presence or absence of such discussions, rather than the quality or frequency of them, even *minimal* discussions of business involvement would allow for an affirmative response.

However, the interview evidence offers a more detailed exploration of what governors usually meant by ‘discussion’ of business involvement, and this evidence points to very little strategy and a great deal of monitoring. The qualitative research found that such discussions rarely – if ever – focused on the potential *strategic* questions about business involvement. Instead, as is illustrated by the comments below, such ‘discussions’ almost always focused on monitoring the school’s work experience programmes – indeed, governors frequently cited work experience as their main (or sole) knowledge of business involvement with their school:

‘[There’s] the work experience programme – I know a bit about that because [my employer is] part of it – we’ve had quite a number of work experience students come in over the course of a year, and I always have one from [the school]. Apart from that, I’m not very clued up on the area at all.’ (Brownstone LEA governor)

‘There’s not a huge amount [of business involvement] compared to other schools. The school has various links with the business community, in terms of work experience and things like that that can happen. But [the school] doesn’t have a lot [of business involvement] coming in, beyond the governors themselves.’ (Redwood LEA governor)

‘Obviously there are things like placements, for example, and I’ve got some people to take on students outside of school for work experience, and things like that. But I couldn’t actually name companies that have that relationship with the school.’ (Greenleaf LEA governor)

‘At sixth form level we have links with businesses in relation to work experience there, case study visits, and so on. But the only other real links are with the governors of the school, [some of whom] have got business links.’ (Redwood head teacher)

While governors may have limited their knowledge about business involvement to work experience programmes – i.e., an issue on which the information was presented *to* them – it was still theoretically possible that governors used this information to take a more strategic approach towards how business involvement more generally might either be improved or better integrated into future school strategy. However, the qualitative research found that governing bodies usually received reports on work experience in a *pro forma* manner. Governors noted that these reports usually consisted of boilerplate documents that provided the annual number of placements, the number of employers engaged, and summaries of student and employer experiences. Governors also felt that these reports were often simply administrative acknowledgements, rather than the starting points for substantive discussions. To illustrate, here are two typical governor responses, explaining how their respective governing bodies acquire knowledge about the work experience schemes:

‘Work placements are made through the staff of the school, and then they’re simply reported to the governing body at the end.’ (Greenleaf chair)

‘[Business involvement] is never mentioned at the governors’ meeting. [But] I think last year all the kids did work experience, and they got excellent records sent back by the employers about the kids.’ (Redwood LEA governor)

In conclusion, although work experience and/or other kinds of business involvement may be *mentioned* with some regularity at governing body meetings, the habits of the monitoring culture tended to inhibit any substantial discussion of how that information could be put to use in a strategic context.



## 8.2 THE 'VARYING LEVELS OF GOVERNOR INVOLVEMENT' BARRIER

The second institutional-level barrier identified in Chapter Five was that of varying levels of governor involvement. It was argued that the burden of governors' responsibilities was frequently carried out by a small core of governors, and that governors who were *outside* the core were often 'single-issue' advocates. It was therefore argued that the widely varying levels of governor involvement impeded strategic planning by creating a situation where neither core nor non-core governors felt that strategic planning was a personal priority. The influence of this barrier on business involvement and strategic planning is illustrated below.

### 8.2.1 The Role of the Core Governors

First, this research found that the general problems associated with the core governors and strategic planning were also evident in relation to the approach of core governors towards strategic planning on business involvement issues. Interviewees reported that the core governors often felt that they had numerous responsibilities that were more pressing than strategic planning, and that strategic planning about business involvement (as well as many other issues) received a lower priority as a result. While this approach by the core governors was partly attributable to the time pressures created by central government demands (see Section 8.5), some of the rationale for this approach is clearly due to the fact that a small core of governors – either by choice or by circumstance – frequently conducted a disproportionately greater amount of their governing body's work. As these comments illustrate, the potential for focusing on the strategic planning aspects of issues like business involvement was frequently impeded by the pressures created by the disproportionate workload taken on by the core governors:

'At the moment, there's not a great deal [of business involvement], really. [Partly because governors] find it difficult to keep up with the detail that they need to keep up with. A lot of it has to do with the workload, but it's also to do with focus.' (Supplementary interview chair)

'I think it's [an issue of] time. In order to [pursue business involvement], you need to go out and meet people, and you need to come in and see things. And obviously, business is going to want to focus on what its [aims] are as well.... It's a huge responsibility.' (Greenleaf head teacher)

'[Our school's business involvement is] on an ad hoc basis.... If you see things triggered by industry in the school, invariably they're triggered by the chair [in his capacity as industrialist]. But at some stage, he wants to stand down, and then the governors are going to be in a sorry state.' (Redwood foundation governor)

### 8.2.2 The Role of the Non-Core Governors

While the barrier of varying involvement impedes *core* governors because of their disproportionate responsibilities, the barrier impedes strategic planning by *non-core* governors for a different reason – yet the results in terms of strategic planning about business involvement are the same. The research presented in Chapter Five indicated that for various reasons, non-core governors were often less confident about their role than were the (generally more experienced) core governors. It was argued that these non-core governors were therefore more likely to attempt to make their contributions either ‘on the edges’ or by sticking to ‘what they knew.’ However, as the following comments make clear, neither of these approaches is likely to lead to contributions on the strategic planning front, particularly on an issue like business involvement. Instead, respondents suggested that non-core governors generally left the issue of business involvement to ‘others’ – presumably the core governors – and that as such, non-core governors had little direct interest in how strategic planning in this area might be pursued:

‘We do talk about our business partners in the community, we do talk about the awards evening, but we don’t talk in great detail at the governors’ meetings about those things, because we have sub-committees [sic]...you definitely get more information if you’re on those specific committees.’ (Brownstone co-opted governor)

‘I think it’s hard for anyone to have an *understanding* of what all [the business involvement possibilities] are – for instance, [the chair] has narrowed it down to three or four. I’m not even sure how up to date [the business co-opted governor] is on all the initiatives.’ (Whitefrost LEA governor)

‘[The school] has a business relationship with a management consultancy, something the previous head introduced, and which she always said was enormously beneficial. She never produced a report for the governing body, and no governor ever *asked* her to produce a report. I haven’t the *faintest* idea of what it led to or what it does.’ (Bluewater LEA governor)

‘The extent to which the governors see what is going on is extremely limited.... I tend to go in[to the school] about once a year.... So [business involvement] may or may not be happening to a massive extent, and I wouldn’t be in a good position to judge.’ (Brownstone LEA governor)

### 8.2.3 The Influence of Varying Governor Involvement

Not only do these qualitative findings suggest why there may be a lack of responsibility being taken in strategic planning about business involvement, so too do the quantitative findings. Nearly nine out of ten chairs (88.2 per cent, N=85) and

heads (87.3 per cent, N=71) surveyed reported that there was *no* governor assigned to coordinate even the *monitoring* of business involvement activities. Furthermore, only about one in ten chair or head (11.8 per cent and 11.3 per cent, respectively) said that such delegated monitoring took place, while 1.4 per cent of heads were unsure. Clearly, strategic planning in regards to business involvement can and does slip through the crack created by such ‘two-tiered’ governing bodies. This problem can be traced directly to the widely varying levels of governor involvement; if governing bodies were more balanced in terms of commitment, this research suggests that there would be a greater likelihood of all governors having the opportunity to engage in strategic planning. With the core governors saying that their focus and workload forced them to put their priorities into areas other than strategic planning about business involvement, and with the non-core governors arguing that someone with more knowledge about the issue should be doing this work, it is perhaps unsurprising that strategic planning on business involvement is noticeably absent.

### **8.3 THE ‘LIMITED TO TANGIBLE TASKS’ BARRIER**

The third institutional-level barrier identified in Chapter Five was the tendency of governors to apply their expertise and influence to a limited range of issues that provided ‘tangible’ results – generally finance, premises, and staff relations. It was argued first that this tendency led governing bodies to seek governors who could fill certain ‘tangible skills gaps’ on the governing body (such as ‘a lawyer’ or ‘an accountant’), and second, that the pursuit of tangible results often meant avoiding paying attention to ‘primarily educational’ issues. As such, it was argued that the emphasis on tangible results meant that many governors had minimal understanding of the underlying (and more intangible) *educational* issues that faced their schools in the longer term. The influence of this barrier on business involvement and strategic planning is illustrated below.

#### **8.3.1 Short-Term Tangible Results versus Long-Term Vision**

The first main claim (above) was that governing bodies placed a greater emphasis on the skills that helped achieve ‘tangible’ short-term results than they did on the ability to set a broader general vision for the future of the school. In the context of strategic planning and business involvement, this emphasis was evident in three main ways. First, as suggested in Chapter Five, pursuing short-term tangible results usually leads to more immediate rewards for governors than does setting a broad future vision for

the school. These kinds of results make the pursuit of short-term issues more attractive to many governors, while simultaneously making efforts to provide a long-term strategic vision comparatively *less* attractive. Second, and compounding this problem, the skills necessary to contribute to such a strategic planning endeavour are rarely provided to governors, either via formal training or via the informal expertise of current governors. Since governors are rarely recruited for their vision, many do not possess such strategic planning skills. Instead, Chapter Five illustrated that governors often simply sought to apply the skills they *already* possess towards generating tangible short-term results. Given these two hindrances alone, governors noted that likelihood of anyone on the governing body actually *pursuing* strategic planning on business involvement was quite low:

‘It could only be beneficial if the governing body *did* [have a business involvement strategy] – but you see, we aren’t *trained* in that way, so we all bring whatever we bring from our own lives.’ (Whitefrost LEA governor)

‘[The governing body] doesn’t ascertain, for potential governors, what their [non-professional] skills background is – which would enable the appropriate additional information [about strategic planning] to be imparted to them. And that is a major concern.’ (Redwood parent governor)

Third, this research found that even if governing bodies *did* raise questions about how business involvement should be addressed, the same emphasis on short-term ‘tangible results’ over long-term strategic vision still applied. As the respondents below observed, the discussion of business involvement was often approached from the short-term ‘tangible results’ paradigm rather than from the ‘long-term vision’ paradigm:

‘It’s about building [business involvement] *into* an essential framework for the school – [but] we’re still thinking in terms of *additionality*, I fear, rather than locking it in at the substructure.’ (Bluewater head teacher)

‘Governors *should* also be fighting for the school *externally*, in relation to all the governmental and quasi-governmental and community organisations with whom the school needs to build relationships in order to be successful. But most governors tend to stay on more familiar ground.’ (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

Although the ‘long-term vision’ paradigm would permit governing bodies to address the issue of business involvement in a more integrated way, such a strategy-based approach is also less likely to produce immediate results. As a result, the philosophy of many governing bodies – to favour short-term results over long-term vision –

makes achieving a strategic approach towards business involvement substantially more difficult.

### 8.3.2 Business Involvement as a Primarily Education-Related Issue

The second main claim in regarding this barrier was that the preoccupation of governing bodies with pursuing tangible issues – to the exclusion of primarily education-related ones – meant that governors often had low specific knowledge of the educational issues facing their schools. The evidence supported this contention in the context of business involvement, but it is first important to note the difference between governors' *opinions* about strategic planning policy in regards business involvement and governors' *knowledge* about the current state of business involvement at the school. As was amply demonstrated in Chapter Seven, governors' *opinions* about the role of business involvement and strategic planning were extremely well developed. However, the evidence below demonstrates that because governors viewed business involvement as primarily an *educational* issue, they were less likely to have detailed knowledge about their school's business involvement than they were about other, *non-educational* issues. This lack of knowledge therefore makes strategic planning about business involvement much more difficult – even where governors acknowledge that such strategic planning *should* take place – simply because governors would be planning without detailed knowledge of their school's educational needs.

Looking first at the survey data, it is striking to note the differences between what respondents reported as the *current* level of knowledge about business involvement within their governing bodies (Table 8.1), and what those same respondents reported as the *desired* level of that knowledge (Table 8.2). As is shown in Table 8.1, over half (56.4 per cent) of chairs and nearly two-thirds (63.4 per cent) of heads reported that their governing bodies had only *low* or *moderate* knowledge of such involvement. In contrast, Table 8.2 shows that 71.8 per cent of chairs (N=85) and 51.4 per cent of heads (N=70) felt that governors should have high levels of knowledge about business involvement in their schools. Although the difference between chairs and heads reported in Table 8.2 is statistically significant, this is likely to be a difference simply in the degree of *positive* enthusiasm between chairs and heads, with heads being more cautious than their chairs. As can be seen in Table

8.2, less than ten per cent of either heads or chairs felt governors should have *low* knowledge of such activities.

**Table 8.1: *Current Extent* of Governing Body Knowledge about Business Involvement**

Current Extent of Knowledge	Chairs (%) (N=85)	Heads (%) (N=71)
Low	28.2	25.4
Moderate	28.2	38.0
High	43.5	36.6

*Differences between chairs and heads were not statistically significant.*

**Table 8.2: *Desired Level* of Governing Body Knowledge about Business Involvement**

Desired Level of Knowledge	Chairs (%) (N=85)	Heads (%) (N=70)
Low	8.2	7.1
Moderate	20.0	41.4
High	71.8	51.4

*Differences between chairs and heads were statistically significant: Mann-Whitney  $z = -2.4$ ;  $p < 0.05$ .*

The qualitative evidence provides a potential explanation, reconciling this discrepancy between what survey respondents felt their governing bodies *did* know about business involvement and what their governing bodies *should* know. The interviews revealed that many governors perceived business involvement as primarily an *educational* issue – as opposed to, say, primarily a ‘tangible’ issue like finance. As was noted in Chapter Five, many governors were reluctant to engage in ‘primarily education-related’ issues, often preferring to deal with non-educational administrative issues instead. Given this trepidation about engaging in primarily educational issues, it is therefore unsurprising that the most common response from governors (see below) was that they had extremely little knowledge about the involvement of businesses with their school:

‘In *principle*, we’re in the [statutory] EAZ, and we’ve had [business] involvement...for the performing arts specialist school status, but how much more involved the businesses are in the school, I don’t know. (Greenleaf parent governor)

‘I don’t know very much about [business involvement] – we just know that we’re supposed to be going down that route, but I don’t know how we’re going to do it.’ (Redwood LEA governor)

‘I haven’t got a lot of knowledge [about business involvement]. We’ve had a good relationship with Barclay’s Bank to involve the kids in their relationship with business. But I don’t *know* all of what they’ve been up to recently.’ (Whitefrost LEA governor)

‘Nothing. Nothing. I have no knowledge. The last time I was on the governing body, it came up as a potential issue, and we were very reluctant to engage in it at the time. I don’t know what, if anything, has been put in place since then. But it’s never actually come up in discussion.’ (Bluewater co-opted governor)

Furthermore, even those governors who expressed a *personal* understanding of their school’s business involvement felt that their colleagues were less well informed. As the two comments below illustrate, even in situations (such as pursuing specialist school status) where there are clear implications for considering the role of business involvement in the future of their respective schools, *knowledge* of business involvement amongst governors remained minimal:

‘If I’m honest about the whole governing body, it’s not something where there’s a very strong consciousness. They’re certainly conscious of what the specialist schools initiative is meant to do, in terms of working with professional groups – but I think it does need a little expanding.’ (Greenleaf co-opted governor)

‘If you were to ask the governing body, outside people like myself who are aware of the [business involvement activity] because the council is involved in setting it up – a high proportion of the governing body would have no knowledge of it.’ (Whitefrost LEA governor)

In short, the perception of business involvement as a primarily educational issue meant that governors were unlikely to have sought either background or expertise in this area. Instead, governors seemed more likely to seek to make their contributions through the ‘safer’ tangible issues. Of course, this somewhat false dichotomy between educational and ‘non-educational’ creates huge problems for ‘joined-up’ thinking and strategic planning. Clearly, if governors restrict their knowledge base to the latter – to the general exclusion of the former – it becomes extremely difficult to design a coherent or cohesive strategic plan that will deal effectively with the school as an organic whole. As the evidence above attempts to illustrate via the business involvement context, one main consequence of this low level of governor

knowledge about educational-related issues is even when governors believe that a strategic plan would be valuable in *theory*, they are often poorly-positioned to stake out strategic planning positions in relation to these issues in *practice*.

#### **8.4 THE ‘STAFF DELEGATION’ BARRIER**

The fourth of the four institutional-level barriers identified in Chapter Five was the tendency of governors to defer responsibility for strategic planning to the school staff and senior management team. It was argued that many governors accepted uncritically the information they received, and rarely took the opportunity (either by choice or by circumstance) to form their own opinions about it. Because of this information imbalance, it was argued that governors often felt that strategic planning was best left to the head, staff, and chair, rather than pursued as a responsibility for the governing body as a whole. The influence of this barrier on business involvement and strategic planning is illustrated below.

