

NGA Conference – November 16th 2013 – York – Keynote Speech on Performance Indicators given by Sir John Holman, Senior Education Adviser to the Wellcome Trust

Stephen Adamson, Chair of NGA, opened the conference with a welcome to delegates – and to the magnificent setting of the Merchant Adventurers' Hall. He commented that, as always NGA had looked for a contemporary venue and 'this was the best York could do'.

Turning to the content of the conference, Stephen suggested that we were taking a 'core sample' through the tree of education to identify what goes on in the middle. Within was much change: structural change, performance management and pay, the need for co-operation between schools, but with forces at play, which engendered competition. It was an exciting time to be a governor, with more power to effect change.

The Chair then moved on to introduce the first speaker, Professor Sir John Holman, Emeritus Professor of Chemistry at the University of York and Senior Education Adviser to the Wellcome Trust. He had also formerly been a chemistry teacher and head teacher of Watford Grammar School.

Before he embarked on his Keynote Speech – *School Performance Indicators: Measuring what we value* – Sir John commented that he had given his inaugural lecture in this very building in 2000.

As well as serving as a head teacher in the past, he had sat on five boards of governors and been chair of trust company. Things had changed over the years. Pre-1988 there had been little autonomy: now there was greater and greater responsibility and greater freedom of action. We should make far more use of this new power.

Moving to his topic of school performance indicators he pointed out that the real indicators were what parents and pupils wanted from a school. He asked delegates to discuss at their tables what three things parents wanted from *their* schools. The list arising from the discussion included confidence, enjoyment, achievement, physical and mental safety, good teaching; schools which were fair, trustworthy, non-judgemental and had good leadership. However, as one delegate pointed out, it depended on the type of school as to which three things might be most desirable.

Sir John commented, as discussions at tables had shown, that there was more to it than just academic achievement. He referred to the Wellcome Trust and its work being mostly about health. In 2010 he had assisted Sir Mark Walport in reporting on science and mathematics education and how to improve this. They had realised that there were pressures in schools that stopped them making good progress in science in particular. Part of this was because at 16 the emphasis was on tests rather than practical work. The balance needed to be got right, and this should be where the governing body came in to the equation. Governors needed to ask if there was enough practical work across school and to hold the school to account if the amount was not sufficient.

The Wellcome Trust had become involved in governance and was piloting a governance code across 21 schools in England, of different types and with different Ofsted ratings. There were three elements – Element A, strategic planning, with close involvement of the GB; Element B, a framework using the 20 questions developed by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Governance (APPG), organised into various sections; and Element C, performance indicators. To find these PIs, one needed to look beyond the obvious such as scores in English and maths at primary level and GCSEs and A-levels. This was still a work in progress so not all examples were listed but Sir John suggested some of the PIs should include those that parents were interested in, in judging a school. In considering how to measure these, the pilot was encouraging GBs at secondary level to look at whether pupils

were employable and how they knew this to be so – where the evidence might be. DfE, for instance, had some destination information. One could also consider how the inspiration given by subject teachers might lead to A-levels and A level choices. It was also important to provide opportunities to experience success beyond simply academic success. He also mentioned the Data Dashboard, which was the product of co-operation between the Fischer Family Trust, the NGA and the Wellcome Trust.

Sir John then invited Lucy Legard, Chair of Governors at Malton School, to talk about the experience of being in a pilot school. Lucy said that Element C had been the most challenging but also the most important to look at. It was important that the governing body was shown what it wanted to see, rather than what the school wanted to show governors. There was a tension between the focus on teaching and learning and the other aspects of performance that might potentially cause a distraction. Academic data was relatively straightforward, so the school had built on that. They had created a four-page dashboard to show the school starting point and its eventual goal – where they wanted Malton School to be, and what it would look like, in 2020. It was a challenging task to sift through all the various elements beyond the academic, and to find two or three that would show holistic and personal growth for each child. Each child had been issued with a 'living CV', in which each could record all that they engaged in, in and out of school. It could also show where there was a need to develop a pupil if he or she were not accessing things that would help personal growth. An example was one pupil with no involvement in anything in or out of school. He was asked if there was something that appealed to him: this turned out to be joining the Army Cadets and school made this possible. Ofsted had recently visited and had said that the GB used data well. The aim was to make core business sufficiently embedded so that other aspects could be built on that foundation.

Sir John resumed his presentation. It was a source of concern that schools acknowledged the importance of wider measures of performance but nevertheless felt that the need to address Ofsted elements made it difficult to find time for the rest. The next phase of the current project was to try to produce some measures of the success of science and maths in schools that governors could use. In a secondary school, this might be what proportion had gone on to study science or maths at A-level: this could be a proxy for how well the subjects were taught.

He then invited questions.

Qu.1 (Brian Patterson, Dudley Association): You spoke of progression and achieving success and mentioned sporting as well as academic success. However, you did not mention advancement in vocational areas.

Vocational elements are important. There is a rush to use progression to A Level because this is easily understood. A lot of work has been done regarding schools' success in getting young people to move towards vocational qualifications. This is difficult because it is more diverse but one should not diminish it.

Qu.2 (Roger Marsh, Woldgate College, York): You spoke of freedom of action, but not in regard to the curriculum, such as giving music a place. It is harder to find time for the Arts.
Arts and music: I hope I've not given the impression that music is not an academic subject. However, music, almost without parallel is more engaged in outside of school than at school, or outside of the curriculum. It was interesting that the Russell Group's list had no creative subjects on it.

Qu.3 (Vince Barrett, East Riding Association): I'd like to refer to the Newsom Report. Half of our pupils had no recognition of anything they had done except their exam results. There seems to have been no real progress since then.

Newsom: careers guidance is not well done at present. And technical vocational education is one area that worries me as this is a blind spot. There is too much concentration on university as a destination. We need to put together a well-respected structure.

Qu.4 (Valerie Cadd , St John's CE Academy, Darlington): Performance Indicators are very important but we need for instance to know how much pupils engage in education and training after school. How can we find this information?

Ask if engagement always leads to academic achievement. More questions are needed.

Qu.5 (Niki Lamont, Southend Association): At primary level, how do you measure how much teachers inspire pupils, and how do you discover destinations?

We need to get better at reaching over time; we need to check ten years on and find where they are – and bring them back into schools as exemplars.

Qu.6 (Governor, Calderdale Association): If you were setting up a new secondary school today, what would the curriculum look like?

In the curriculum, knowledge matters, but I would put emphasis on extra-curricular activities. Many of the changes in lives happen outside of the classroom. The curriculum is taken for granted, so look for other opportunities, where pupils can learn teamwork, leadership and independence.

In thanking Sir John, Stephen Adamson drew attention to the work of Lord Baker in regard to vocational education: there seemed to be some hope there.

[We are, as ever, grateful to Judith Bennett of the Oxfordshire Association and a former Chair of the NGA, for making available to us her incredibly detailed set of notes on Sir John's presentation]