

Academic Staff Governors' Power and Professional Status in the Governance of Further Education Colleges in England

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Abdulla joined Birmingham City University in January 2019 after 20 years of teaching in the British Further Education sector and in the Maldives. He completed his Doctor of Education in 2017 at University of Warwick's Centre for Education Studies. His current research focuses on educational governance; and teachers' and academics' roles in educational governance both in the UK and internationally. Abdulla is also a co-founder of Maldives Research, a think tank researching public policy in the Maldives.

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At a time of the British government's heightened interest in FE college governance, this paper explores Academic Staff Governor (ASG)'s professional and power status at three FE colleges in England. The study draws upon relevant literature to identify concepts related to ASGs' power relations and professional status in governance. An interpretivist stance is used to collect predominantly qualitative data through a combined methods approach. During fieldwork, qualitative and quantitative evidence from semi-structured interviews; questionnaire responses, observations of governance meetings and governance documents was analysed. Findings suggest that ASGs' insiderness; their relationships, their professional status and the decision-making circumstances may limit their influence in the governance of the colleges, with implications for governance quality. As a result of the study, 'The Restricted Professional Model' of an ASG has been developed to highlight the restricted nature of the role with implications for good governance. For governance practitioners, organisations and policymakers, the research recommends avoiding low-power and low status governance roles; take action to develop ASGs' professionalism as educators; remove structural and power barriers and to allow more opportunities for ASGs to contribute to governance. Finally, further research opportunities are identified including research to establish ASGs' professional profiles in the FE sector and the wider impact educators' professionalism has on governance in a variety of educational institutions.

Keywords: educational governance; FE colleges; academics; academic staff; teaching staff governors.

Introduction and Context

Recent announcements by the UK government suggests an intensification of focus on strengthening governance with the UK Further Education (FE) sector (DfE 2018) and the announcement of extra funding of £14m in developing FE governors (Speck and Exley 2020). These initiatives are taking place against a backdrop of nearly three decades of governance failures in FE colleges (Hill 2014); irregularities in institutional

reporting of student outcomes (Jupp 2015) and published records of falling quality of FE (Lucas and Crowther 2016). More recently, the FE Education Commissioner in a white paper has emphasised the need for governing boards to feature amongst others, “post-16 education experience” in order to “build a diverse membership” and to ensure board members “have the skills they need” (DfE (Department for Education) 2021, 54-5). ASGs’ membership is an important way of ensuring that post-16 education experience is represented in FE boards.

The emergence of academic staff governors such as lecturers in FE governing boards was first a result of the government circular 7/70 in 1970 (DES 1973), where academic staff governors were charged with the function of advising college principals on academic matters. The incorporation of colleges in 1992 resulted in academic staff governors working with limited power status below the more powerful business external governors. However, academic staff roles captured in FE arrangements announced in 1997 by the New Labour government portrayed an equal status as other governors, partly as a response to the aforementioned cases of failed college governance (Hill 2014). In England, an FE college’s governing body typically may consist of both internal governors and external governors; the internal governors may consist of the Principal (the Chief Executive), one or two student governors and up to three staff governors. The staff governors may be composed of teaching staff governors (known as Academic Staff Governors or ASGs) and/or non-teaching staff governors (Business Support Staff Governors) elected by college staff as representatives of staff (Sodiq and Abbott 2018; Sodiq 2012; Hill 2012). External governors may be searched for and appointed because of their specialist expertise and skills in college governance (Schofield, Matthews, and Shaw 2009). In this arrangement, ASGs, the focus of this paper, are members of an FE college’s governing board, whose responsibilities include

the determination and the maintenance of the educational character and mission of the college; and the oversight of its activities; the effective and efficient use of resources; the solvency of the institution and the governing body and safeguarding of their assets as specified in the Education Act 2011 (HM Government 2011).