##### **8.4.1 The Influence of Staff Delegation Impediments**

The evidence of this barrier in the business involvement context comes from both the quantitative and the qualitative data. First, the survey demonstrated that – unsurprisingly – heads consistently had a far greater understanding of the business involvement activity at their schools than did chairs. Table 8.3 shows the response of chairs and heads when asked about their knowledge of their school’s level of involvement in eight of the most prominent types of business involvement activities. By comparing the ‘don’t know’ responses (a ‘none’ response was taken to indicate that the respondent *knew* that there had *been* no involvement) to the aggregate of all other responses, it was possible to determine the particular areas of business involvement where respondents – on aggregate – had the highest and lowest levels of knowledge.



**Table 8.3: Respondents with No Knowledge of their School's Level of Business Involvement**

*Percentage of respondents responding 'don't know' on each given issue.*

Business Involvement Activity	Chairs (%)	Heads (%)	Chairs (N)	Heads (N)
Work experience/careers advice	2.4	1.4	83	68
Mentoring of students by businesses *	14.3	0.0	84	69
Mentoring of staff/ teacher placements *	25.9	0.0	81	69
Curriculum assistance *	34.9	1.4	83	69
In-kind donations	14.6	0.0	82	69
Financial donations / matched-funding *	12.2	1.6	82	64
Private Finance Initiative	12.2	6.3	82	63
For-profit education management	14.6	10.9	82	64

*\* = Differences between chairs and heads were statistically significant:  $\chi^2 \geq 10.7$ ;  $p \leq 0.05$ .*

In general, these figures illustrate the relatively high level of declared ignorance amongst chairs regarding business involvement activities. In seven of the eight categories, the percentage of chairs responding 'don't know' was over ten per cent. Only in one category – work experience – did more than 90 per cent of chairs indicate that they had some knowledge about whether (or how much) business involvement was currently in place at their schools. Furthermore, in five of these eight categories, the difference between chair responses and head responses was statistically significant. Although it is generally unsurprising that head teachers would have fluent knowledge of the various schemes on offer in their own schools, these statistically significant differences illustrate the wide gap between chairs and heads regarding knowledge about business involvement. Furthermore, if chairs – usually the most active and aware members of the governing body – were unaware of these activities, it is likely that *less-involved* governors would have even *lower* levels of awareness.

Further evidence of this barrier was evident from the qualitative data, which indicated that rather than seeking to rectify this information imbalance, most governors were content to defer to the staff on strategic planning about business involvement. As the comments below illustrate, governors frequently believed that because the staff held the information about business involvement, the staff should therefore be given the responsibility for strategic planning in this area:

'We could be a lot better informed [about business involvement] than we are.... Senior management can, to a large extent, get on with it within the reporting and monitoring structure that governors set for them, and we don't

set much of a structure for them – it's not something that we call for, and it's not formalised.' (Brownstone LEA governor)

'In relation to the [specialist school bid], the governors weren't really involved. Perhaps because they didn't know *how* to, or they didn't *want* to, or they just let the head and the senior management to try and do it themselves.' (Greenleaf LEA governor)

'[On issues like business involvement,] there would be a general discussion about things, the school is asked to draft the policy, and they consult with the student body and staff, and then it comes back to us for ratification.' (Bluewater chair)

'What do I know about business involvement? Very little! We hold conferences – one former staff member at the school did everything [related to business involvement], and was very good. But he's gone now, and hasn't been replaced.' (Supplementary interview chair)

'At the moment we're going for technology status, and the chap we appointed to the business manager, that's one of his many tasks to do.... I don't know very much about it – we just know that we're supposed to be going down that route, but I don't know how we're going to do it.' (Redwood co-opted governor)

While it may seem easier and simpler in the short-term for governors to leave strategic planning on business involvement issues to a well-informed staff, there are (as was argued in Chapter Five) serious long-term consequences for taking this approach. Not only can this approach remove governors from the decision-making loop, this approach also has the potential to render governing bodies unprepared to act as an informed 'critical friends' to the school when issues surrounding business involvement arise. As was noted in Chapter Five, it should not be implied that governing bodies do not require staff input and advice in creating strategic plans. However, as was demonstrated by the evidence above, governors may actually be *impeding* effective long-term strategic planning by deferring this responsibility to the staff, whose emphasis is more frequently focused on achieving shorter-term results.

## **8.5 THE 'TIME CONSTRAINTS AND VOLUNTEER EXPECTATIONS' BARRIER**

Sections 8.1 through 8.4 illustrated how the four institutional-level strategic planning barriers adversely affected strategic planning on business involvement issues. The next four sections illustrate how strategic planning on business involvement issues is impeded by the central governmental-level strategic planning barriers.

The first central governmental-level barrier identified in Chapter Six was that of time constraints and volunteer expectations. It was argued that in general, central government expected governors to do too much, given the time that governors were willing to volunteer. Chapter Six also identified two barriers relating to issues that governors felt took up an inordinate amount of their time – dealing with paperwork and understanding legislative and regulatory changes. However, for the purposes here, all three of these barriers will be addressed under the ‘time’ rubric. While neither paperwork nor legislation has a *direct* impact on governors’ strategic planning about business involvement, they do have an *indirect* impact, in that time spent on these activities is generally *not* spent on activities like strategic planning. It is therefore this more *general* point concerning time and volunteers that this section seeks to illustrate: that central government’s excessive expectations of these volunteers adversely influences governing body strategic planning on business involvement issues.

### 8.5.1 The Influence of General Time Constraints

This research confirmed that overall time pressures *did* impede governing body strategic planning on business involvement issues. Most governors in this research felt that the multiple demands on their limited time meant that issues like strategic planning about business involvement were often forced into the background. In particular, governors noted that it was difficult to find time to address business involvement issues when governing bodies and schools that were already under substantial pressure to fulfil existing obligations related to central government directives and programmes. While these respondents acknowledged that *ideally* such strategic planning would take place, they also admitted that finding the time to do so was often extremely difficult:

‘I would not rule out business involvement in the long-term strategy of the school.... [But] at the moment we have no involvement with business at all – whether this is a good thing or not, I’m not too sure, but the base line is that we are all frantically busy, and more input from anyone at all would possibly drive us over the edge.’ (Supplementary interview chair)

‘The amount of time that there might be for somebody to *do* the amount of ‘face-to-face’ meeting which is necessary to generate [business involvement activities]– is almost certainly going to [require] a school which is extremely stable, [a school] which is *not* under the pressure of rapidly changing pupil population or staff.’ (Bluewater chair)

‘It would be a concern if an issue like business involvement was building up, and we were not dealing with it. And if we were presented with something we’d not had an opportunity to think about, I think we’d want to make sure we’d have time to consider what the implications were. *But that’s not always possible* [emphasis added].’ (Supplementary interview chair)

Overall, governors felt that they often did not have the time to construct a strategic plan that would address business involvement, despite their acknowledgement that such planning would be valuable. Given this predicament, it appeared clear that the lack of available time created a substantial impediment to strategic planning in the business involvement context. One reason for this paucity of available time, discussed next, is that although governors are volunteers, central government has given governors an increasing number of responsibilities to fulfil.

### **8.5.2 The Influence of the Volunteer Aspect of Governance**

This research found that in the business involvement context, the combination of central government priorities and limited volunteer time created numerous strategic planning difficulties. It was argued in Chapter Six that governors felt their responsibilities had increased in recent years without commensurate acknowledgement of either the increased commitment that would be required of governors or the increased support that these volunteer governors would need. In the strategic planning context, it was argued that this situation only further exacerbated the difficulty in encouraging governors to engage in strategic planning, as governors tended to spend their time on activities that met central government’s immediate demands. Yet because central government does not provide either incentives or ‘relief’ from these other activities in order to allow governors to actually *engage* in strategic planning, volunteer governors rarely make strategic planning a priority when allocating their limited time. The comments below illustrate how this divergence of theory and practice unfolds in the context of strategic planning about business involvement. These governors pointed out how the limited time that volunteer governors can commit to their schools meant that complex discussions of business involvement and strategic planning were often given lower priority than more immediate concerns:

‘For...things like donations, the main contribution of the governing body would be in discussion. You don’t progress unless you have ideas – but [governors] are *volunteers*, too. We have a very strong governing body, I

think, but they're tied up in their own work and many other things.' (Greenleaf chair)

'The trouble at present is that [there are] more and more demands, and we have less and less time to give to them. [Many] church schools have full time people employed to deal with school business, and property. Where you have lay people who say 'I'll do that when I get home tonight,' that's when you have difficulties.' (Redwood foundation governor)

'So much of the work of secondary schools in inner London, particularly in poor areas, is just struggling to keep on top. So to ask [governors] to put effort into building business partnerships is a tough thing to do.' (Supplementary interview chair)

The irony of this situation is that because governors were apprehensive about engaging in strategic planning (as they felt they did not have enough time to do so), their governing bodies often spent their time addressing issues like business involvement in an *ad hoc* manner. Yet when compared to the repetition and replication of effort that the *ad hoc* approach requires, it might be argued that a well thought-out strategic plan would be likely to eliminate the significant fragmentation and needless duplication of effort that often result from such a piecemeal approach. Consequently, in the long run a strategic plan is likely to *save* governing bodies more time than it costs. If a strategic plan is in place, it becomes easier for staff and governors to determine where limited resources should be focused, where duplicated tasks can be eliminated, and how to acquire more value-added delivery of the extent of business involvement that the school decides to pursue. Furthermore, if governors do *not* spend the time to proactively determine their philosophy about business involvement, desirable business involvement opportunities may be missed. Unfortunately, as the evidence above has shown, the increased demands on volunteer time often meant that strategic planning on important issues was frequently given a low priority.

## 8.6 THE 'FINANCING SYSTEM' BARRIER

After the barriers of time, paperwork, and legislation, the fourth central governmental-level barrier outlined in Chapter Six concerned strategic planning impediments created by the current financing system. First, it was argued that in their desire to ensure that their schools did not 'miss out' on funding opportunities, governing bodies often sought funding for programmes simply because such funding was available, rather than because the specific programmes were necessarily well-suited to the long-term aims of the individual school. Second, it was argued that the

uncertainties surrounding the long-term viability of many governmental funding schemes severely hindered attempts to plan strategically for the long term, creating incentives for governors to alter long-term priorities in favour of short-term opportunities. The influence of this barrier on business involvement and strategic planning is illustrated below.

### **8.6.1 The Influence of the Fear of Being Left Behind**

First, this research found that governors' fear of being left behind clearly factored into their thinking about strategic planning and business involvement. In most cases, governors mentioned central government programmes that required schools to seek outside sponsorship as a condition of receiving government funds. As the comments below indicate, governors felt that the current financing system forced them to give preference to short-term issues in order to avoid 'being left behind.' This approach points to a more general strategic planning impediment – that the funding system encouraged schools to pursue short-term objectives (securing funding in order to keep up with their competitors) rather than to determine whether these initiatives actually fit well within the governing body's long-term vision of the school. As one governor summarised the situation (in the context of his school's potential bid for specialist status):

*'When these things come, you have to respond, and it's [all about] how good you are at responding to that kind of thing. These business cases and applications take time and effort, and if you're not careful, you're so busy trying to get £50,000 that your eye goes off what you're in place to do – which is to have a successful school – and so it drifts.'* (Redwood co-opted governor)

Other governors noted that any strategic planning they might have *wanted* to do regarding business involvement was frequently impeded by the need to quickly gain business involvement in order to secure government funding. Instead of being allowed to consider how business involvement would be best integrated into the life of the school, many governors felt forced into such arrangements simply in order to 'keep up.' These typical comments from governors indicated that they believed the fault in this particular process – and the impediment to strategic planning – lay firmly in the current structure of the central government financing system:

*'We wouldn't do these kinds of initiatives if it hadn't been for the money! Where else would we have raised that amount of funding from? There's also a competitive element to these initiatives, in that other schools around us*

were thinking of becoming specialist, so we didn't want to fall behind relative to them.' (Supplementary interview chair)

'We need the money, so we're forced to make the bids. There's no way around it.... I'm a bit cynical about these kinds of government initiatives, but to be honest and pragmatic about it – we're not in a position to say we can't.' (Greenleaf chair)

'If, for example, it becomes that all schools are expected to become specialist status, I don't want us to be left behind – and I don't think we should be. So we have to keep our eye on it, otherwise we [will] become left behind.' (Brownstone head teacher)

### 8.6.2 Uncertainties Surrounding Long-Term Programme Viability

Second, it was argued in Chapter Six that strategic planning was often made difficult by the uncertainties surrounding the long-term viability of the various government funding schemes. This research found that this barrier also existed in relation to strategic planning on business involvement issues. In the first instance, governors argued that these uncertainties about viability made strategic planning about business involvement difficult, simply because governing bodies did not know what resources they would have at their disposal in the *short-term* future, much less the long-term future. As this Bluewater LEA governor observed:

'You have to think about how you're draining capacity away from the school, if people are off trying to get grant money, and you don't actually have money enough to *pay* a project development person. And you *can't plan effectively*, because you don't know whether or not you're going to *get* things.'

In the second instance, governors argued that strategic planning was made more difficult because central government policies requiring business collaboration were often designed as 'unfunded mandates.' In other words, although central government would strongly promote certain policy *concepts*, the financial *support* for these concepts was not always fully forthcoming. As such, although some initial central government funding might be available, governing bodies often felt that it would be challenging to sustain these programmes if additional outside support could not be retained. As a result, governors were – understandably – hesitant to make long-term commitments to programmes that they might not be able to financially support if the short-term government funding for these initiatives ceased:

'Don't tell us what we've got to do and then say, 'and by the way, it will cost a million pounds – and you've got to find a million pounds, because we're not going to give it to you.' (Whitefrost staff governor)

‘If you could galvanise the school to raise money and focus on something to get it done, there might be some hidden benefits. But [that’s] terribly difficult, and very divisive. Some schools just have real difficulty doing that kind of stuff, and always will have, you know? So I think it would be very bad if everything depended on you being able to raise £10,000 in order to get a programme.’ (Redwood LEA governor)

Another illustration of this concern about central government’s approach towards business involvement and finance surrounded the potential of too many schools pursuing the same limited outside resources. On one hand, governors understood central government’s desire to increase business involvement in education through incentives like the specialist school initiative. However, governors argued that central government appeared to have ignored the fact as these types of initiatives become more appealing, businesses may have to become more selective in their support of them. As one supplementary interview chair said, ‘The big firms, they have to spread themselves thinly.’ Many other governors concurred, noting that businesses may face an increased demand on their limited resources due to the very incentives that central government has created for schools:

‘It’s very difficult to foresee where we’ll end up. But there must be a [recognition of the] fact that if you have lots more school seeking business sponsorship, then there will be less to go around.’ (Greenleaf co-opted governor)

‘Business has endless calls on its charitable activities, and the time of its management and executives. Environmental issues, social and community issues, education. And increasingly, businesses are very hard-headed... [they’re] not prepared to write a cheque and hope that the outcome is broadly OK.’ (Bluewater co-opted governor)

‘There are a certain number of rich companies that are prepared to put money in – but they’re only going to do that to a certain extent. They won’t plough all their profits into education. And once they’re drained by schools across the country, it’ll stop – so then what’s the government going to do? To a degree, I see it as a quick fix solution to bad government policy over the years.’ (Whitefrost staff governor)

Combining central government’s strong endorsement of these initiatives with the aforementioned desire ‘not to be left behind’, governors saw the potential that the demand for financial assistance from businesses would outstrip supply. Unfortunately, this uncertainty about whether the pursuit of such funding would be successful only *contributed* to governors’ belief that business involvement should continue to be perceived as a windfall ‘extra’, rather than as an integral component of a strategic plan.



