



Thought Piece: A Question of Accuracy



A Question of Accuracy in Minutes

Minutes are the shop window to governance. By ensuring that the board has clear and accurate minutes trustees and governors can quickly evidence their effectiveness. Sadly the opposite is also true. In this short article we look at how to ensure minutes are accurate.

Minutes must be all of the following;

1. Legible
2. Accurate
3. Concise
4. Approved

Let's take each of these words in turn:

Legible – minutes must be readable and easy to understand. This means that the sentence structure needs to be consistent, that there are no spelling errors, that the grammar supports the reader and does not confuse them; and most importantly the minutes make sense to some one reading them after the fact. Minutes are read by a variety of audiences and need to be easy to decipher for someone who might not have been at the meeting e.g. an auditor, Ofsted, or someone doing an external review of governance. Minutes do not need to be narrative but they need to show discussion, questions and challenges clearly and accurately; Nor do not need to look like colourful works of art that the clerk has colour coded (remember not every one can see certain colours) according to question, answer, challenge – they just need to be readable.

Accurate – minutes need to be a correct and true record of the meeting. They should not be changed once they have been approved and signed by the Chair. If minutes (very rare circumstances), do need to be changed this must be done by use of an addendum. Clerks should be expert paraphrasers who can quickly encapsulate your discussions into one or two short paragraphs; capturing discussion, context and actions clearly. Chairs are reminded that they need to worry more about the lack of questions and challenges than they do about a misplaced comma or missing full-stop.

Concise – most meetings last between 2 and 2.5 hours and on average this produces minutes of between 6 and 8 pages. Minutes that run to 20 sides and include empty spaces, big gaps and are in a large font are probably not concise. Remember 'less is more' but don't argue over the semantics, expect clerks to use 6 words when one will do, or force your clerk adopt your own personal style.

Approved – once minutes are approved as a true and accurate record they must not be changed. There are a variety of opinions on how minutes are signed by the Chair but the main thing to remember is that once they are approved they are on record in full. If the board are not content to approve minutes for whatever reason (remember

it is not the Chair's decision on whether to approve the minutes by themselves) then this needs to be discussed properly. There may be very good reason. A good clerk will once the minutes have been agreed by the chair and headteacher/CEO in draft circulate them to the board so that when the meeting takes place everyone has had a chance to read and digest and be ready to approve them.

Why not have a look at set of minutes from 12-18 months ago and see if they make sense to you now? The results are often illuminating!