Within the current climate of the rekindled interest in FE governance, I aim to ascertain the nature of power and professional status of ASGs as academics in the governance of three 'Outstanding' Colleges in England; 'Outstanding' is used throughout this paper to denote the inspection judgement awarded by Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted 2014) to the colleges. The evidence was collected from a project conducted between 2011 and 2015. The two terms 1) 'academics' or educators and 2) 'ASGs' in this paper refer to 1) academic staff such as teachers, lecturers and 2) tutors of colleges acting as 'teaching' or academic staff governors of the colleges where they are employed respectively. Educators' role in educational governance is of particular importance and needs researching given that in the last few decades there has been very little research into their roles in governance. While research into ASGs in FE governance in England is notably absent and limited to ASGs' role complexity and activities reported by Sodiq and Abbott (2018), similarly, one has to go as far back as three decades for similar research into school teacher governors (TGs). The term 'TGs' in schools is used synonymously with 'ASGs' and TG roles are equivalent role in schools (Linter 2001; Earley and Creese 2000). The latter revealed the complex power relations between TGs and the rest of the governing board (GB) and Linter's PhD thesis asserted the important role educators as governors can play in school improvement (2001). Earley and Creese's work (2001, 2000) revealed the restricted nature of ASG's role in school governance. In this paper, I aim to establish if 20 years later, the same qualification applies to ASGs in colleges, with a specific

focus on their professional and power status in governance. It is also envisaged that this paper will facilitate a much needed revival of research into and the understanding of academics' status in the governance of FE colleges.

Literature Review

Power in Institutional Governance

Many researchers have explored 'power' amongst actors in both educational and corporate governance, for instance, Masunga (2014); Klijn and Koppenjan (2012); Salaman (2010); Santiago et al. (2008); New (1993); Pounce (1992); Ebbutt and Brown (1978) and (Taylor 1983). Power as a social concept in leadership is recognised as relative authority over valued organisational resources (Rucker and Galinsky 2017). Such authority may be qualified as structural (Anicich et al. 2016) with a hierarchical element (Hohmann and Walter 2019) and social (Rucker and Galinsky 2017) because of the networks individuals operate in. The nature of such networks affects individual governors' ability to fulfil their role in educational governing boards (Baxter 2020; Moos and Paulsen 2014; Bush and Gamage 2001). Power surfaces when the authority is asymmetrical in favour of an individual, or groups in organisational structures. Rucker and Galinsky's earlier work (2016) identifies the effects of power and social power, in an agentic-communal model stressing that the effects may be either agentic and driven by a desire to excel oneself in organisation and society, or communal, where the individual, with a desire to belong, focusses on serving their own communities. Aspects of this dual-factor sense of power will be used to analyse the evidence from the current research to understand the nature of the power relations experienced by ASGs at the three FE colleges.

Researching teacher governors in school governing boards (GBs), Earley and Creese (2000) identified three general role conceptualizations using analogies of the roles:

- ‘The Minimalist’ - not contributing much to governance; recruited unwillingly because no other teacher has shown interest; does some informal liaison between teachers and the board; lacks training; limited power in governance;
- ‘The Watchdog’ – lack of trust: TGs wary of other governors and the Senior Management Team (SMT) and mainly acts as a representative of teaching staff’s interests; speaks out in board meetings and challenges the headteacher or;
- ‘The Communication Link’ - acts mainly as a communication link between governance and teachers on Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA) matters.

Similar ‘informal’ labelling and role analogies have been adopted by Krantz and Maltz (1997), Mullins (2007) and James et al. (2007). In the conceptualisation by Early and Creese (2000), all the analogies capture somewhat negative perspectives of educators’ governance role. For a more balanced approach, there is a need to introduce an analogy to capture some of the positive aspects of ASG roles too. In this study, I will apply the approach to ASGs in FE governance while remaining open to the emergence of both positive and negative aspects of the role. This will be done while acknowledging in comparison to FE governance that school governance, especially since the schools began to convert to academies in the 2000s, may feature a very different overall governance structure (Eyles and Machin 2019). Academies are governed by an academy trust board above local school governing board, unlike FE college governance, where the FE institution’s governing board is the statutory governing body.

Nevertheless, ASGs in both FE colleges and schools have similar positions where they are normally elected to the board by the teaching staff.

Trust and Power:

Trust in governance is crucial for effective governance despite the difficulty in achieving it (Klijn and Koppenjan 2012), particularly when various governance constituencies represent conflicting perspectives. Research in HE governance in OECD countries suggests that SMTs' power in staff appointments may discourage criticism of SMTs and equally, the academic staff and student governors may work together to overturn SMT's decisions (Santiago et al. 2008).

Research in school governance focussing on the relationship and trust issues between TGs and external governors is limited to a handful of dated but worthy of note for their pertinence. New (1993) noted external governors' lack of confidence in TGs' capacity to fulfil their governance responsibilities while Pounce (1992) suggested that the mistrust between the two parties was mutual. In Taylor's (1983) study, the teaching community believed that TGs used their power to advance the heads' or staff's views but were concerned that TGs were powerless when considering any opposition to the heads' views. The headteachers believed that the TGs were supportive and they and the boards trusted the TGs. In terms of governor relationships, Smith (2010) asserts that board governors, whether academic staff or otherwise, may be valued for their local and social connections in the immediate community and as a result may be seen as powerful figures in educational governance.