### 8.6.3 The Influence of a Short-Term Financial Policy Mindset

Finally, this research found that the short-term focus of the current financing system frequently created incentives for governors to favour short-term business involvement opportunities – those that provided immediate results – over those that might be more sustainable and advantageous in the longer term. Governors did recognise the potential problems of this situation; as is illustrated below, governors felt that central government often perceived business involvement as a short-term financial solution, rather than as a broader issue of long-term educational strategy:

‘I’d be concerned about [business involvement activities] that seemed not to represent long-term value-for-money.... My concern would be that you’ve *really* got to believe that it’s the best product in the long term.’ (Redwood LEA governor)

‘I think government...is almost totally dominated by the bookkeeping approach. It’s what I call the ‘clerical bookkeeper approach’ as opposed to the ‘far-sighted finance director approach.’ All they’re trying to do [through business involvement initiatives] is balance their books and get more down at least cost. There’s no vision at central government in funding at all.’ (Blewater LEA governor)

Yet it was also clear that despite the potential for the financing system to distort their broader priorities, governors felt resigned to playing by its rules. Governors acknowledged that it would be more valuable if funding schemes were custom-fit to the unique strategic needs of their individual schools, rather than being designed as one-size-fits-all initiatives. Indeed, governors often felt that central government initiatives frequently forced them into making a ‘Hobson’s Choice’ in relation to business involvement – taking the business involvement that was first offered, regardless of whether it is the best decision in the long-term strategy of the school:

‘[I think] the governing body *would* have a say in the involvement of businesses – [we] would want to see that educational objectives overrode business necessity. But we need to be pragmatic, and when you’re short on resources, decisions are usually financially based!’ (Greenleaf parent governor)

‘I think we find that within our strategic plan, [we are forced] to jump through the hoops we have to jump through in order to get the money. We play the game, and try to get as much of the benefit of it as we can, without skewing our overall sense of what we’re trying to achieve.’ (Brownstone LEA governor)

‘I have to tell you, I think we just roll with it and try to survive. Whatever money is offered, we try to take it – because you don’t like to turn money away. But it distorts our priorities. Because we go for the money.’ (Blewater LEA governor)

In summary, this section argued that the current financing system created substantial problems for strategic planning in the business involvement context, as governors frequently felt forced to pursue short-term opportunities at the expense of long-term benefits. This syndrome meant that effective long-term planning became extremely difficult, as governors frequently felt forced into pursuing new initiatives for their financial value rather than for their strategic planning merit.

## **8.7 THE COMMUNICATION BARRIER**

The fifth central governmental-level barrier related to the breakdown in communication between governors and central government. First, it was argued that governors perceived the existing communication mechanisms between central government and governing bodies to be either deficient or non-existent, leading to poor central government responsiveness to local-level concerns. Second, it was argued that governors felt these failures in communication led to a lack of central government knowledge about how its policies affected governing bodies, thereby leading central government to attempt to legislate its way out of problems by creating frequent new initiatives. The influence of this barrier on business involvement and strategic planning is illustrated below.

### **8.7.1 The Influence of Communication Impediments**

On the first point raised above, it was clear that governors found the lack of communication about the central government position on business involvement to be a substantial hindrance to any attempts at strategic planning in this arena. Respondents repeatedly argued that there was little communication on the part of central government about why central government felt business involvement was necessary or valuable. Governors further noted that this lack of communication about the specific central government rationale behind pursuing these programmes made it extremely difficult for governors to understand how such programmes were meant to fit into their school's broader strategic plans:

‘I don’t recall being told *why* the government is doing it. I’m uncertain that I know their *reasons*. I would imagine the reasons would be...[that] they want [business] to provide money and management skills for administration and running of the infrastructure.... I suppose those are the two things – but on the other hand, I haven’t seen that *stated*.’ (Redwood chair)

‘I don’t know enough about this government’s thinking on business involvement. It wants *solutions* – but at the same time, it’s trying so many

things. For governors, that simply translates into *concerns* – ‘who’s to know what the next programme will be?’, or ‘how long until it terminates?’ (Supplementary interview chair)

‘I don’t want to give government *any* excuse for not fully funding the state sector of schools. And one of the grave risks is that government won’t fulfil its own obligations. If you can get *genuine* additionality from business money or in-kind, fine – [but] my view is *to drive government into declaring that as a rule of the game.*’ (Bluewater co-opted governor)

‘Obviously, whomever the key players are in the government have got examples of very good practice. So they must have good examples of how they foresee things. But sometimes that doesn’t get filtered down.... It has to be a much clearer sense of what the idea is.’ (Redwood LEA governor)

One illustration of the impact of this communication deficiency can be seen in what governors *believed* central government was asking of businesses, versus what governors themselves thought would constitute the most valuable business contributions. As can be seen below, many governors thought that central government was merely seeking financial support from businesses. In contrast, most governors argued that if central government had asked *governors* how their schools would benefit most from business involvement, governors would prefer that businesses contribute *experience* rather than *money*:

‘Our link with the business in the community is normally in skills and expertise, *not* really in money or sponsorship – from what I’ve seen. What the school gets out of the business community is actually experience.’ (Brownstone co-opted governor)

‘I’ll tell you what I’d love business to get involved in: into providing assistance and help in producing our budget and financial plans, and helping us monitor them. That, I think, would be a real contribution that could be made at very little cost to a business.’ (Bluewater LEA governor)

‘I think the expectation that [business involvement] will bring substantial additional resources is not *right*. What it hopefully *will* bring are new ways of working, and new skills. That’s the bit I’m more optimistic about, because I can see that being an area of crossover.’ (Supplementary interview chair)

These comments suggest that the communication breakdown between governing bodies and central government on issues like business involvement creates not only confusion and frustration, but hinders governors in their understanding of how central government policies might influence their schools. This research suggests that if governors are not informed about either *why* central government supported these initiatives or what impact central government expected from them, it is

somewhat unreasonable to expect governors to guess at the motives of central government and then construct a strategic planning framework accordingly.

### 8.7.2 The Influence of a Poor Understanding of Potential Policy Effects

Second, it was argued that the lack of effective communication between governing bodies and central government led to a poor understanding on the part of central government regarding the effects of its policies. Because governors felt central government did not articulate effectively what it expected these policies to achieve, governing bodies were often unclear as to around which of these initiatives they should design their strategic plans. This scenario was evident in the business involvement context, as governors repeatedly complained that central government seemed to display a poor understanding of what business involvement might entail when implemented ‘on the ground’. In specific, governors felt that because of the poor communication channels between the school level and central government, there was often an evident gap between theory and practice in central government’s thinking about what business involvement might entail. When asked whether the current government was realistic in what it thought business could provide in either time or resource, one governor replied:

‘I’m not sure they are [being realistic], because they change what they feel business or industry should provide. And they change what they’re *seeking* in relation to public policy as a whole in terms of how business and industry can be part of that relationship. I think it’s evolving. So I don’t think really feel [the government is being] realistic.’ (Supplementary interview chair)

Numerous other governors concurred, which suggests that central government has not effectively explained to schools and governing bodies how it envisions business involvement developing in *practice*. As can be seen below, governors felt central government believed that businesses could – and would – do more for education than businesses were actually prepared to do:

‘Central government seems to view ‘the business community’ as simply another Department of State, and it’s not! Yes, ‘business’ may be permanent, but *individual* businesses can vary widely in their profitability from year to year. So you often cannot have the level of continuity that government would *need* if business were to play the role in education that government seems to *want*.’ (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

‘I think if you asked whether government expects business to be more involved than business *can* be, the answer would be yes. I think business, in

general, would like to help education, and I see that through [my work with] the CBI. There's a real wish to *help*. The problem is that we can't match the sort of help we can give to the opportunities to give it.... Government imagines we can do a lot more than we *can*.' (Redwood chair)

'Government needs to understand that businesses do not exist to be efficient – they exist to make money. Simply because government is enticed by the efficiency aspect does not mean that having businesses run schools is fiscally in the interest of businesses!' (Supplementary interview chair)

'I can see why central government wants business to be *involved*. [But] in my opinion, most business people – or at least, the good ones – aren't really that interested. They do it as a public service, not because they think their business will get things out of it. Government wants business involvement in lots of things – but...you can't overcome the weaknesses in the government system [simply] by bringing in business people – it just doesn't work.' (Whitefrost co-opted governor)

One illustration of how this poor understanding of policy effects led to problems in business involvement-related strategic planning can be seen in the issue of 'policy unevenness'. Governors complained that central government appeared not to recognise how difficult it might be for some schools to achieve the level of business involvement that central government seemed to be encouraging. Although not all respondents expressed this view, many did believe that an insufficient understanding of the wide variation in local circumstances frequently led central government to formulate 'blanket policies'. These policies created advantages for some whilst setting almost insurmountable barriers for others, and governors pointed to a number of specific practical matters – geography, distance, neighbourhood – that influenced the ability of schools to participate in various government programmes. Furthermore, governors argued that due to a lack of communication with the local level, central government did not appear to accommodate these specific local variations when constructing their initiatives and directives:

'[There is] this disparity – that people who are good at getting matched funds, and [who have] contacts in business and industry, could possibly go ahead and [pursue these initiatives]. Your rural school in the middle of nowhere, with no connections, can't.... I don't think it's a very equitable way of dividing money.' (Bluewater teacher governor)

'Those who work at [another school further away] – I don't know what sort of education business links they've got there, but I would think that they'd be less well established and less effective simply because it would take people longer to get there from work.' (Brownstone LEA governor)

‘Government shouldn’t be asking schools to solicit contributions from business, because some schools simply won’t have the ability to do so. In a number of communities – apart from the small shops – there isn’t much in terms of business. So for schools who might lack the ability to acquire those resources, their children are now at a disadvantage – and that’s not right.’ (Greenleaf chair)

Besides these specific criticisms of a central government that appeared aloof and unresponsive in terms of policy design, there was a broader critique from governors as well. In specific, governors expressed dismay about a central government policy-making process in which a lack of communication about the potential impact of proposed policies continually generated policies that were often incompatible with local needs. Given the frequency of these new policies, governors argued that it was difficult to foster a long-term vision of school planning when new initiatives continually drew schools and governors towards short-term benefits as opposed to long-term planning. As these comments illustrate, governors felt that a lack of communication created substantial strategic planning problems due to central government’s *overall* approach towards policy making:

‘[These initiatives are] OK where you’ve got major employers or big companies in the local area that are willing to support the local schools and everything, but it’s not the same across the country. It’s patchy. One minute the government is saying one-size-fits-all, and then next minute it’s saying it doesn’t!’ (Whitefrost chair)

‘I think initiatives like the Education Action Zones – and things similar – in the main are very good *if they work*. The problem is a lot of them aren’t fully thought out, and the ideal which they embody does not, in reality, work in that way. It becomes an amalgam, a hodgepodge of effective and ineffective realities.’ (Redwood parent governor)

As the evidence presented in this section has sought to demonstrate, despite the positive rhetoric about business involvement emanating from central government, those on the local level were continually confused about both the objectives and the goals of central government’s support for business involvement. This poor communication led those ‘on the ground’ to believe that many central government policies were based on over-optimistic expectations. In turn, this reinforced governors’ beliefs that central government was pursuing an *ad hoc* programme of policies that were both poorly designed and targeted at creating short-term success. One consequence of this poor communication system was that central government appeared to lose a considerable amount of credibility in the eyes of the very

individuals on whom implementation of these programmes depends. The other consequence, which has significant relevance to the issue of strategic planning, is that governors were extremely reluctant to engage in strategic planning when they themselves were unsure about the impact that future ill-designed government policies might have on their overall planning process.

## **8.8 THE TRUST BARRIER**

The sixth and final central governmental-level barrier was that governors believed central government did not trust governing bodies. First, it was argued in Chapter Six that the present government's centralising tendency not only demonstrated a lack of trust in governing bodies, but often *prevented* the implementation of flexible, locally-tailored approaches that would do the most to assist individual schools. Second, it was argued that governors were extremely reluctant to devote their limited time and energy to strategic planning, as they believed that government would simply superimpose its own plans on schools and thereby render redundant or outmoded any strategic planning done by governors themselves. The influence of this barrier on business involvement and strategic planning is illustrated below.

### **8.8.1 The Influence of Centralisation**

The first component of this barrier was that governors believed the centralising tendency of the present government created a lack of trust that impeded strategic planning. This component was clearly evident in the business involvement context, as a majority of governors in the case studies pointed to their concern that central government would continue its track record of centralising policy decisions. Governors felt that by centralising policy on many issues, including business involvement, central government was implying that governors were either incapable of making decisions at the local level, or that local needs were irrelevant to the strategic planning necessary on this matter:

‘Different conditions for business in different areas will lead to different outcomes. And that’s why I think the whole sense of ‘too much prescription’ [from central government] is bad, because the solution is going to *vary*.’ (Redwood chair)

‘What I wouldn’t want is some national diktat on such a [business involvement] policy. On policies and things, each governing body is there with its *own* views ideas and feelings, and is there to represent the unique feelings of *that* governing body.’ (Bluewater teacher governor)

As was suggested in Chapter Six, this tendency towards centralisation and high levels of prescriptive regulation led to the perception amongst governing bodies that central government did not trust them. This was again the case in the specific instance of business involvement programmes, as governors voiced their concerns that central government was attempting to control too much of the business involvement process, allowing little room for governors to use their discretion in making decisions that would be best suited to local needs:

‘In these initiatives, like the Education Action Zones, it’s not so much *business* putting money in as it is *government* putting the money in. And when the cheque arrives, there are usually requirements on how it’s spent, since someone needs to know what happened to the money.... It’s a lot of bureaucracy, and the governors complain to the government about the process all the time.’ (Supplementary interview chair)

‘The aims and objectives of central government don’t always meet and accord with the aims and objectives of business.... I’m *sure* [governing bodies] can find accord somewhere between the two, and it’s a case of putting cards on the table. Government hasn’t fully put its cards on the table as to what it wants and requires...[but] governing bodies *are* more independent, and they *can* be more trusted.’ (Redwood parent governor)

In summary, Chapter Six noted that governors felt the centralising tendency of the present government often *prevented* the implementation of flexible, locally-tailored approaches that would do the most to assist individual schools. Based on evidence above, it appeared that this problem existed in relation to business involvement issues, and led to practical problems within governing bodies that were attempting to make the decisions that they felt were necessary for improving their schools.

### **8.8.2 The Influence of Governors’ Perceived Lack of Respect**

The second component of this barrier was governors’ belief that central government treated governing bodies as entities who were to be *tolerated* for the sake of local accountability, but not to be *respected* as full partners in the policy process. This perception appeared to contribute significantly to the lack of governing body strategic planning on business involvement issues. Governors at each case study school noted that they felt that central government was creating business involvement policies that demanded governor accountability, whilst simultaneously sidestepping any significant local level input in design. Chapter Seven addressed this issue briefly, identifying many governors who felt that they were being *coerced* by central government into considering PFI proposals, rather than being *convinced* of



the necessity of this type of financial arrangement. However, it was found that this concern about central government's policy implementation approach spread to other kinds of business involvement as well. It was evident from the survey data that while central government had a slim majority of support amongst respondents for its business involvement agenda, this support was far from solid. Table 8.4 illustrates the responses to a question about whether the respondent had positive or negative perceptions of central government's *general* business involvement proposals, whereas Table 8.5 shows the responses when respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with *specific* proposals (e.g., specialist schools, Education Action Zones, and City Academies).

**Table 8.4: Perceptions of Central Government's *General* Proposals for Involving Business in Education**

Perception	Chairs (%) (N=86)	Heads (%) (N=71)
Positive	52.3	43.7
Neutral	23.3	33.8
Negative	24.4	22.5

*Differences between chairs and heads were not statistically significant.*

**Table 8.5: Level of Agreement with Central Government's *Specific* Proposals for Involving Business in Education**

Perception	Chairs (%) (N=86)	Heads (%) (N=71)
Agree	57.0	50.7
Neutral	14.0	18.3
Disagree	29.1	31.0

*Differences between chairs and heads were not statistically significant.*

These tables suggest that despite government efforts to promote business involvement initiatives, a substantial minority of governors and heads remained unconvinced of the value of central government's approach. Unfortunately, the qualitative evidence suggests that governors were not optimistic that central government would resort to 'convincing' over 'coercing' in its effort to win converts to its initiatives:

'I think schools see [the specialist schools initiative] as just another way to get additional money – it's not necessarily because they genuinely see specialising as advantageous in and of itself. Really, it's perceived as 'this is

the way that government wants us to go, and they're just bribing people into doing it.' (Whitefrost LEA governor)

'As Tony Blair [has] said, and I've said in the LEA, if [matched funding] is something politically that is going to be pushed really, really hard – then I think we have to go down that road.' (Brownstone head teacher)

'Education Action Zones – what is it that they *do*, really? They're simply a new name for catchment areas! Look at what they're supposed to do – they ask schools in the same area to work with each other. Years ago it was called 'catchment areas', and now it's 'action zones'! Nothing has really changed; it's just new words for old ideas. But we have to go along with it in order to keep up.' (Whitefrost parent governor)

Another illustration of the lack of trust in governing bodies can be seen in central government's approach towards business involvement as sponsorship-driven, rather than as partnership-driven. Governors saw a clear difference between sponsorship and partnership programmes, as the survey found that 83.7 per cent of chairs (N=72) and 81.7 per cent of heads (N=58) saw a practical difference between the terms 'sponsorship' and 'partnership'. The interview data shed further light on how these two terms were perceived by governors, as governors usually perceived sponsorship as a limited and financially-based commitment, whereas they saw partnership as a more dynamic and potentially longer-term relationship between parties that treated each other as equals:

'Sponsorship pretty largely means 'give us the money'.... Partnership, I think, means something really of mutual involvement, which *may* involve money directly, [but] may involve the sharing of time and resources.' (Bluewater chair)

'I think a lot of sponsors are *not* very effective partners. They monitor, but they don't necessarily play an active role. Some do. Some sponsors *demand* an active role when they're involved with a school, and I think that's the healthier model.' (Greenleaf co-opted governor)

'[The difference is that] sponsorship has got money involved. Whereas partnerships are more joint working to achieve joint aims.' (Whitefrost chair)

'Sponsorship I see as a one-off occasion, a particular event that the school and the sponsor have been working together on. Sponsors, I think, are looking for a direct return, and immediate return. Partners are looking for a long-term gain, I think.' (Greenleaf LEA governor)

'I suppose sponsorship doesn't imply participation in the sense that partnership does.... Sponsorship, to me, sounds like you're not getting as much – or as useful – an input as you would from partnership.' (Brownstone LEA governor)

Yet despite these comments in favour of partnership over sponsorship, and despite governors' preference prefer that businesses contributions come as *experience* rather than as *money* (see Section 8.7), the major recent central government business involvement initiatives – specialist schools, education action zones, city academies, private finance initiative – focus primarily on financial contributions from business, rather than on partnerships that offer experience. In summary, this research found that rather than being *convinced* by central government about the value of certain business involvement issues, many governors instead felt *coerced*. Ultimately, this perception is extremely detrimental to the strategic planning process, as it leads governors to wonder why they should even bother engaging in strategic planning if central government will simply set its own unilateral agenda regarding business involvement – and then coerce governing bodies into compliance.

