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Insights from an appointed governor

Leigh, JA

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Authors	Leigh, JA
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INSIGHTS FROM AN APPOINTED GOVERNOR

Dr Jacqueline Leigh is an appointed governor at Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust. She shares some insights into her role and advice for new appointed governors

HOW DID YOU BECOME AN APPOINTED GOVERNOR?

I am a nurse and I work as a senior lecturer in healthcare leadership and management at the University of Salford, and agreed with the head of school at the School of Nursing, Midwifery, Social Work and Social Sciences that I would be the appointed governor. I have been in office for around 10 months.

HOW DID YOU FIND YOUR EXPERIENCE OF A GOVERNOR AT FIRST?

At first it was quite scary. I wasn't sure what questions to ask during council of governor meetings. I was thinking: how can I hold the board to account? How can I scrutinise this information in front of me? Now during meetings I am more comfortable and always ask at least one pertinent question at each council of governors meeting.

WHAT IMPACT DO YOU FEEL YOU HAVE MADE IN YOUR TIME AS A GOVERNOR?

There are many groups and sub-committees that governors can get involved in and I chose to be part of the engagement group. Within this group we are planning to gather staff, patients, visitors and members views on inefficiency or 'waste' they have experienced or observed and how this could be improved. I have used my links with my university to engage with the students on trust issues and encourage them to become members and get involved. After asking why there isn't a programme about service and quality improvement for nursing students, I established the Salford undergraduate quality improvement programme in conjunction with trust and university staff. This means that third year student nurses who are on placement in the trust are now exposed to more techniques on quality and service improvement which will be invaluable in equipping them well to become high quality future nurses. As a governor I have also helped to develop a governor code of conduct, which provides guidance on how to behave appropriately as a governor, and applying the code has allowed our meetings to be really effective.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO APPOINTED GOVERNORS JUST STARTING OUT?

One thing that helped me a lot was being assigned a buddy who was a staff governor. They helped me if I had any questions or if I had any issues I wanted to discuss. If you aren't able to get a buddy, my main piece of advice would be: don't be afraid to ask questions. Whatever it may be or however silly it may seem, it is worth asking. Starting as a governor can often be daunting with a lot of language feeling very alien. Just try to listen, learn and engage with the whole process. Get involved with as many things as possible. Trust staff are always willing to listen and help you and I believe that the culture of a trust has an important part to play in this. At Salford Royal I have felt supported as a governor and this is because I feel valued in my role. Our lead governor is very encouraging and our chair hosts a feedback meeting which is open to us all to attend. In the North West I also have opportunities to meet and learn from other trusts in my region, which I feel is also very helpful.