In FE governance and leadership, Donovan (2019) argues that distrust between leaders and staff is essential due to the risk-averse and performative environment of FE. This distrust complicates the relationship between ASGs, the Principal and the SMT.

Professional Status in Governance

Power and status are regarded as conceptually distinct and empirically distinguishable elements (Anicich et al. 2016; Fragale, Overbeck, and Neale 2011). Status in this paper refers to the *professional* status of ASGs in college boards, which feature many other types of professions (Godbold 2014). In Nerland's (2016) definition of a profession, the shared knowledge amongst professionals consists of different dimensions of knowledge – an aspect that may have a bearing on the wide ranging types of knowledge that ASGs could utilise in their governance activities in FE.

Professionals' commitment to their professional communities by contributing to governance may raise the status of a profession (Whitehead and Aggleton 1986). In such participation, there may be clashes between professional values (for instance serving the best interest of the professionals' client body) and institutional values leading to organisational professional conflict or OPC (Becker 2018; Cowton 2009). In FE governance, ASGs may find decision-making problematic when attempting to balance the best interest of the institution against the best interest of the students and the relevant professional body because FE college's governance arrangements prevent governors serving the interests of particular groups other than the best interest of the institution itself (Hill 2012). This aspect of governance may affect the professionalism of ASGs because of the impact the restriction has on their autonomy.

The Effects of Power and Professional Status

A number of studies within organisational leadership have explored the effects of status and power. (Anicich et al. 2016) researched private and public organisations in the US and concluded that people with low-status believe their role was disrespected, and did not enjoy admiration from peers. The authors recommend that organisations should

match role status and power. Other effects of the status-power operation is that organisation's members lacking status resulted in individuals engaging in less prosocial behaviour that is deemed beneficial to society (Cho and Fast 2018). Power also allows people to express their feelings (Anicich et al. 2016; Galinsky et al. 2008; Anderson and Berdahl 2002; Chen, Lee-Chai, and Bargh 2001; Hecht and LaFrance 1998) in their endeavour to do public good. The converse of this effect is that with less power, people are less inclined to express sincere feelings in order to avoid work-related or social sanctions (Anicich et al. 2016), which results in minimalist contribution to strategy in governance (Castellanos and George 2020; Hendry, Kiel, and Nicholson 2010). This effect echoes Earley and Creese's findings in school governance discussed earlier (2000). Another study by Hohmann and Walter (2019) identified individuals' tendency to be motivated to engage in status-elevating behaviour if they have power even with low perceptions of their status.

Professional Status of ASGs - Academic Staff as Education Governors

When educators such as teachers or lecturers act as governors, some see their role as acting as intermediaries in the training of governors and the academic staff. This element is captured well by Linter (2001), in his illuminating action research conducted as a TG, where school governors shadowed his teaching practice. Governors in the study described the experience as 'educating' (2001, 188) and giving them 'insights into the school far beyond the bounds of governor meetings' (2001, 259). The role of the educator in governance, thus suggests a markedly high status. Furthermore, Marchington (2015) reinforces the idea that professionals could contribute meaningfully to advance productivity and efficiency of organisations, especially where the management encouraged staff to bring shop-floor level insight from professionals to organisational decision-making.

In educational governance, despite external governors' independent knowledge, ASGs in school and FE governance may be frustrated with external governors' lack of professional knowledge (Taylor 1983; Lee 2000). Interestingly, New's (1993) research into school GBs in England concluded that, although in some schools TGs were regarded as esteemed education experts (New 1993), in the majority of GBs, a limited number of external governors were uncertain about the TGs' ability to contribute to non-TLA issues. However, the authoritative guidance on educational governance in England regard ASGs' knowledge of the education environment as an important governance resource for external governors and strategy in educational institutions (Hill 2012, 2009; Earley and Creese 2000; Pounce 1992). Earley and Creese (2001) established that TGs do make an invaluable contribution to governance through their educational expertise and by communicating teachers' opinions to governors. In FE governance, ASGs' professional information may range from their awareness of learners' educational needs as well as relatively less expected and valued knowledge such as ASGs' management expertise (Sodiq and Abbott 2018). Furthermore, as already highlighted in the introduction, there is a drive in national policy to ensure post-16 education experience in FE college boards (DfE 2021) and this elevates the professional status of ASGs in FE governance.