## 8.9 CHAPTER EIGHT CONCLUSION

This chapter was the second of two chapters designed to answer the fourth and final research question. By tying together the theoretical and practical components of this research study, this chapter sought to illustrate that the strategic planning barriers identified in *theory* actually had an adverse influence in *practice*. In order to meet this goal, evidence was presented to illustrate that the systematic application of the strategic planning barriers identified in Chapters Five and Six *did* provide a robust explanation of the reasons for the absence of governing body strategic planning on business involvement issues. In so doing, the evidence in this chapter also confirmed that these barriers *did* exist as practical and significant barriers on a specific issue of practical policy importance. Given these findings, it is argued that this chapter answered the fourth main research question satisfactorily.

More broadly, this chapter also sought to illustrate that the systematic application of these barriers could provide a valuable heuristic analytical tool for understanding the absence of strategic planning by governing bodies on issues of policy importance. By applying this set of potential barriers in a heuristic and systematic manner, it was possible to acquire a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the issues facing governing bodies in relation to strategic planning about business involvement than would have been the case had the lack of strategic planning been addressed in an *ad hoc* manner. By illustrating the value of employing the *specific* strategic planning barriers identified through this research in order to achieve this

increased level of understanding, this chapter thus illustrates the value for future researchers in identifying and employing sets of barriers for use as heuristic analytical tools in *other* policy contexts. As such, it is concluded that the systematic identification and application of such barriers *does* provide a valuable heuristic tool for future researchers. Having thus addressed the two main goals of this final data chapter, the final thesis chapter is devoted to presenting the overall conclusions and contributions of this study, offering policy recommendations, and providing suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER NINE

### CONCLUSIONS

#### 9.0 INTRODUCTION

This final chapter draws together the evidence and arguments of the first eight chapters in order to provide a final analysis of the value of this research study. Section 9.1 summarises the research findings from the data chapters, illustrating how these empirical findings answered the four main research questions proposed in Chapter Two. Section 9.2 discusses the implications of the research findings, their contribution to the existing research literature, and the extent to which they can be generalised. Section 9.3 proposes a set of substantive policy recommendations emanating from this research, and Section 9.4 suggests further avenues of potential research in this field. Finally, Section 9.5 provides a final set of reflective observations to conclude this thesis.

#### 9.1 SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The main goal of this thesis was to determine whether, given their brief from central government, school governing bodies in inner London state secondary schools were engaging in strategic planning to the extent that might be expected, and if not, why not? This section summarises the research findings and conclusions from the five data chapters, and analyses how well these empirical findings answer the four main research questions outlined in Chapter Two.

##### 9.1.1 Answering Questions One and Two

Do governors in inner London state secondary schools view their role as a strategic one, and if so, how do they themselves define strategic planning?
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Is the lack of strategic planning implied by the existing literature actually evident in the governing bodies of inner London state secondary schools?
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In relation to the first research question, it was demonstrated in Chapter Four that governors *did* believe that their role included responsibility for strategic planning. Furthermore, it was demonstrated that governors shared a general set of common criteria in their definition of strategic planning: that strategic planning should be a long-term and goal-driven process, that it needed to adhere to and remain consistent with the ethos of the school, and that it required constructing decision-making and

resource allocation frameworks. Armed with this definition of strategic planning, Chapter Four then turned to the second main research question, and examined governors' perceptions of how well their own definition of strategic planning (as stated above) was met in practice. It was found that the majority of governors did *not* believe that their governing bodies engaged in strategic planning in a manner that reflected those common criteria. To confirm this finding, Chapter Four then examined whether the School Development Plan (SDP) – which governors frequently identified as their schools' strategic plan – actually provided governors with meaningful strategic planning opportunities. It was shown that in practice, governing bodies often had limited involvement in creating the SDP, and that many governors found the SDP to be an inadequate long-term planning tool. It was therefore concluded that the lack of strategic planning implied by the existing literature *was* actually evident in inner London state secondary schools, as the combination of broad survey coverage (including responses from either the chair or head of 114 of the 139 schools surveyed) and interview data from multiple sites lends confidence to this general assertion that strategic planning by the governing bodies in inner London state secondary schools was frequently either minimal or non-existent.

### 9.1.2 Answering Question Three

If the lack of strategic planning implied by the existing literature is actually evident in the governing bodies of inner London state secondary schools, why is this the case?

Chapters Five and Six then turned to answering the third main research question (above). The concept of 'barriers' to strategic planning was introduced in Chapter Five, providing the theoretical framework within which the research data were presented and interpreted. It was argued that the concept of 'barriers' provided an alternative heuristic tool for identifying and interpreting systemic problems that governing bodies might face in the strategic planning process. Chapter Five also presented the survey evidence regarding the main strategic planning hindrances faced by governing bodies, as reported by survey respondents. It was argued that the research evidence pointed to two sets of strategic planning 'barriers' – one set created at the institutional level, and the other set created at the central governmental level. Each of these sets was then addressed in its own chapter.

Chapter Five identified and explored four main *institutional*-level barriers to governing body strategic planning. The *first* of these four barriers was the existence of a ‘monitoring culture’ amongst governing bodies, which led to governors taking a less long-term or proactive approach towards their responsibilities. The *second* barrier was the varying level of involvement of the different categories of governors, as the burden of governors’ responsibilities was often carried by a small core of governors, while some categories of governors were consistently more likely to be involved in that core than were others. It was argued that this disparity, in conjunction with the confusion arising from the vague definition of the governor’s role, created severe strategic planning hindrances. The *third* barrier was the tendency for governors to engage in activities that were smaller, more well-defined, and more ‘task-based’ than strategic planning. It was argued that governors often gravitated towards issues of premises and finance – which produced ‘tangible’ results that could be either seen or quantified – and away from the ‘intangible’ issues like curriculum and overall strategic planning. The *fourth* institutional-level barrier was the tendency for governing bodies to defer strategic planning decisions to staff, since by allowing the head, staff, and sometimes the chair of governors to manage the strategic planning process, governing bodies often ceded effective control over the very strategic planning processes that they were entrusted to oversee. Finally, Chapter Five discussed the role of the local authority level in governing body strategic planning. Evidence was presented to support the decision to focus this research on the institutional and central governmental levels, as it was argued that governors did not believe that local authority factors played nearly as significant a role in governing body strategic planning as did institutional and central governmental factors.

Chapter Six then identified and explored six *central governmental*-level barriers to strategic planning. The *first* of these barriers was the limited amount of time that governors had available to volunteer, in contrast to the level of expectations placed upon them by central government. It was argued that the increasing demands upon governors’ time adversely affected not only the time available to engage in strategic planning, but also the recruitment and retention of a stable governing body. The *second* barrier was the volume and format of paperwork that governors received and were expected to understand, as many governors found themselves unable to assimilate this material effectively. Because of the time necessary to understand and act upon their paperwork, it was argued that governors had less time engage in ‘non-

urgent' activities like strategic planning. The *third* barrier was the frequency and complexity of the legislation and regulations affecting governing bodies and schools, as many governors often found government initiatives to be overwhelming, confusing, and designed to achieve short-term results. It was argued that the time that governors spent on understanding governmental proposals prevented them from devoting time to strategic planning, and that the short-term focus of many initiatives created further disincentives for engaging in strategic planning.

The *fourth* barrier was the structure of the current financing system. It was argued that bid-based funding schemes, the current system of year-on-year budgets, and the need to rely on fixed-term supplementary funding programmes created substantial strategic planning uncertainty for governing bodies. The *fifth* barrier was the absence of effective two-way communication between governing bodies and central government, as governors felt that institutional-level strategic planning was being hindered by the lack of meaningful dialogue between governing bodies and central government regarding central government's future plans for education. It was further argued that central government's failure to clarify the responsibilities of governors meant that governing bodies – uncertain of their authority – had a perverse incentive to avoid making decisive long-term decisions. Finally, the *sixth* barrier was that governors believed that central government often did not trust governing bodies. It was shown that this lack of trust often led governing bodies to avoid engaging in strategic planning, since there was a perception that any such efforts would simply be ignored by central government if institutional needs were incompatible with national policy. Together, it was concluded that these six central governmental-level barriers and the four institutional-level strategic planning barriers identified in Chapter Five provided a thorough and robust answer to the question of *why* there was a lack of strategic planning amongst the governing bodies in inner London state secondary schools.

### 9.1.3 Answering Question Four

Can it be demonstrated that the identification of these strategic planning barriers has practical policy relevance and importance?

The fourth research question was posed in order to ensure that conclusions related to the third research question had practical – not merely theoretical – applicability to current policy issues. Chapters Seven and Eight therefore drew upon additional



research into the issue of business involvement in education, in an attempt to determine whether systematically applying these ‘strategic planning barriers’ to a policy issue of practical importance could provide a robust explanation of the reasons for the absence of governing body strategic planning on that policy issue.

First, Chapter Seven confirmed that business involvement provided an appropriate lens through which the practical policy relevance of the strategic planning barriers could be examined. Evidence demonstrated that governors believed that business involvement *was* a legitimate strategic planning issue, and that there was currently an *absence* of strategic planning about business involvement in their schools. Second, this research examined the perspectives, opinions and concerns of governors about business involvement, and found that governors believed that there were four main advantages to engaging in strategic planning on business involvement issues. The first advantage was the potential role of strategic planning in *enabling* a more systematic approach towards business involvement in education. The second advantage was the potential role of strategic planning in *guiding* business involvement, which would permit schools to better identify the types of business involvement activities that they would or would not support. The third advantage was the potential role of strategic planning in building community via business involvement. Finally, the fourth advantage was the potential role of strategic planning in assisting governing bodies to prepare responsibly for the future developments in business involvement. Together, this evidence provided the context for interpreting the findings on business involvement and strategic planning presented in Chapter Eight. Finally, Chapter Eight built upon this evidence in order to demonstrate that the strategic planning barriers identified in Chapters Five and Six had practical policy relevance and importance. By systematically applying the four institutional-level strategic planning barriers and the six central governmental-level strategic planning barriers to the issue of business involvement,<sup>1</sup> Chapter Eight illustrated that the heuristic and systematic application of these barriers *did* provide a robust explanation of the reasons for the absence of governing body strategic planning on business involvement issues. Given this research evidence, it was therefore argued that the fourth main research question could be answered satisfactorily in the affirmative.

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<sup>1</sup> The barriers of paperwork and legislation were discussed in the broader context of the time barrier – see Section 8.5 for the reasons behind this decision.

## 9.2 CONCLUSIONS AND RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

In Section 2.6.2, it was argued that if successful, this research study would be advantageous for seven main reasons. In specific, it was argued that a successful study would: 1) contribute to the understanding of how governors perceive their own role, 2) provide a systematic framework of strategic planning barriers through which the absence of governing body strategic planning could be better analysed and understood, 3) demonstrate that these barriers had practical policy relevance, and in doing so provide new insights into the opinions of governors about business involvement in education, 4) contribute new evidence on the role of central government in governing body activities, 5) provide a more detailed understanding of governing bodies in inner London state secondary schools, 6) update the existing literature on school governance, and 7) provide independent research on school governance and business involvement. In the light of the evidence presented in the previous chapters and summarised above, this section revisits these claims in order to put forward the broader conclusions of this study, as well as to identify the contributions that this study has made to the existing literature. At the end of this section, the ability to generalise from this research (and limitations thereto) are discussed.

### 9.2.1 New Insight into the Governor's Role

First, it was argued that this study would contribute to the understanding of how governors perceive their own role. Through the research presented in Chapter Four, this study demonstrated that governors saw their role as a strategic one, a finding that adds to the research into the role of the governors conducted by Earley (1994a) and Scanlon et al. (1999), respectively. This research also supports the argument of Creese (1998) that governors have a role in strategic planning, while building upon this argument by using research evidence to outline governors' own definition of strategic planning. However, this study does not *only* conclude that the governor's role needs to be clarified and addressed – such an argument has been made previously. Rather, the evidence in this study provides a convincing argument that strategic planning needs to become one of the *primary* roles of governing bodies, rather than simply one of many, and that steps need to be taken to ensure that central government's rhetorical promises to this effect are realised in practice. This study concludes that governing bodies are presently an under-utilised strategic planning resource, often engaging in complex administrative tasks in order to meet the demands of central government, rather than in the broader strategic planning

responsibilities for which governing bodies (as lay collective entities) are more suitably structured to address.

This research also highlights the public policy value of qualitative research that focuses on the individual-level perspectives of respondents from multiple governing bodies. As was illustrated by the research into governors' view of their role in Chapter Four, governors across the research area were generally concerned about similar problems and issues. However, it was equally evident to the researcher during the course of this study that few governors realised that *other* governors in *other* schools held similar concerns (and possibly, useful solutions). This isolation means the perspectives of governors are easy to overlook in the broader public policy discourse, since governors tend to approach problems on a school-by-school basis, rather than as an integrated and more cohesive whole. The value of studies like this one is that they provide individual governors with the knowledge that their concerns are shared amongst their colleagues, and that these concerns are rarely inherently local or solely ascribable to unique institutional factors.

### **9.2.2 New Theoretical Tools and Strategic Planning Barriers**

Second, it was argued that this study would provide a systematic framework of strategic planning barriers through which the absence of governing body strategic planning could be better analysed and understood. This research accomplished this task in several ways. First, this research developed the nascent concept of barriers to strategic planning in greater detail. While Corrick (1996) argued that such barriers existed, this argument was based on a brief analysis of data collected by Earley (1994a), and was only a relatively minor aspect of that study. Furthermore, while there has been limited research into factors that impeded governing body effectiveness in *general* (Creese 1998; Scanlon et al. 1999), these factors had not been applied to strategic planning in particular. This research therefore built upon this broader research into governing body effectiveness by extending Corrick's observation about the 'lack of effectiveness' of governing bodies into a formal theoretical concept of strategic planning barriers. In doing so, this research provided the first systemic and heuristic examination of what makes governing bodies *less* effective in terms of their strategic planning.

This study also contributed to the literature by identifying ten specific barriers to governing body strategic planning. Various authors have pointed to the existence of some of these problems previously, as was discussed in the chapter conclusions. However, this research extended the existing literature in four new and unique ways. First, this study identified three new barriers that have not been raised previously in any existing research – the barriers of the ‘monitoring culture’, communication, and trust. Second, this study is the first to classify all ten of these issues as ‘barriers’, and to view each of these issues – individually and collectively – through the lens of strategic planning. The current study permits, for the first time, the view that these ‘problems’ (which are often viewed in isolation in the existing literature) actually interact to form significant barriers for governing bodies that might be seeking to fulfil their strategic planning responsibilities. Third, the current study is the first to define all ten of these barriers as components of a single integrated set, as it is believed that a systemic and dynamic understanding of these barriers is preferable to the *ad hoc* approach that exists in the current literature. In doing so, this research provides a more complex perspective regarding the potential interrelation between these issues than does the existing literature, which often focuses on one or two of these issues alone. Finally, the current research demonstrates that these barriers exist not solely at the institutional level but also at the central governmental level. As such, this research demonstrates that these barriers must be understood in the broader context of how governing bodies actually operate in the real world, where multiple demands arise from multiple sources. This research has therefore provided a new starting point both for understanding why problems in strategic planning may arise and for determining how those problems may be solved, as it is posited that identifying and eliminating structural barriers to strategic planning can be just as valuable as proposing short-term solutions for circumventing them.

