

# Roundtable Notes

## 08. Student safeguarding

The Leadership Foundation in conjunction with other sector bodies, including the Committee of University Chairs (CUC), offers a programme of Roundtable events. The events provide an opportunity for small numbers of participants (governors, governance professionals and senior managers) to discuss topical or emerging issues relating to the governance of higher education institutions (HEIs).

At each event, participants share and exchange views under the strict application of the Chatham House rule. None of the discussion is attributed to either an individual or an institution. To facilitate the wider dissemination of some of the key points discussed at each Roundtable, a summary note is released following every event.

### Context to examining safeguarding

It is important to recognise that governing bodies have legal responsibilities in regard to student safeguarding, but equally have ethnic and moral obligations. A key contextual question is whether governing bodies are largely reactive: taking action about student safeguarding when serious matters are brought to their attention. Or, alternatively, do governing bodies take a proactive and strategic approach?

Putting aside issues relating to PREVENT, the Roundtable explored issues around the safeguarding of children under the age of 18, and those students over 18 who might be deemed to be vulnerable adults.

In relation to vulnerable adults, HEIs are not subject to a specific written down legal duty. Rather HEIs have a common law duty of care, and are expected to take reasonable steps to ensure vulnerable adults are safe.

Typically, governors may fall into the trap of assuming that all of the HEI's students are over the age of 18, and that consequently the legal obligations relating to child safeguarding are not important. This however is unlikely to be the case. Typically, for example, institutions will invite onto their campuses young people under the age of 18,

run summer schools for young people or offer pre-university programmes for international students under the age of 18. HEIs offering professional placements tied to nursing or teacher training programmes should equally be mindful of the safeguarding issues that can arise in the workplace, and how these can be best managed.

With regard to matters such as mental health, the question is where does the HEI's responsibilities start and where do they end? Similarly, how might other agencies be involved in offering support to such vulnerable students, and how can issues of confidentiality that arise be effectively managed?

Participants at the Roundtable, felt that further guidance to governors on their responsibilities would be of significant value. These would potentially help in raising awareness of governors' responsibilities, the issues governors should be testing with the Executive and their monitoring of the impact of institution's policies and actions.

In passing it was noted that typically an institution's statement of primary responsibilities includes 'to receive assurance that adequate provision has been made for the general welfare of students.'<sup>1</sup>

The actions that institutions might consider adopting to improve the flow of information and to ensure governing bodies were fully-sighted on student safeguarding include:

- Considering whether the Student Services (to similar titled) committee regularly discusses and reviews the HEI's policies on safeguarding and vulnerable adults, and the implementation and impact of the policies
- Reflecting on whether reputational risks with regard to safeguarding and vulnerable adults are regularly reviewed by the institution's Audit Committee
- Ensuring the governing body receives an annual report on safeguarding and vulnerable adults

In addition to the above, there is a strong case for ensuring the topic of student safeguarding is covered in the induction of all new governors.

### Resources available

A new Getting to Grips guide on Student Safeguarding is in preparation. Designed to assist governors and governing bodies understand and effectively discharge their responsibilities that Guide is expected to become available from May 2018.

In addition, the Leadership Foundation is undertaking research commissioned by Hefce to assess the progress of the higher education sector and any remaining barriers to implementing the UUK Taskforce's recommendations on student safeguarding, with regard to sexual misconduct and hate crime. The work will identify what additional information, action or support is required from UUK and others to enable further progress to be made. A report of the study will be published in the next couple of months.

For further information on Governance and our upcoming events visit [www.lfhe.ac.uk/governance](http://www.lfhe.ac.uk/governance)