Research Methodology and Fieldwork

The research questions in this study were:

- What power relationships exist in ASGs' roles in the GBs at the three colleges in the study?
- What is the three ASGs' professional status in the three GBs?
- What are the implications of ASGs' power and professional status for FE college governance?

Power and status are ontological entities in ‘people and relations’ (Mason 2002). The study relied on governors’ interpretive narratives as evidence, about experiences related to power and status and hence, the epistemological basis of this study was mainly interpretivist rooted in the experiential epistemology (Reicher 2000). The study also relied on van Ees et al.’s (2009) argument for observing board members’ behaviour to study governance.

The project followed ethical guidelines (BERA 2018, 2011) and approval was obtained from the home institution of the research. Full information about purpose, data collection and data security was shared with participants and informed consent was obtained (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2007). Although as informed to participants, the author was able to establish the identity of some of the questionnaire respondents (eg:- the Chair of the board, the ASG), the use of pseudonyms, (for instance, X-College and X-ASG) in all observation notes, interview scripts and project outputs ensured the anonymity of the colleges and the respondents to the project’s audience. Care was also taken not to include any identifiable evidence in the outputs.

Sixteen potential colleges for the multi-case study were identified using Ofsted’s (2012a) publication of ‘Outstanding’ FE institutions in England. Official permissions were requested from the board clerks for participation in the project. Four colleges accepted the invitation; three formally identified for the study to allow comparisons to be made (Yin 2009) and one as a contingency case to use if any of the confirmed colleges decided to leave the study.

A cross-sectional semi-structured questionnaire (Fogelman and Comber 2007) designed online using Qualtrics® (2002) was used to gather evidence from the three colleges’ ASGs and other governors. The questionnaire design was adapted from questionnaires used by Gleeson, Abbott, and Hill (2011) and Sodiq (2012) that

researched school and college governors' perceptions. Respondents were encouraged to provide brief comments freely to complement responses to any closed questions, thus providing their own and contextual variables (Storey 2016). Governors including ASGs to be interviewed were identified through a request made at the end of the online questionnaire. From those who responded, purpose sampling was used to identify and invite one ASG and one other senior governor to be interviewed from each of the three colleges.

Observations of eight governance meetings across the three colleges facilitated evidence triangulation and exploration of themes related to power and status from the questionnaire. A systematic observation tool (Moyle 2007) was used to capture and categorise meeting participants' verbal contributions into communicative functions (for example, questioning and challenging); governance functions (for instance, realigning mission, Table) and ASG roles such as giving professional information (Earley and Creese 2001). The information about the person who contributed prior to and in response to the contributions from the ASG and the corresponding communicative functions provided information about power and relationships in ASG role.

[Insert Table 1 here]

Six semi-structured, in-person interviews (three ASGs and three external governors across the three colleges) were conducted, which focussed on the emerging themes from the analysis of the survey results and evidence set from the meetings observed. The interview questions (categorised into ASGs' power and professional status) encouraged ASGs to engage in retrospective-meaning making (Tummons 2014) of their own meeting contributions and experiences in governance. A variety of governance documents from the three GBs were scrutinised for power and status themes, including

Instruments and Articles of Governance; Standing Orders; committees' Terms of Reference; annual self-assessments; Ofsted reports and meeting minutes.

The GB observations were conducted with caution recognising potential observer bias (Moyley 2007) and the possibility that the observer's presence could influence contributions in meetings although the researcher placed himself as far away as possible from the participants. The quality of the interview data depended on participants' ability to remember actual phenomena, and interviewing alone might not have verified actual governance activities (Silverman 2013). This justified using observing governance meetings for closer access to actual practice. The case study approach did not allow generalising the findings to other colleges or other educational settings. However, there may be patterns in the findings worth exploring in other settings or in a wider study to better understand power and professional status of academics in institutional governance.

Results and Discussion

The Three ASGs' Power in Governance

Analysis of the Terms of Reference for committees indicated that the three ASGs' participation in their remuneration committees was barred or discouraged, which meant they could not influence the college's staffing and pay meaningfully due to a conflict of interest as ASGs themselves are teaching/academic staff and could promote their own agenda at odds with students' (Ford 2020). However, a senior governor at X-College strongly argued against this arrangement. She emphasised that an ASG could make significant contributions by enlightening the remuneration committee and 'people who are two or three layers of management above' on matters such as a teacher's 'typical day/week' because ASGs are 'so close to the coal face.' What the quote highlights is

how an ASG could contribute to the committee without directly being involved in determining teachers' pay matters.