### **9.2.3 New Perspectives on Business Involvement**

Third, it was argued that this study would use the lens of business involvement in education to provide evidence for whether these barriers provided a robust explanation of the reasons for the absence of governing body strategic planning on a substantive policy issue. In doing so, it was argued that this study would also provide new insights into the opinions of governors about business involvement in education. Both of these goals were accomplished by this study. First, by demonstrating that the strategic planning barriers did provide a robust explanation of

the absence of governing body strategic planning on business involvement issues, this research applied the theoretical barriers in order to illustrate how these barriers actually *prevent* strategic planning from taking place. From this evidence, it can be concluded that this systematic and heuristic approach provides a new theoretical framework *through* which a practical strategic planning problem can be analysed, and *from* which potential solutions to remedying such problems might be constructed. While this framework will require future research in order to ascertain its explanatory strength, the evidence in relation to business involvement permits the conclusion that each individual barrier – as well as the framework as a whole – has both theoretical and empirical support.

Second, this study provides significant new evidence to supplement the limited research by Baginsky et al. (1991) into governor perspectives and opinions about business involvement issues. By demonstrating that governors were generally supportive of business involvement, within a certain set of restrictions and limitations, this research provides new data on which public policy in this area can be based. This study also provides the first analysis in the literature of governor perspectives on the strategic planning aspect of business involvement issues, using empirical evidence to demonstrate that governors supported the suggestions of Glegg (1997) and Tulloch (1999) that governing bodies *should* be engaged in the issues surrounding business involvement. More generally, this research provides new evidence in the field of business involvement in education, filling a gap in an existing literature that is comprised mostly of the analyses of specific government initiatives or the views of employers towards such projects.

#### **9.2.4 New Insight into the Central Government Role**

Fourth, it was argued that this study would contribute new evidence on the role of central government in governing body activities, the exploration of which has been limited to this point. The existing literature on governing body dynamics often focuses on the institutional level, while issues surrounding the governing body-central government relationship have gone largely unexplored. This study rectified this absence of research, focusing specifically on the influence of central government on the strategic planning of governing bodies, and identifying six main areas in which central government substantially hindered governing bodies. Most notably, this study suggests that governors and governing bodies have the clear potential to be

great allies of government; the higher-than-expected level of support from governors in this study for central government's ideas about business involvement (within certain well-defined constraints) provides strong evidence for this conclusion. Yet it is equally clear from this research that central government's lack of perceived trust in – and understanding of – governing bodies has precluded central government from securing the support of governing bodies in its attempts to improve education. Equally, it is clear from this research that despite the statutory requirement for governing bodies to engage in strategic planning, governing bodies themselves still view strategic planning as a subsidiary (rather than a primary) responsibility, and that central government does very little in practice to reverse that perception. Given the demonstrated influence that central government has on governing body strategic planning, it is clear that the central government approach to governing bodies must be substantially revised in order to eliminate the structural barriers to strategic planning that have emerged from central government's complacency.

#### **9.2.5 New Insight into Inner London Governance**

Fifth, it was argued that this study would provide a more detailed understanding of inner London state secondary school governors and governing bodies, as there was no existing research literature with this specific focus. Central government has recently displayed a significant level of renewed interest in inner London's schools; indeed, as Tony Blair himself argued in the government's most recent plan for improving London's secondary schools (*The London Challenge* (DfES 2003d)), 'Radical reform will be focused most urgently on the two areas of *Inner London* where the problems are greatest [emphasis added]' (2003c:2). Yet the process of identifying problems is different from understanding the tools that will be necessary to solve them, particularly in an education system as complex and varied as that of inner London. If governing bodies of inner London schools are to play a role in solving these problems, this research offers policy makers a deeper understanding of how these governing bodies operate, the concerns that they hold, and the realities that they face. Furthermore, this study provides the first broad empirical analysis of how governors and governing bodies in inner London perceive of some of the very policies that central government is keen to pursue – such as the proposal in *The London Challenge* that 'every London secondary school will have a high-quality link with a business' (2003:15). It is therefore hoped that future policy decisions about inner London's schools will be both informed and improved by the insights provided in this research.

### **9.2.6 Update of the Existing Literature**

Sixth, it was argued that this study would update the existing literature on school governance, as much of this literature was between five and ten years old. If nothing else, this research provides new and more recent evidence on governing bodies, strategic planning, and business involvement. As was noted in Chapter Two, it is important to base current policy decisions on current policy research, since policies based on old information often have difficulty adapting to recent events and addressing newly raised concerns. In relation to the literature on governing bodies, this research updates the surveys of governors and head teachers regarding ‘factors hindering governing body effectiveness’ (Earley 1994a; Scanlon et al. 1999), and by combining in-depth qualitative interviews with a quantitative survey (rather than relying upon the quantification of open-ended qualitative responses) this research provides a more accurate and complete evaluation of these factors in relation to strategic planning. Additionally, this research confirms and updates general research into governing bodies by those such as Earley (1994a), Deem et al. (1995), Creese and Bradley (1997), and Scanlon et al. (1999), as well as research into perspectives on governing body strategic planning by Creese (1998) and Earley et al. (2002). In relation to business involvement and governing bodies, this research provides a significant update on the research of Baginsky et al. (1991) and Thody (1992), and adds to the existing general research on business involvement in education.

### **9.2.7 Impartiality**

Finally, it was argued that this study would provide independent research on school governance and business involvement, not sponsored or supported by the major governmental agencies or industry groups who may have a direct interest in its outcome. It was suggested that this independence would preclude any concerns about the impartiality or objectivity of either the data or the results on the grounds of conflicts of interest. A good deal of existing research on school governance is sponsored by central government, and a good deal of existing research on business involvement is sponsored by either central government or industry. In contrast, this study provided evidence and conclusions that can claim to be genuinely independent and uncompromised by influences external to the researcher.

### 9.2.8 Generalisation and Limitations

One of the measures of the value of research is the extent to which its findings can be generalised. As was argued in Chapter Three, the issue of generalisation frequently plagues qualitative research, since it is often claimed that as case studies are not ‘representative’ of the study population, their findings cannot be generalised (and are therefore of limited value). However, it was pointed out in section 3.5 that this concern was addressed by the research design in two ways. First, the use of a quantitative survey in addition to the qualitative interviews, and the strong confluence between the qualitative and quantitative results, provided strong supporting evidence for the ‘representativeness’ of the qualitative data. This therefore supports the potential for generalising from these findings. Second, it was noted that by employing an *analytical-theoretical* rather than a *statistical* approach towards data collection, clear patterns that were observed during a qualitative study could be generalised as contributions to *theory*. These ‘theoretical’ contributions can then be tested in other situations where there is reason to believe that such theoretical contributions might help explain certain patterns of behaviour.

The ten strategic planning barriers identified in this thesis constitute contributions to a theory of why governing bodies do not engage in strategic planning. In order to illustrate the strength of this theory, these barriers were applied to a specific issue (business involvement in education). The finding that these barriers provided a robust explanation for the absence of strategic planning therefore strengthened the argument that these barriers might explain the absence of strategic planning in *other* schools, and strategic planning on *other* issues. Additionally, the findings concerning governor perceptions of their strategic planning role and governor opinions about business involvement provide other theoretical frameworks that offer legitimate bases from which to generalise.

Before doing so, however, several potential limitations need to be considered. First, this research was conducted entirely in urban state secondary schools in inner London. While the generalisation of these findings may be directly applicable to governing bodies of other urban secondary schools, secondary schools in suburban and rural areas, as well as primary schools in all areas, face different sets of circumstances in which some of these barriers may not apply. Second, the qualitative portion of this study was conducted with schools that were at *neither* one



end nor the other of the academic performance spectrum – the area in the educational bell-curve where most of England’s schools reside. As such, this research did not focus on the governing bodies of schools in special measures, as much of the energy of these governing bodies will be focused on short-term tasks. Neither was this research targeted at governing bodies of schools with enviable exam results and high academic achievement, since these schools may have *less* pressure to improve their strategic planning, having already reached the upper echelons of the league tables. Certainly, the quantitative survey does provide a measure of equalisation in this regard. However, without further specific research on the applicability of these barriers to schools on the edges of the spectrum, it is safer to presume that the barriers *identified* herein are applicable to those schools whose positions are similar to those of the schools *studied* herein.

Yet in spite of these limitations, the applicability of the strategic planning barriers to a specific policy issue provides important evidence that these barriers may indeed provide a heuristic tool with which to understand the absence of strategic planning on *other* issues of policy importance. Furthermore, it is possible to propose that these barriers might also explain the absence of strategic planning in other types of *organisations* in which lay governing bodies are expected to undertake such responsibilities. Such organisations might include prisons, hospital trusts, non-profit boards, and other entities. Therefore, while the findings of this thesis should be generalised with caution, the theoretical propositions made herein provide a potentially valuable source of explanation for understanding discrepancies between the rhetoric and reality of strategic planning.

### 9.3 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the fourth research question of this thesis sought to determine the practical policy relevance and importance of the research findings, it seems appropriate to draw upon the observations made during the course of this research in order to offer suggestions for addressing the barriers identified in this thesis. This section therefore provides two sets of practical policy recommendations. The first set offers recommendations for policy makers seeking to mitigate the impact of the institutional-level strategic planning barriers, while the second set offers recommendations for policy makers seeking to mitigate the impact of the central governmental-level strategic planning barriers.

### 9.3.1 Mitigating Institutional-Level Strategic Planning Barriers

- *Restructure governing body committees.* To address the ‘monitoring culture’ and ‘tangible tasks’ barriers, individual governing bodies should re-evaluate their current approach to committees. Governing body committees reflect governing bodies priorities, yet the traditional committee structure of most governing bodies focuses almost entirely on administrative/operational matters – usually premises, finance, legal, and personnel, with a final committee on curriculum. As Davies and West-Burnham (1990) argued, such an operationally-focused structure both *encourages* governors to engage in short-term tangible issues and *discourages* them from addressing issues that cut *across* committee jurisdictions. The existing committee structure should therefore be replaced by a structure in which committees are viewed as the *means* to the end of providing students with a better education. These core committees should be: strategic planning, operational matters, curriculum matters, and community relations. The strategic planning committee would establish the importance of strategic planning in the governing body remit, and would provide a standing forum for setting out the broad vision of the school. The operational committee would deal with issues of finance, premises, and personnel. Through consolidation of the operational committees, the curriculum committee would gain renewed importance as the forum for all academic matters. Finally, the community relations committee would enable the governing body to not only field complaints, but also to actively promote the governing body as a valuable bridge between the school, businesses, and the broader community.
- *Require a minimum level of mandatory governor training, including training on strategic planning.* Although this suggestion has been made by numerous previous researchers (see e.g., Schlechte 1995; Jones 1998; Phillips 2002), this research further affirms the necessity of such a scheme. Almost all of the institutional-level barriers would be mitigated to some extent if a minimum level of governor training were required of both new and continuing governors. Currently, new governors are expected to acquire the knowledge necessary to govern effectively on their own, and predictably, the results of this autodidactic approach vary substantially. For new governors who are unfamiliar with education terminology or intimidated by governing body meetings, the absence of training almost encourages them to limit their involvement and defer their

responsibilities, thereby further entrenching the strategic planning barriers identified in this thesis. The most common objection to a mandatory training requirement is the time such training would require of governors, and the associated negative impact such a requirement might have on governor recruitment. While some might argue that untrained governors are better than no governors at all, such an approach would simply perpetuate the *status quo* while ignoring the evidence that being a functional governor requires a certain minimum level of specialised knowledge. Furthermore, if individuals who wish to become governors are not willing to expend even a minimum amount of time in order to acquire a basic understanding of their responsibilities, it is difficult to understand why it should be presumed that, once appointed, these individuals would have the time necessary to provide effective governance of their school.

- *Require governing body meetings to be open and public.* Although Sallis argued in 1991 that ‘The business of governors is *not*, in general, confidential’ (1991b:13), there has been almost no subsequent discussion of this topic in the literature since. This is unfortunate, since to address both the ‘monitoring culture’ and ‘varying involvement’ barriers, one of the strongest remedies would be requiring that all main governing body meetings be open and public unless specific circumstances warranted the use of ‘executive session’. Furthermore, it should be required that the names of all governors, as well as a method for contacting them, be made public. Opponents of this recommendation might argue that such standards could make governor recruitment more difficult. However, on a practical level, it is more likely that this policy would discourage individuals like those current governors who are ‘here in name only’ from applying in the first place – and the argument here should almost always be focused on quality, rather than quantity. On a philosophical level, individuals who become governors agree to undertake a public position, in which they will have executive authority to make decisions about the provision of public education through the allocation of public taxpayer funds. As such, this proposed policy would eliminate the inherent imbalance of the current system, in which public authority is conferred upon governors without requiring a concomitant level of public accountability.

- *Increase the emphasis on recruiting governors for vision.* In order to combat the tendency for governors to engage in task-based ‘tangible’ issues, governing bodies should refocus their recruitment of governors in order to give vision, passion, and the desire to think (and stay) long-term as much weight as practical skills in the selection process. Although some schools may claim that the dearth of potential governors means ‘beggars cannot be choosers’, it is nevertheless important even for these governing bodies to emphasise the *importance* of vision to potential governors. As Adams (2001) argued, governing bodies should not be some ‘ideal’ collection of useful professions, but rather ‘a set of committed individuals with a concern both for the quality of education offered by the school at present, and its plans for the future’ (2001:34). Yet currently, governing bodies tend to seek governors who offer particular skill sets – ‘a solicitor’, ‘a banker’, ‘an IT specialist.’ Admittedly, this strategy is partly out of necessity, as the statutory responsibility of governing bodies currently requires them to carry out a number of operational and administrative responsibilities – effectively providing a free management infrastructure at zero cost. However, if governing bodies are truly to fulfil their statutory obligation to engage in strategic planning, they require governors who can think beyond a specialised skill set.
- *Provide governing bodies with adequate administrative support.* In conjunction with the previous recommendation, it is vital that governing bodies be provided with adequate administrative support – including secretarial, financial, and legal. The current *ad hoc* system of such support, varying substantially by school or LEA, has three consequences. First, it forces governing bodies to recruit *governors* with these skills (instead being able to hire administrative staff) in order to ensure that necessary statutory requirements are met. Second, it forces governors to spend their own limited time on such matters, rather than on broader issues of strategic planning. Third, it provides governors with an excuse for avoiding strategic planning issues, as governors can legitimately argue that their time is being spent on statutorily required task-based ‘tangible’ matters. Although this recommendation would require substantial financial resources (or possibly even in-kind donations of time from the business community!), it is essential if governors are to provide strong strategic leadership.

- *Provide and finance mechanisms for increasing governor interaction with students and staff.* This research found that one of the main reasons why governors deferred their strategic planning responsibilities to staff was that governors felt that staff had a better grasp of the major strategic issues – both primarily educational and, to a certain extent, administrative – facing the school. This lack of knowledge frequently appeared to result from the fact that governors did not feel comfortable visiting the school, fearing that they would be perceived as ‘inspectors’. Furthermore, governors often argued that they could not afford to take time off work to make visits during the school day. However, it was apparent during the conduct of this study that the governors who were most well-informed and comfortable in their roles were those who had spent the most time in their schools. This should not be surprising, as it should be apparent that trust is best built through frequent interaction (see Creese 1994). It is therefore essential for schools (or central government) to design and finance mechanisms that will enable governors to form independent and informed perspectives on matters facing their schools. One such mechanism would be encouraging increased opportunities for governors to meet with staff *and* with students in informal small groups during the school day. This system has already been adopted by some schools, which designate specific governors as ‘link’ governors with specific departments. A second mechanism would be encouraging staff to provide regular updates of departmental activities at governing body committee meetings, a system that is already in place at some individual schools. These types of activities would enable governors to increase their school knowledge and become more confident in engaging in debates over strategic planning issues.
- *Consider the use of ‘super chairs’ in struggling schools.* It was apparent during the course of this research that the workload of many chairs of governing bodies was extremely onerous. Furthermore, it was apparent that in struggling schools, it was nearly impossible for volunteer chairs to fulfil the expectations placed upon them. Given this difficulty, it is proposed that struggling schools be provided with the option of employing a professional ‘super chair’: a paid chair of governors who would be able to work full-time, *alongside the existing governing body*, on improving the school. This recommendation departs from the government’s notion that *all* governors in a failing school could (or should) be replaced by an interim paid body, and does so for the following reason. Much is

made of the use of ‘super heads’ in turning around the *academic* problems of failing schools, but little mention is made of the more mundane *management* side of the equation. When struggling schools are required to fundamentally review their working practices, new precedents are set for how that school will operate and manage its future. It is at this critical juncture where schools determine how their long-term strategy and management agenda will be pursued in future, yet it is equally crucial that there are local committed governors who will be able to carry on once the transformation is complete. As such, a paid full-time (yet interim) professional ‘super chair’ could play a valuable role in providing the basis for sound and secure strategic planning practices.