The limited scope for ASGs' involvement in statutory and powerful committees was in par with Masunga's (2014) observation that ASGs in colleges may not be of the same power status as those in the small decision-making circle consisting of the GB's Chairperson, the CEO/Principal, and others in the statutory committees. In addition, the Instruments of Governance at the colleges barred the ASGs from holding the GBs' chair/vice-chair positions. Y-ASG and Z-ASG were discouraged from being committee chairs too. Such barriers meant the three ASGs were not part of the dominant coalition in governance (van Ees, Gabrielsson, and Huse 2009; Argote and Greve 2007). This may be as expected because some argue that it is not desirable to allow ASGs to be too powerful (Bagarette 2014; Taylor 1983). ASGs are argued to possess less power if they are close to FE principals (Masunga 2014; Ebbutt and Brown 1978), and such a close relationship may hinder ASGs' meeting contributions (Cornforth and Edwards 1998). The nature of this relationship, according to all three ASGs in the interviews was of a 'boss-employee' relationship. Their nominations to the board were often initiated by the SMT and their elections often featured a single candidate from the colleges' staff. As the principals were also part of their respective GBs, it made it slightly awkward and difficult for the ASGs to contribute to governing meetings. The survey results across the colleges suggested that the ASGs in the research did not dominate governance meetings (Figure 1).

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE.]

In fact, 32% of governors believed that ASGs were often excluded from some discussions and inhibited from participating in meetings because of the SMT's presence although the level of perceived hindrance to ASGs' participation was lower at X-

College (21%) than at Y and Z colleges (38%). In addition, at Z-college, a majority of governors (61%) felt that Z-ASG was often excluded from some discussions as a matter of course.

In the meeting observations, the three ASGs were observed to perform 50% fewer number of challenging the SMT functions (19%) than supporting the SMT functions (38%, Table). The challenge function might be seen as a display of power [Insert Table 2 here]

but more importantly, researchers across four decades and in both corporate and educational governance assert that challenging SMTs constructively is essential for good governance (Masunga 2014; Wilkins 2014; Hill and James 2013; Alimo-Metcalf 2012; Ofsted 2012b; Earley and Creese 2001; Mace 1973). It appeared that ASGs' limited power status and influence from the SMT could amount to less effective governance in college boards. At the same time, there may be other factors not explored in this study, such as the role of the chairs and the governing professionals/clerks that may be relevant in enabling and facilitating ASGs to engage in supporting/challenging SMTs in governance for effective governance (FETL 2020).

In order for ASGs to be empowered in governance, a productive relationship to form may be the relationship with the wider stakeholders because governors recognised the value of such affiliations (Smith 2010) and governors exercising such communal power may be seen as influential in local contexts. X-ASG, for instance, was observed in the GB meeting to be the main contributor in a discussion where she argued successfully for X-College's policy on staff sickness to be approved by the governors. She believed that the policy was necessary for the benefit of the college's wider teaching community as it helped them to manage their workload better. In contrast, at Z-College, Z-ASG claimed that ASGs and the board did not have a say in strategy or

policy-making because strategy was decided by the SMT prior to meetings, and that ‘the operational drives the strategy rather than the other way round.’ Hence, from a decision-making point of view, Z-ASG was seen as a governor with much more constrained power. This latter case echoes the view that governance structures effectively bar certain members (for instance, ASGs in this study) from strategy and decision-making (van Ees, Gabrielsson, and Huse 2009; Rucker and Galinsky 2017) markedly limiting their influence in governance.

The Three ASGs’ Professional Status in Governance

During data analysis, no substantial evidence was found to indicate the presence of mutual mistrust between the ASGs and other governors that may be attributable to their lack of confidence in one another’s competence. In the meetings at the 3 GBs, it was observed that the ASGs attempted to enlighten other governors regarding educational matters. The relevant professional information consisted of the highly valued knowledge such as ASGs’ attentiveness to students’ learning priorities or ASGs’ professional experience at their own colleges. In the interview X-ASG claimed that she sometimes asked questions from the SMT to ‘enlighten the rest’ of the governors because she could see that they did not understand curriculum matters. Likewise, Y-ASG was observed in a Curriculum/Quality Committee meeting attempting to inform the board on how the college’s lesson observation policy worked in practice:

Y-ASG: We’ve got a lot of learning circles – we’ve got so many things going on and for a young teacher, for a new teacher it’s amazing the people that you can go to and there’s nobody that you can’t go to... from the Principal all the way down you can go to anybody and pick up good practice.