### 9.3.2 Mitigating Central Governmental-Level Strategic Planning Barriers

- *Clarify and focus governors’ role.* One of the most pervasive strategic planning barriers was that of time, as governors argued that the expectations of central government exceeded the amount time they could afford to volunteer. To address this barrier, three steps should be taken in order to clarify the governors’ role. First, governor responsibilities must be clearly outlined and consolidated in a single document, instead of being spread throughout a diffusion of documents and reports. This would help combat the barriers of communication and trust as well as the barrier of time and volunteer expectations. Second, governor responsibilities in *practice* should be aligned with the main statutory responsibilities outlined in the *Education Regulations (2000)* – notably, that governing bodies act as the strategic planning entity for the school. By clarifying the focus of governing bodies to reflect the tasks for which they are best suited, governors would have more time to fulfil these core tasks – and could do so more thoroughly than is possible at present. Third, many governors complained that their current administrative responsibilities were all-encompassing, yet felt that now being charged with such responsibilities, it was unfair to then delegate them to members of staff. As such, central government must avoid the temptation to view governing bodies as ‘Christmas trees’ – repositories of local responsibility that can always accept one more ‘ornament’ of regulatory oversight.
- *Provide governors with adequate employment leave.* Another way to combat the time barrier is by providing governors with more time. Currently, governors often find it necessary to use their own personal leave in order to meet these

responsibilities, which clearly limits the extent to which they can engage in governor-related activities. If central government expects informed and capable school governance, governors must be given adequate employment leave in order to do their job properly – to visit the school during the day, attend meetings or conferences, or read and assimilate paperwork and documentation. Systems for such leave already exist for individuals who are lay magistrates or members of the Territorial Army, and employers accept the value of these public commitments. School governors must be accorded similar stature if they are to perform to the level expected of them by central government. Surprisingly, the parliamentary Education and Employment Committee recently argued that it would *not* be ‘practical’ to require employers to offer governors paid time off to meet their essential duties (Education and Employment Committee 1999:19). However, if central government were to take the steps necessary to meet this recommendation, it would gain not only additional time from its governors, but a much needed measure of their trust and respect.

- *Guarantee schools a minimum level of financing over a long-term time frame.* This research found that a major strategic planning barrier was the short-term nature of the school funding system. Because governors do not know how much money they will be receiving in future years, it becomes extremely difficult to make long-term strategic plans. Central government should remedy this state of affairs by guaranteeing schools a minimum level of annual financing over at least a five-year time frame, subject to adjustment for inflation and unusual fluctuation in pupil numbers. Such forward guarantees would both give governors substantial additional confidence in engaging in strategic planning and demonstrate the importance that central government places on maintaining consistency in the education system. Critics of such a proposal might argue that central government would find such a system (based upon expectations of future tax receipts) financially irresponsible. However, it is clear from central government’s support of the private finance initiative that central government has few concerns about requiring *schools* to budget for long-term PFI debt repayment. If governing bodies are therefore deemed responsible enough to assume substantial long-term debt, it only seems reasonable to ensure governing bodies that a minimum level of future income is similarly assured.

- *Provide phase-out funding to assist governing bodies in future financial planning.* Another financial strategic planning concern of governing bodies related to short-term fixed-term funding programmes. Governors repeatedly noted that although financial necessity often forced them to apply for such funding, the uncertainty over the *renewal* of such funding schemes made it difficult to integrate such funding into long term planning. As such, governing bodies often allocated such assistance on one-off capital improvements, even when they would rather have allocated such funding towards longer-term commitments. If such fixed-term programmes are to continue, central government should designate a certain amount of the overall programme fund as ‘phase-out funding’. This ‘security deposit’ could be kept in an escrow account, and used to provide schools with a more *gradual* decrease in funding should that particular programme cease. Governing bodies would therefore have the opportunity to absorb this loss of funding more gradually than they can at present, which would in turn allow greater confidence in future financial planning.
- *Create an internal review of the paperwork load.* Although the DfEE promised the National School Governors' Conference in 1999 that it would institute a new communication framework that ‘included clear categorisation of subject matter, status, related documents, audience, and action’ (NSGC 1999:17), the practical results of this framework appear to have been negligible. The current research found that governors still received far too much paperwork, and that they either attempted to read *all* the material they were sent, or became discouraged and read very little of it. Neither approach is the best use of governor time. To combat this problem, it would be valuable for central government to create its own ‘internal governing body’, which would receive everything central government intends to distribute *before* its general issuance. This entity would simulate the ‘sharp end of the stick’ that governing bodies feel they have become, and would provide central government with an ‘early warning’ system if its simulated ‘governors’ felt they were becoming too overloaded.
- *Improve the paperwork classification system.* Another way to combat the paperwork barrier is for central government to be much more rigorous with its paperwork classification scheme. The current classification scheme identifies documents with categories like ‘strongly recommended’ – yet in practical terms,



this phrase has little or no contextual relevance for governors. Is it ‘strongly recommended’ that governors read it? Act upon it? Discuss it? Discard it? Although some LEAs seek to assist governing bodies in making these determinations, LEAs should not be forced to do a job that could and should be done by central government and the DfES. To eliminate this ambiguity and increase governor productivity, central government therefore needs to: better identify the target audience for each document, explain what determines the categorisation of any given document, and make explicit the expectations of governor *action* regarding each classification category. Such a system would assist in easing the paperwork pressure on governors, who currently find it difficult to prioritise and act efficiently upon the documents they receive.

- *Require education policies to demonstrate a longer-term focus.* Governors herein complained that education legislation and regulations were issued too frequently, were too focused on short-term results, and were too lacking in a comprehensive vision of the desired results. All of these issues contributed to difficulties in governing body strategic planning. As Davies and Ellison (1998) argued:

‘Schools, when faced with a series of new initiatives from central or local government, reach and adjust to them as they come along without seeing the pattern or purpose of what is happening’ (1998:464).

To remedy this barrier, central government needs to adopt a set of principles regarding education legislation and regulations, which should include the following. First, central government must clearly state its overall vision of the education system, which encompasses the entire learning cycle of a child. As such, this vision should treat the education system as a set of constituent entities that participate in delivering a single educative process, rather than as a set of loosely related autonomous entities at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Second, given this framework, central government should then be required to demonstrate how any subsequent legislation or regulation provides a necessary component for achieving this vision. This would provide governors and schools with a clear rationale for implementation. Third, central government needs to ensure that legislation and regulations are written to encourage long-term priorities and planning, as well as the politically necessary short-term results. Finally, the frequency of major education policy announcements must be

reduced, in order to provide governors with the opportunity to understand and implement the changes required therein, and in order for central government to acquire enough data about the effects of its existing policies so as to make intelligent decisions about the long-term value of these programmes.

- *Reorganise and improve existing communication patterns.* As central government increasingly bypasses the LEAs and operates more directly with individual schools, governors want their concerns – and suggestions – to be heard directly by central government, rather than being transmitted (and possibly transmuted) by the local authority. This is not a recommendation that local authorities should be heard less – simply that governors and governing bodies need to be heard more, and that they require outlets for this kind of communication. Although part of the onus of this recommendation falls upon the national governor organisations, it also falls on central government to pay more attention to the issues raised by those on the ground, rather than by relying upon second-hand interpretation and delivery of this information.
- *Appoint a minister for school governance.* One visible and valuable way in which central government could help combat both the communication and trust barriers to strategic planning would be to appoint a minister for school governance. Such an appointment, preferably of a current or former school governor, would have numerous advantages. First, it would convey to governors the message that central government acknowledged the value and importance of school governors. Second, it would provide governors with a political contact point and ombudsman for comments or concerns, in addition to the existing administrative contact points within the DfES. Third, it would offer a measure of central government accountability in relation to governance concerns, as such a minister would be required to explain and justify decisions that impacted upon governors and governing bodies. The combined effect of such an appointment would be to demonstrate to governors that the communication and trust barriers could be addressed at the central governmental-level.

#### 9.4 ISSUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While the previous section provided a set of policy recommendations for battling the barriers expounded upon in this thesis, this section identifies a set of issues on which

future research would be beneficial. These issues are those that emanated from this research, but which, due to constraints of time, resources, and scope, it was not possible to pursue. This list is by no means exhaustive; however, it is hoped that future researchers will draw upon these recommendations in order to expand upon the issues raised in this thesis. The potential issues for future research are divided into three categories: research on school governance, research on strategic planning, and research on business involvement in education.

#### **9.4.1 Potential Research on School Governance**

- *Are the barriers to governing body strategic planning identified in this research relevant and applicable to different educational contexts?* Due to the necessary constraints referred to above, this study was limited to inner London state-maintained secondary school governing bodies. However, it would be extremely valuable to determine the extent to which the common strategic planning barriers identified in this research, and their relevance to governors' opinions about business involvement, can be generalised to other educational contexts. Such contexts might include:
  - Governing bodies in other areas of England;
  - Governing bodies *not* located in urban areas;
  - Governing bodies of primary, higher, and further education institutions;
  - Governing bodies of state-maintained special schools;
  - Governing bodies of independent sector schools; and
  - Governing bodies of secondary schools in other developed countries.
- *How do those at the central government level perceive governing bodies?* As was argued in Chapter Three, this research was focused on governors' perceptions of the barriers to strategic planning, since regardless of the factual *accuracy* of such perceptions, it is often such perceptions that determine whether policies will succeed or falter. However, further research would be valuable to determine how those in central government – both politicians and civil servants – *actually* perceived governing bodies, looking beyond the platitudes of the official policy documentation. Do these individuals trust governing bodies? Do they believe communication is adequate and sufficient? Do they appreciate the time pressures that governors feel? Research into this area could provide important

insights into the issues on which there was genuine agreement or disagreement between central government and governing bodies, as well as the issues on which each side may have been genuinely uninformed. This kind of research could assist greatly in informing and improving the dialogue between governing bodies and central government.

- *To what extent do governing bodies remain 'rubber stamping' entities, influenced primarily by the degree to which the head acts as an information 'gatekeeper'?* As was noted by Shearn et al. (1995) (see section 2.2.5), the role of the head teacher in determining the type and extent of information received by governing bodies is crucial, and as Bird (2002) argued, there are still concerns that governing bodies may not be receiving the information they need in order to operate effectively (2002:6). Building upon this research, it was argued in section 5.5 that one of the four major institutional-level barriers to strategic planning was the deference of governors to school staff, due largely to governors' concerns about the validity and extent of their own educational knowledge. However, this thesis only examined issue of information asymmetry in the context of *strategic planning*. As such, further research into the extent to which governing bodies are hindered more *broadly* due to the information-provision philosophies of their heads would be extremely valuable, particularly in light of recent research suggesting that the governing bodies of many public service organisations are still largely engaged in 'rubber stamping' decisions that have already been made by others (see Steele and Parston 2003).
- *What is the role, value, and effectiveness of national governor organisations?* As Thody (1999b) argued, 'To influence the system politicians, [governors] need unity and an ability to lobby' (1999b:38). Yet while teacher governors in this research often mentioned the teacher's unions in the context of their responses, no governors in this research referred to the role of the national governor organisations (such as the National Association of Governors and Managers) as an outlet for advocating their concerns. This was somewhat surprising, given that one of the cumulative conclusions of this research was that although governors in different schools frequently shared common concerns, they often failed to recognise that these concerns were systemic. It would seem that a major role of a national organisation should be to provide a collective voice on behalf of

governors (see Morrish 1993; Watson 2001), yet governors did not seem to take advantage of this resource. It would therefore be advantageous to investigate how effective these organisations are in fielding, responding to, and promoting the redress of governor concerns.

- *Why do non-core governors remain on governing bodies?* This thesis argued that there was a small ‘core’ of governors on most governing bodies who performed the majority of the work, while there was a number of ‘non-core’ governors who contributed substantially less. However, this research did not seek to determine why these ‘non-core’ governors remained on their governing bodies, and with the exception of the brief mentions by Brehony (1992) and Thody (2000), no such research exists. Is it prestige? A commitment to the interest community (for example, the parents, teachers, or local authority) for whom they are delegates? Despite their relative inactivity, do these non-core governors serve an important symbolic function? How can they be better engaged in the life of the governing body? And how can *core* governors create better working mechanisms that would enable greater shared authority with and inclusion of all governing body members? Such research would assist both governing bodies and central government in re-evaluating the structure of governing bodies and the role that governors are expected to play.

#### **9.4.2 Potential Research on Strategic Planning**

- *Can further exploration of the quantitative data provide additional insights?* Although the quantitative survey data in this study were examined extensively, there are always additional tests that could be run and variables that could be added. While the time constraints and the space limitations of this thesis precluded further such testing, there are numerous ways in which these data could be analysed further – for example, examining the extent to which factors such as known free school meal eligibility or specialist school status influence governing body strategic planning. Additionally, this data set could provide valuable baseline data for future longitudinal research, examining what factors contribute to changing attitudes towards strategic planning and business involvement over time.

- *Can the theoretical concept of strategic planning barriers be usefully applied in different public service contexts?* This thesis sought to apply the concept of strategic planning barriers only to one particular entity, school governing bodies. However, it would be beneficial to determine the extent to which this theoretical concept of barriers provides a valuable heuristic tool for evaluating and interpreting problems faced by lay governance bodies of *other* public services. Can researchers gain a new perspective on the problems faced by the governing bodies of hospitals, prisons, and other public services by seeking to determine what factors impede effectiveness, rather than by simply attempting to convince these governors to act differently within the constraints of their existing resources? Such research would help determine how the concept of barriers might be developed in order to improve public policy across a broader range of public services.
- *How are approaches towards strategic planning in the public services influenced by the relative levels of centralisation or decentralisation therein?* In this thesis, the intersection of strategic planning and centralisation was largely discussed in the context of trust. Arguing that there was a discrepancy between central government's rhetoric and reality regarding decentralisation, governors contended that the level of prescriptive regulation that often accompanies decentralisation makes such autonomy nominal at best. However, there is a substantial opportunity for future research that offers a more complete understanding of the influence that levels of centralisation have on approaches towards strategic planning. Does a discrepancy in central government rhetoric and reality exist in other public services, and if so, does it affect strategic planning in similar ways? Are individual institutions really more proactive in engaging in strategic planning under more decentralised systems? In more decentralised public services, how well do the strategic planning processes of individual institutions balance the desire to improve institutionally with the public desire for high standards of minimum provision across the entire service? Such answers would be extremely useful in the context of the current debate over the level of centralisation in the public services.
- *How can strategic planning be better 'incentivised'?* This research concluded that there are specific barriers to strategic planning that *prevent* governing bodies from engaging in such activities. However, it is foreseeable that while the

mitigation or elimination of these barriers would enable more governing bodies to engage in strategic planning, some governing bodies would *still* fail to do so. Further research would therefore be valuable into what incentives might actively encourage governing bodies and educational institutions to prioritise strategic planning and sustain that commitment over the long term.

#### **9.4.3 Potential Research on Business Involvement in Education**

- *To what extent can or will the private sector respond to central government's desire for increased private sector involvement in education?* While this research examined some of the issues surrounding central government's promotion of increased private sector involvement in education, it would be extremely beneficial for further research to investigate the extent to which the private sector can or will cooperate in bringing these proposals to fruition. How would a downturn in the economy affect the implementation of such proposals? Do businesses view such proposals, particularly those calling for financial involvement, as a form of 'double-taxation'? What lessons do the disappointing results of the City Technology College and statutory Education Action Zone programmes offer regarding the extent to which central government can expect private sector support in education? And are there enough willing businesses to meet the demand of all the schools that seek such involvement? Research into these and similar issues would provide an important assessment of whether these kinds of central government proposals would be viable if implemented nationwide over the long-term.
- *Why do some schools receive more business involvement than do others, and what factors contribute to a school's likelihood of receiving such assistance?* It became clear in the early stages of this research that the level of business involvement in schools often differed dramatically between individual institutions. Some of this difference can be explained by institutional decisions about how much business involvement to allow. Yet even in apparently similar schools that were each actively seeking increased business involvement, some were significantly more successful than others. Further research would therefore be advantageous on questions such as: How important is the geographical proximity of the school to the business? Does the level of involvement correlate with the quality of the local education-business partnership organisations? How important is community

outreach, by staff, parents, governors, and others, in attracting support? Does a school's proximity to other schools with low levels of business involvement provide either a relative advantage or disadvantage? Answers to these types of questions would provide insight into the dynamics of private involvement in the public sector, as well as help to identify and provide support to those schools that might otherwise struggle in obtaining business involvement.

- *What lessons for increasing the acceptance of business involvement can be learned from the implementation of the work experience programme?* While this research identified some of governors' specific concerns about business involvement in education, this research did not attempt to address how these specific concerns might be allayed. One potentially valuable avenue for future research would therefore be to explore what lessons for increasing the acceptance of business involvement can be learned from the implementation of the work experience programme, which is now a relatively uncontroversial and integrated component of secondary education. The success of the work experience initiative in bridging the school-business gap suggests that other attempts at increasing the acceptance of business involvement in education could learn from its history. For example, under what conditions did the initial work experience model have its greatest successes? How were the main objections to and concerns about the work experience programme addressed? How have both businesses and schools been encouraged to sustain and improve upon the work experience model? Applying the answers to these questions to the current debate over business involvement could provide important insights into how the introduction of new forms of business involvement might be improved.

## **9.5 FINAL REMARKS**

For too long in the English education system, strategic planning has been a rhetorical promise rather than a practical reality. Governing bodies, being charged with the responsibility for strategic planning, have instead approached their task as one of 'muddling through' rather than as one of setting out a vision for the future of their school. While some of this attitude can be attributed to historical inertia, this research has shown that much of the absence of strategic planning by governing bodies – at least in the secondary schools of inner London – can be attributed to barriers that are either created or perpetuated by the governing bodies and central government of today.



At the institutional level, the increasing autonomy of governing bodies has also meant increasing responsibilities. However, rather than embracing this new autonomy as means for actively engaging strategic planning, many governing bodies have instead limited their own autonomy by focusing on short-term issues rather than long-term concerns. Furthermore, while governors argue that they are no longer engaging in ‘day-to-day management,’ it would be erroneous to presume that the absence of day-to-day involvement implies the presence of a strategic perspective. In too many cases, governing bodies have become monitors and observers, often involved in activities that have little to do with core educational issues while remaining tied up with the management of issues that are frequently administrative or peripheral. These attitudes and approaches must change if governing bodies are to become in practice what they are designed to be in theory: the voices of the community working not solely to maintain the school as it stands, but to provide the vision and leadership that will bring the school forward in years to come.

Yet the reasons for the current absence of strategic planning in the secondary school system do not rest only, or possibly largely, with the governing bodies. The current Labour government has created a school system in which central governmental aims take precedence over local plans when the two are in conflict, and a system in which governing bodies are expected to be accountable even as they are being denied the tools necessary to plan effectively. The word ‘governor’ is derived from the Latin *gubernare*, meaning ‘to steer’ – originally, ‘governors’ were the helmsmen of the rowed ships in the Roman fleet. At present, it appears that while central government proclaims that governors have the freedom to *steer*, in reality central government treats governors as administrative ‘oarsmen’, giving them only the resources and responsibilities necessary to *row*. This approach only increases the reluctance of governing bodies to engage in strategic planning, since such local plans run a high risk of being disregarded in order to accommodate the next round of central government strategies. By treating governing bodies merely as a free management infrastructure, central government is playing a dangerous game: trying to reap immediate benefits while failing to recognise the underlying costs that pursuing such a policy incurs in volunteer time, expertise, and trust.

Lest this analysis sound overly pessimistic, it should also be noted that part of the reason why this situation in regards to strategic planning exists and persists is

because little attention has been paid to the reasons for its perpetuation. With such a dearth of information, it is perhaps only to be expected that potential solutions to these problems have not been forthcoming. Indeed, it is extremely difficult to solve a problem when one possesses only limited evidence about the precise nature of the problem itself. By defining the barriers to strategic planning faced by governing bodies, this study provides both a wealth of evidence about the problem and a new way of understanding its causes. This evidence is, in turn, intended to provide those on all sides of the issue with the knowledge necessary to pursue an informed and lasting solution to the strategic planning challenge. While the problems outlined in this thesis are serious, they are not intractable. Both governing bodies and central government have the ability to respond to these issues in ways that can improve the process. However, the longer that these obstacles to strategic planning persist, the longer the education system will fail to live up to the expectations of the children whom it is designed to serve. This research was begun on the premise that governing bodies *can* make a significant contribution to the state of the education system. In the course of this thesis, it has been argued that governing bodies can make their most significant and lasting impact on the education system by focusing on their strategic planning role. It remains to be seen whether in the future, governing bodies will be able to overcome the barriers that prevent them from doing so at present.

## **APPENDIX A**

### *Preliminary Study Documents*

- Map of the Research Area
- Governor Services Directors Interview Schedule
- Education-Business Partnership Directors Interview Schedule

# MAP OF THE RESEARCH AREA

[RESEARCH AREA OUTLINED IN BOLD]



## GOVERNOR SERVICES DIRECTORS INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

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### *About Governors: Broad Questions*

1. What is your perception of the governor's role? Does that perception match the one that the governors themselves hold about their own role?
2. Is it important that governors are volunteers? Why?
3. How much autonomy do governors really have? Do they welcome that autonomy or are they overwhelmed by it?
4. Does the level of economic deprivation in a school's catchment area influence the priorities of its governors? If so, how?
5. Overall, how important are governing bodies to schools?

### *About Governors and Policy Making*

6. Do you find that governing bodies engage more in short-term firefighting or more in longer-term planning? How much knowledge about or interest in long-term policy issues do governors have?
7. Do you find governors feel qualified to give their opinions and ask questions regarding education-related policies, or would many rather leave such questions to the educators?
8. Do you find governors find themselves pushed to the margins of decision making on some policy issues? If so, on what issues and when?
9. At what stages in the policy making process have you found governors to be the most influential? At what stages are they least influential?
10. Could governors be more effective given existing legislation? How? What changes in legislation would make them more effective and valuable?

### *About Governors and Business Involvement*

11. Do governors have opinions about business involvement in their schools? If so, do they view business involvement as a benefit or as a threat?
12. Are governors generally active in the monitoring of business relationships with their schools? If so, how? Should they have more or less involvement? Why?
13. Do you believe governors should have a role in business partnerships – either in knowledge, involvement, assistance, or monitoring? Should governors have a role at the strategic planning stage of these partnerships?
14. Where do governors believe the public-private boundary should be drawn? Why there and not further?
15. Have governors ever come to governor services looking for assistance in how to manage partnerships with businesses?
16. What, if anything, have the co-opted business governors brought to schools?

### *About Governors and Partnerships*

17. Do you find governors perceive central government's promotion of partnership initiatives more as a) a positive development that brings together knowledge and resources from many sectors, or more as b) an attempt by central government to ask schools to find additional resources elsewhere?
18. Do you think governors and schools would become involved in partnerships schemes if there were no financial incentives to do so?
19. In your experience, what do governors believe is their role in making decisions about specialist school status? Do governors see their role changing should their school receive specialist status?

## EDUCATION-BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP DIRECTORS INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

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### *General Questions about the EBP*

1. How is your EBP supported?
2. How do you answer the question: 'If they're so good, why aren't there more – if they're not so good, why are they being pressed?' Is the constraint on the supply end or the receiving end?
3. What do you see as the benefits and tradeoffs of being involved with businesses?
4. What do you see as the keys to a good partnership? Are there some schools that are better suited for partnerships than others? What differentiates them?
5. Does being an urban EBP affect the kinds of partnerships you can arrange? If so, how?
6. How much partnering is arranged through the EBP and how much is arranged directly between schools and businesses?
7. Do you see a difference between partnership and sponsorship? If so, what?
8. Do you see a difference between private partnership and private management?
9. What do you think about 'adopt a school' initiatives?
10. What does the proposed increase in the number of specialist schools mean for your work?
11. Are there any schools who resist involvement with the EBP? Why? What causes schools to avoid extensive partnerships?
12. What do you think causes partnerships to be less than successful or to fail?
13. Beyond work placement, what kinds of schemes are the most popular?

### *Questions about Governors*

14. What role do governors play in these partnerships in your experience? When are they most involved? How involved do they get? Where could they be more involved?
15. At what stage of partnerships have you found governors to be the most influential? At what stage are they least influential? How active do you think governors are in the creation/monitoring of these business relationships? Should they have more or less involvement? Why?
16. In your experience, how well informed are governors about partnerships?
17. What misconceptions from governors are common regarding business partnerships?

### *Questions about Schools*

18. Do you believe schools would engage in partnerships if there was no financial incentive to do so?
19. What concerns do you hear the most from schools who are thinking of partnering with businesses? Are these justified? In what circumstances? How do you work to allay these fears?
20. Do you believe schools with business partnerships provide more equality of opportunity than do schools without partnerships?
21. Do you think schools act differently than they might otherwise in order to remain attractive to their sponsors?
22. What are the long term policy objectives of partnership involvement from the viewpoint of schools? What are their short-term objectives? Do these objectives coincide with those of businesses?

### *Questions about Businesses*

23. What are the reasons for why businesses become involved in education business partnerships? How do they vary? What do the businesses get out of their partnership agreements?
24. There is an argument that some businesses get involved for largely symbolic reasons. How prevalent is this? Does it matter in the end?
25. What have you found to be the longitudinal 'involvement trajectory' of private sponsors? Do you worry about loss of support? What do you do to minimise that potential?
26. Do different kinds of outlay from the business sector attract different types of recipients in terms of students and schools? Do these actions systematically exclude some types of schools and students from being at the top of the list for private sector assistance?
27. Do private resources generally go to schools where parents are less involved (in effect substituting for missing resources) or where parents are involved (because the parents make the effort to get partners)?

### *Questions about the Future*

28. Do you believe partnerships will become more or less prevalent in the coming years? Why?
29. Do education-business partnerships indicate a decline of governmental involvement in, or control over, traditionally governmental functions?
30. Have you noticed any signs of partnership fatigue, in either schools or businesses?

## **APPENDIX B**

### *Main Qualitative Study Documents*

- Research Proposal Letter to Chairs and Heads
- Research Summary / Frequently Asked Questions Sheet
- Governor Interview Schedule



## RESEARCH PROPOSAL LETTER TO CHAIRS AND HEADS

[EXAMPLE]

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19 September 2000

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ :

I am currently a doctoral candidate at the London School of Economics under the supervision Dr Anne West (director of the LSE Centre for Educational Research), and I am writing to ask for your assistance.

My doctoral research centres on the policy-making role of governors in state-sector London secondary schools; specifically, on governor's involvement in and opinions about local-level education-business partnership schemes. The research design relies upon interviews with governors and head teachers, in an attempt to get beyond the quantitative league-table statistics and provide a more in-depth understanding of these issues.

I am writing to you because I believe that \_\_\_\_\_ is an excellent candidate for inclusion in this project, due to both its history of involvement in education-business partnerships and its location within London's urban centre. In addition, several of my colleagues have suggested that the governors of \_\_\_\_\_ might offer valuable perspectives for this research project.

Besides forming the basis of my doctoral dissertation, this research will provide guidance to both the government and other secondary schools on how governing bodies can best contribute to educational policymaking in this era of increased school-based management. As such, I am hoping that you and your colleagues will be able to assist me in this endeavour.

The research itself is designed to keep the demands upon the valuable time of you and your colleagues to an *absolute minimum*. In general, each individual would only need to provide one hour for an interview, which would be arranged at the time and place most convenient for the interviewee. Furthermore, any references to specific places or individuals will be made anonymous in the final written work.

My own background in education policy includes consulting work for the Department for Education and Employment and program management for the United States Department of Education. I would stress, however, that the current project is independent, and not sponsored by any public or private organisation.

I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience to discuss \_\_\_\_\_'s involvement in this project. I can be contacted on 020 7955 6522, or via email at [t.a.heuer@lse.ac.uk](mailto:t.a.heuer@lse.ac.uk). All my best for a smooth start to the new school year!

Sincerely,

Tad Heuer

## RESEARCH SUMMARY AND FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS SHEET

### School Governance Case Study: Information and Frequently Asked Questions

Tad Heuer, *London School of Economics*

#### *What is the goal of this research?*

- The research centres on the policy-making role of governors in state-sector London secondary schools. It seeks to examine governors' knowledge of and opinions about education-business partnership schemes (in specific), and their thoughts the governors' policy-making role (in general).
- Besides forming the basis of my doctoral dissertation, this research will provide guidance to both the government and secondary schools on how governing bodies can best contribute to education policy-making at a time when there is an increasing emphasis on school-based management.

#### *How does our school fit in to this study?*

- Your school is one of five case studies. It was selected as a potential candidate after a comprehensive review of the most recent Ofsted reports for all 139 central London secondary schools. The selection criteria attempted to balance variables such as location, size, percentage of students eligible for free school meals, and involvement with business partnerships.
- Interviews have been conducted already with the Directors of Governor Services and Directors of the Education Business Partnerships in each of the central London boroughs.
- A mail survey of all chairs and heads in inner London secondary schools was carried out in June, in order to test the findings of the case studies.

#### *What commitment would be required, and when would this research occur?*

- The demands upon your time are kept to an absolute minimum. At most, each individual would need to provide only *three-quarters of an hour to one hour* for a single interview, which would be arranged at the time and place most convenient for the interviewee.
- All interviews will be conducted during the next two months, and will be completed by this July.
- Two school-based interviews are requested, one with the head teacher, and the other with a teacher governor. Six governor interviews are requested, with the following governors: The Chair, vice-chair, head of the finance committee, head of the curriculum committee, a parent governor, and a co-opted governor (preferably from the business community).
- Copies of 1) recent governor reports to parents, 2) the school development plan, 3) the school prospectus, 4) the head's report to governors, and 5) any additional materials or minutes relating to either business partnerships or strategic planning would be extremely useful.

#### *What will our school get in return?*

- A volunteer time commitment, as I am offering your school one hour of my time – in either an administrative or educational/visiting speaker capacity -- for every hour of interview time provided. I understand the difficulties of sacrificing your valuable time simply for my benefit, and I believe that this type of time-exchange provides a positive benefit to all parties involved in the research process.
- A short policy report, which will be written on the cumulative findings of this study. This report will be sent to all participating schools and governing bodies, the inner London borough governor services directors and education business partnership directors, and any other interested parties.

#### *What guidelines govern the use of the information that you collect?*

- The anonymity of all schools and individuals will be preserved. As the goal of the research is to provide an environment where participants can offer their honest perspectives on these issues, any quotations or references to specific places or individuals will be made anonymous in the final work.
- Research protocol calls for all interviews to be tape recorded to ensure the accuracy of quotations. However, all tapes will be transcribed immediately, and then erased upon conclusion of the research.

#### *What is your background, and who is funding your research?*

- I am currently a doctoral candidate at the London School of Economics, and I hold Bachelors and Master's degrees in Public Policy from Brown University. My background in education policy includes consulting work for the DFEE and program management for the U.S. Department of Education. I am funded by the Marshall Scholarship, a programme set up by an Act of Parliament in 1953, which annually sends forty American scholars to any British university for two or three years. The scholarship is administered by the Association of Commonwealth Universities.

#### *What if I have other questions?*

- Please feel free to call me on 020 955 6522, or to reach me via email at [T.A.Heuer@lse.ac.uk](mailto:T.A.Heuer@lse.ac.uk).

## SCHOOL GOVERNOR INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

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### *Questions about Governing Bodies*

1. From a school administration perspective, what is your perception of what the governing body's role *should* be? How well do you think the governing body meets that perception in *practice*?
2. How would you define the term 'strategic planning'?
3. Given your definition, how effective do you think your governing body is at strategic planning?
4. What would help your governing body do better strategic planning?
5. Does central government expect too much from governing bodies? If so, how should these expectations be changed to help governors do their job better?
6. Do you think the governing body's philosophy on business involvement should form part of the strategic plan for the school?

### *Questions about Central Government*

7. Does the amount of legislation and paperwork influence your ability as a member of the senior management team to do long-term planning? If so, in what way?
8. Does the number of targeted government funding programmes (including programmes that require 'bids' from schools) affect that long term planning ability? If so, in what way?
9. What do you believe are central government's reasons for promoting increased involvement of business and the private sector (through initiatives like Specialist Schools, EAZs, City Academies, etc.)?
10. Following on from that question, do you think central government is expecting that private sector can (and is willing) to contribute more than it really will?
11. Do you think central government understands how its policies *affect* governing bodies and schools?
12. Do you think central government *trusts* governing bodies and senior management teams?

### *Questions about Opinions on Business Partnerships*

13. What is your opinion about the nature and extent of the links your school has with business? (These links could include everything from work experience and student or staff mentoring by businesses, through donations (financial or in-kind) from business, to PFI initiatives.)
14. Would you like more business links at your school? If yes, what constrains it, and if no, why?
15. What do you see as the best and most helpful role that business can play in state education?
16. Where do you think the public-private boundary should be drawn? What types of involvement from business would you find uncomfortable?
17. Why do you believe that businesses get involved with state education?

## **APPENDIX C**

### *Main Quantitative Study Documents*

- The Quantitative Survey Instrument
- Survey Cover Letter from LEA Governor Services
- Survey Cover Letter from Research Supervisor
- First Survey Follow-up Letter (from LEA Governor Services)
- Second Survey Follow-up Letter (from Researcher)

# THE QUANTITATIVE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

[PAGE 1 OF 4]

## School Governance Survey

ALL RESPONSES ARE HELD IN COMPLETE CONFIDENCE -- NO SCHOOL WILL BE IDENTIFIED

Please return by **6 July 2001** using the enclosed pre-stamped envelope

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Borough: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Governor (circle): Co-Opted Foundation Parent LEA Years on Governing Body \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Years as Chair \_\_\_\_\_ On average, how many hours a week do you spend on school governance matters? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you, or have you ever been, employed in the private sector? Yes No If Yes, for how many years? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you, or have you ever been, employed in the state education system? Yes No If Yes, for how many years? \_\_\_\_\_

### Section 1: Business Involvement/Links with Your School

For the following questions, 'business involvement/links' includes, but needs not be limited to: mentoring of students by business, in-kind and/or financial donations, Private Finance Initiative, work experience, for-profit management, teacher placements, and curriculum assistance.

Please circle the number that best reflects your answer:

1. In general, what is the **extent** of your governing body's knowledge about business involvement/links with your school? Very Low 1 2 3 4 5 Very High

2. How **much** do you think governors should know about business involvement/links in their schools? Very Little 1 2 3 4 5 A Great Deal

3. How **active** has your school been in encouraging business involvement/links over the past few years? Inactive 1 2 3 4 5 Very Active

4. For the following list, simply circle Yes or No to indicate your response:

a) Would you consider your school to have *substantial* involvement/links with business? Yes No

b) Would you consider your school to have *effective* involvement/links with business? Yes No

c) In general, do you know how your school decides whether or not to pursue proposals for business involvement/links? Yes No

d) Does your governing body ever discuss your school's business involvement/links? Yes No

e) In general, do you think business involvement/links with schools will become more common over the next few years? Yes No

5. For the following list, please circle Yes, No, or Unsure to indicate your response:

a) Does your governing body have a written policy on business involvement/links with your school? Yes No Unsure

b) Are you (or other governors) involved in *creating* any business relationships with your school? Yes No Unsure

c) Are you (or other governors) involved in *monitoring* any business relationships with your school? Yes No Unsure

d) Does your governing body have a governor assigned to monitor business involvement/links? Yes No Unsure

e) Has your governing body ever been in contact with your borough's Education Business Partnership office? Yes No Unsure

f) Do you see any practical difference between the terms 'sponsorship' and 'partnership'? Yes No Unsure

g) Have financial or resource constraints ever resulted in your governing body considering business involvement/links that it might otherwise not have considered? Yes No Unsure

h) In general, do you think education-business links are worth the effort required to sustain them? Yes No Unsure

➔ NEXT PAGE

# THE QUANTITATIVE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

[PAGE 2 OF 4]

6. For *each* type of business involvement below, please:

- Tick a box in section A, and
- Circle the appropriate number in sections B, C, and D.
- Circle **\*\*** to indicate 'Don't Know' or circle **♦** to indicate 'Not Applicable'.

Type of Business Involvement:	A: Tick the box that reflects the <i>strength of your opinion</i> about this type of business involvement:				B: Level of school's involvement over the past few years:					C: Financial value to your school:					D: Educational value to students:						
					None	Low	Moderate	High	DK	None	Low	Moderate	High	DK	NA	None	Low	Moderate	High	DK	NA
					Oppose	Neutral	Support														
Work Experience/ Careers Advice					1	2	3	4	*	1	2	3	4	*	♦	1	2	3	4	*	♦
Mentoring of Students by Businesses					1	2	3	4	*	1	2	3	4	*	♦	1	2	3	4	*	♦
Mentoring of Staff/ Teacher Placements					1	2	3	4	*	1	2	3	4	*	♦	1	2	3	4	*	♦
Curriculum Assistance (e.g., pre-designed course materials from business, etc.)					1	2	3	4	*	1	2	3	4	*	♦	1	2	3	4	*	♦
In-kind Donations (e.g., IT equipment, supplies, etc.)					1	2	3	4	*	1	2	3	4	*	♦	1	2	3	4	*	♦
Financial Donations or matched-funding initiatives					1	2	3	4	*	1	2	3	4	*	♦	1	2	3	4	*	♦
Private Finance Initiative					1	2	3	4	*	1	2	3	4	*	♦	1	2	3	4	*	♦
For-Profit Education Management					1	2	3	4	*	1	2	3	4	*	♦	1	2	3	4	*	♦

For the following questions, please circle the number that best reflects your answer:

7. Would you say your school's involvement/links with business are <b>systematic</b> or <b>unsystematic</b> ?	Very Unsystematic 1	2	3	4	Very Systematic 5
8. Do you see your school <b>increasing</b> or <b>decreasing</b> its involvement/links with business over the next two years?	Greatly Decreasing 1	2	3	4	Greatly Increasing 5
9. In general, would you <i>personally</i> like to see <b>more</b> or <b>less</b> business involvement/linkages in your school?	Much Less 1	2	3	4	Much More 5
10. Are you generally <b>supportive</b> or <b>suspicious</b> of the reasons that businesses give for becoming involved with schools?	Very Suspicious 1	2	3	4	Very Supportive 5
11. Have you seen a <b>positive change</b> or a <b>negative change</b> in the ethos of your school due to business involvement/links?	Very Negative 1	2	3	4	Very Positive 5
12. Do you <b>agree</b> or <b>disagree</b> with central government's <i>specific</i> proposals to encourage more business involvement in education (e.g.: Specialist Schools, Education Action Zones, City Academies)?	Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly Agree 5
13. Do you view central government's <i>general</i> proposals for involving business in education as a <b>positive</b> development or as a <b>negative</b> development?	Very Negative 1	2	3	4	Very Positive 5

➔ NEXT PAGE

# THE QUANTITATIVE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

[PAGE 3 OF 4]

## Section 2: Long-Term Strategic Planning and Your Governing Body

*For the purposes of the following questions, 'long-term strategic planning' means 'future planning beyond the current and next school year.'*

14. Should long-term strategic planning be one of a governing body's main responsibilities?	Yes	No									
15. Would you characterise your governing body as being <b>proactive</b> or <b>reactive</b> ?	Very Reactive 1	2	3	4	Very Proactive 5						
16. How would you rate the <b>clarity</b> of your governing body's long-term strategic vision for the school?	Poor 1	2	3	4	Excellent 5						
17. Do you think your governing body is <b>effective</b> or <b>ineffective</b> in doing long-term strategic planning?	Very Ineffective 1	2	3	4	Very Effective 5						
18. About what <b>percentage</b> of its time does your governing body spend on doing long-term strategic planning?	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
19. Do you think your governing body should place <b>more</b> or <b>less emphasis</b> on long-term strategic planning?	Much Less 1	2	3	4	Much More 5						
20. How would you rate the <b>ability</b> of your governing body to do long-term strategic planning?	Low Ability 1	2	3	4	High Ability 5						
21. How <b>frequently</b> is the long-term strategic planning process initiated by <i>governors</i> (as opposed to being initiated by <i>staff</i> )?	Never 1	2	3	4	Always 5						
22. Please indicate whether or not the following factors hinder your governing body in doing long-term strategic planning:											
	Not an Issue	Hinders Slightly	Hinders Moderately	Hinders Greatly							
The amount of legislation and regulation	♦	1	2	3							
The amount of paperwork	♦	1	2	3							
Amount of time required to address statutory responsibilities	♦	1	2	3							
Amount of time required to formulate and review statutory policies	♦	1	2	3							
Amount of time required to monitor targets	♦	1	2	3							
Amount of time spent on immediate 'crisis' issues	♦	1	2	3							
Uncertainty about central government's future funding commitments	♦	1	2	3							
Difficulty in balancing the school's current budget	♦	1	2	3							
The increase in delegated funding to schools	♦	1	2	3							
Pressure created by the timing of central government funding decisions	♦	1	2	3							
Pressure created by the timing of local government funding decisions	♦	1	2	3							
Uncertainty about central government's future education priorities	♦	1	2	3							
The need to address changes in the National Curriculum and assessment	♦	1	2	3							
Uncertainty about changes in the school's pupil intake	♦	1	2	3							
Difficulty in recruiting and retaining teachers	♦	1	2	3							
The need to show continuing improvement in the league tables	♦	1	2	3							
The need to make improvements to satisfy OFSTED	♦	1	2	3							
Desire not to increase governor workload	♦	1	2	3							
Difficulty in recruiting governors	♦	1	2	3							
Difficulty in retaining governors	♦	1	2	3							
The volunteer status of governors	♦	1	2	3							
Inadequate knowledge level of governors	♦	1	2	3							
Insufficient number of governor meetings per year	♦	1	2	3							
Lack of administrative support for governors	♦	1	2	3							

→ LAST PAGE

# THE QUANTITATIVE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

[PAGE 4 OF 4]

23. In general, **how influential** is your governing body in shaping school policies in the following areas?

	Not Influential				Very Influential
Curriculum	1	2	3	4	5
Finance	1	2	3	4	5
Pastoral Care	1	2	3	4	5
Premises	1	2	3	4	5
Staffing	1	2	3	4	5

24. On your governing body, what is the general **level of involvement** of the following categories of governors?

	Very Low				Very High
Co-Opted Governors	1	2	3	4	5
Foundation Governors	1	2	3	4	5
Parent Governors	1	2	3	4	5
LEA Governors	1	2	3	4	5
Teacher Governors	1	2	3	4	5
Staff Governors	1	2	3	4	5

25. Do you find your governing body to be <b>effective</b> or <b>ineffective</b> as a bridge between the community and the school?	Very Ineffective					Very Effective
	1	2	3	4	5	
26. Do you find non-teacher governors are <b>comfortable</b> or <b>uncomfortable</b> in offering opinions and suggestions about curriculum-related issues?	Very Uncomfortable					Very Comfortable
	1	2	3	4	5	

## Section 3: Your Governing Body and the School Development Plan

27. How involved is your governing body in <b>creating</b> the School Development Plan?	Not Involved					Highly Involved
	1	2	3	4	5	
28. Do you think your governing body should have <b>more</b> or <b>less involvement</b> in creating the School Development Plan?	Much Less					Much More
	1	2	3	4	5	
29. How involved is your governing body in <b>monitoring</b> the School Development Plan?	Not Involved					Highly Involved
	1	2	3	4	5	
30. How many <b>years</b> does your School Development Plan cover?	1	2	3	4	5	6+ Don't Know
31. Does your governing body have any written long-term strategic plans <b>beyond</b> the length of the School Development Plan?						Yes No
32. Do you consider the School Development Plan to be your school's main long-term strategic plan?						Yes No
33. Does your governing body evaluate the School Development Plan at the end of the school year?						Yes No

## Section 4: Central Government

34. How <b>well</b> do you think central government understands the effects its policies have on governing bodies and schools?	Not Very Well					Very Well
	1	2	3	4	5	
35. How would you <b>rate the level of trust</b> that you think central government has in governing bodies?	Very Low					Very High
	1	2	3	4	5	
36. In general, do you think central government expects governing bodies to do <b>too little</b> or <b>too much</b> ?	Too Little					Too Much
	1	2	3	4	5	

## Section 5: Final Question

37. Do you think the governing body's philosophy on business involvement should form part of the long-term strategic plan for your school?	Yes	No
--	-----	----

Thank you *very much* for your time! Please return to:  
Tad Heuer/Centre for Educational Research  
London School of Economics  
Houghton Street  
London WC2A 2AE

Comments or Questions?  
Email: [T.A.HEUER@LSE.AC.UK](mailto:T.A.HEUER@LSE.AC.UK)  
Phone: 020 7955 6522



## SURVEY COVER LETTER FROM LEA GOVERNOR SERVICES

[EXAMPLE]

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Alan Wood, Director of Education, Edith Cavell Building, Entfield Road, London N1 5BA

Phone: 020 8356  
Fax: 020 8356  
Minicom: 020 8356 7540

Our ref:  
Your ref:  
Date:

15 June 2001

Dear

As you will see from the enclosed documentation, Tad Heuer, a doctoral candidate at the London School of Economics, is conducting a focused survey of the chairs of governors and head teachers in Hackney's secondary schools as part of his research.

We are happy to support Mr Heuer by circulating this survey to Hackney's secondary heads and chairs on his behalf, as we believe this research will be extremely valuable both for Mr Heuer and for Hackney schools. In particular, the conclusions of this study will assist the LEA in planning and providing future services for Hackney's governors.

Recognising the many demands upon your time, this survey has been carefully designed to be completed in approximately **ten minutes**. Although the survey may appear long at first glance, there are **no** 'open-ended' questions, and **every** question can be answered by simply circling your response. Most important, although you will be able to view the survey results at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/depts/CER/governance.htm>, all individual responses are guaranteed to remain confidential.

Please endeavour to return this survey by 6 July 2001, using the stamped return envelope enclosed for your convenience. Should you have any questions, please contact Mr Heuer directly on 020 7955 6522. Many thanks in anticipation of your assistance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Mark Brownlow'.

Mark Brownlow  
Governor Support Manager

IPS 77004

## SURVEY COVER LETTER FROM RESEARCH SUPERVISOR

[EXAMPLE]



The London School of Economics  
and Political Science

CENTRE FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Director, Dr Anne West

15 June 2001

Dear

### Research Project on School Governance

I am writing to ask for your co-operation in an important research project being carried out by Mr Tad Heuer, a PhD student in the Department of Social Policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science. The project is concerned with a very pertinent topic, namely governing bodies and their role within schools.

As part of his research, Tad Heuer is carrying out a survey of head teachers and chairs of governing bodies of secondary schools in London. Local education authorities (LEAs) and education business partnerships across the capital have been involved in this research and the findings should be of great interest to many stakeholders, including policy makers in central and local government. Moreover, the policy implications arising from the research should inform and influence government policy and aid LEAs with planning and provision of services for governing bodies.

I do hope that you will be willing to complete the attached questionnaire (no school will be named in any reports that are produced). I am very aware of the enormous pressures that you are currently under but I hope that you will find 10 minutes to complete this questionnaire. A stamped-addressed envelope is attached for you to return your questionnaire to the LSE. It would be most helpful if you could return the questionnaire *as soon as possible* and if at all possible before 6 July 2001. If you would like a summary of the findings to be sent to you, please let Tad Heuer know. Alternatively, the results of the survey should be available via the Internet during the autumn term, at [www.lse.ac.uk/depts/CER/governance.htm](http://www.lse.ac.uk/depts/CER/governance.htm).

If you have any queries, please contact either Tad Heuer ([t.a.heuer@lse.ac.uk](mailto:t.a.heuer@lse.ac.uk)) or me ([a.west@lse.ac.uk](mailto:a.west@lse.ac.uk) or: 020 7955 7269). Thank you in advance for your co-operation – without your views it will not be possible to obtain a full picture of how school governing bodies manage their ever-increasing responsibilities.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Anne West'.

Dr Anne West

Houghton Street, London, WC2A 2AE

Telephone: 020 7955 7809

Fax: 020 7955 7733

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## FIRST SURVEY FOLLOW-UP LETTER (FROM LEA GOVERNOR SERVICES)

[EXAMPLE]

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19 June 2001

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ :

Several days ago, we sent you a school governance survey on behalf of Tad Heuer, a doctoral candidate at the London School of Economics.

If you have already completed and returned this survey, many thanks for your prompt response!

However, if you have not already done so, we would greatly appreciate your doing so as soon as you can, and by 6 July 2001 if at all possible. Remember that the survey has been designed to be **completed in ten minutes**, and all responses are guaranteed to remain confidential.

Should you have any questions, or if you have either misplaced or not received the survey, please contact Mr Heuer directly on 020 7955 6522. Many thanks for your assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Governor Services Director

## SECOND SURVEY FOLLOW-UP LETTER (FROM RESEARCHER)

[EXAMPLE]

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16 July 2001

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ :

I am writing to you in connection with a survey on school governance and business involvement that is being conducted at the London School of Economics. This survey was sent to all chairs of governing bodies and head teachers of inner London secondary schools about three weeks ago.

We have been very pleased with the response rate so far – altogether, over 50% of chairs of governing bodies and head teachers have completed the survey. However, to date, we do not appear to have received your survey.

With the debates over business involvement in schools and the overall role of school governors having gained considerable importance since the General Election, I wanted to ensure that you had the opportunity to have your opinions heard on these timely and crucial issues.

I am therefore enclosing another copy of the survey and a pre-stamped envelope in order to provide you with another opportunity to do so. I do hope that you will be able to help.

As I fully understand how extremely busy you are as the term nears its end, please remember that the survey has been designed to be completed in approximately **ten minutes**, and that all responses are guaranteed to remain confidential. I would greatly appreciate your returning your completed survey as soon as you can, and by **31 July 2001** if at all possible.

Should you have any questions, please contact me directly -- via email at [t.a.heuer@lse.ac.uk](mailto:t.a.heuer@lse.ac.uk) or by phone on 020 7955 6522. Many thanks for your assistance!

Yours sincerely,

Tad Heuer

Encl: School Governance Survey  
Pre-stamped return envelope

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