Similarly, Z-ASG used his expertise to propose practical and potentially productive ways of making the best of the governors’ time when visiting the college:

Z-ASG: Governors could follow the format of the ‘learning walk’, to get a feel for what that’s [teaching’s] about, in terms of looking at specific areas for focus in their learning walks, maybe with a 10-15 minute briefing.

Survey data also indicated that 92% governors (Figure 2) across the three colleges agreed [INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE.]

or strongly agreed that ASGs facilitated their understanding of educational matters at the three colleges. External governors’ reliance on professional education provided by ASGs underlined the importance of ASGs’ role in facilitating the development of external governors’ professional TLA-specific knowledge. This educating function demonstrated the professional criterion related to the ownership of specialist knowledge (Nerland 2016). The findings also reinforced the assertions in previous research that practising teachers and lecturers are an invaluable source of expertise in educational governance (Marchington 2015; Boocock 2015; Earley and Creese 2000; Linter 2001; Pounce 1992) and therefore, could raise their professional status in governance (Nerland 2016). However, one of the responses in the questionnaire revealed that about 20% of governors across the three colleges felt that the ASG role is a merely or mostly symbolic role (Figure 3). This was reinforced by Y-ASG and Z-ASG’s assertions that, unlike X-ASG, they felt

[INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE.]

they were treated as inferiors. In fact, Y-ASG could demonstrate a raised level of professional status due to his membership with an educational leadership body for ethnic minorities; his experience in his curriculum field (Personal and Social Development Skills); and for being a college manager in community connections. As a leader enabling the institution’s interaction with the local community, his power status would arguably be elevated (Smith 2010; Masunga 2014). Likewise, Z-ASG could enjoy raised professional status as a member of a professional association for Computing/IT (his curriculum subject) and he possessed subject and TLA expertise from practice. Contrastingly, X-ASG’s profile demonstrated she did not hold membership with a professional (teaching or otherwise) organisation and although being an ASG, she had not been a practising lecturer for 5 years. Level of professional engagement shapes professional identities (Leblanc 2014) and this applied to X-ASG’s professional status. Furthermore, Cowton (2009) asserts that a professional should have the ability to self-regulate and enjoy autonomy when processing their body of knowledge, as enabled via

their professional membership. X-ASG's role in organising governor training (verified in interview and self-assessment reports) would elevate X-ASG's professional profile, with regard to LeBlanc's (2014) concept of professional identity and raise her professional status in the GB. It is worth noting that, although the three ASGs' profiles with regards to their practising teacher status and membership with professional teaching bodies as described earlier might have arguably influenced their professional image, there was no evidence from other governors that linked these aspects to the ASGs' professional status amongst the governors at the three colleges.

The overall findings regarding the ASGs' power and professional status are summarised in Table 3. The ASGs enjoyed positive relationship with the rest of the [Insert Table 3 here]

board but limited power status arising from not being in the dominant coalition. They appeared to engage in a valued professional information-sharing role. Overall, X-ASG portrayed a relatively higher power and professional status (neutral; shown in blue boxes in the table) than the other two ASGs, despite her limited professional status as an insider as in the case of the other ASGs (brown boxes). ASGs' exclusion from the dominant coalition and feelings of limited ability to challenge the SMTs (low or markedly low levels: highlighted in yellow or brown) affected the power status of both Y and Z-ASGs. However, their potential to perform a professional role using their wide-ranging professional knowledge was regarded as significant (high level; in green).

What the above findings and discussions mean is that despite the ASGs' individual professional status, what constituted a professional governor status was the variety of actual professional activities the ASGs' engaged in using their TLA and subject-specific expertise – encapsulated as Role-as-Practised in the author's earlier work (Sodiq and Abbott 2018). ASGs' capacity as educators to endow insight to other governors in their practice was identified as a particularly valuable resource for governance. According to the Principal of Y-College, she had not realised the potential

ASGs contributed until she became an active participant in the research project while discussing the interim findings. As already, alluded to in the above findings, how ASGs feel and how they see themselves within a given governing board could also determine their professional status, Role-as-Perceived (Sodiq and Abbott 2018) and this aspect of the role is invariably linked to the Role-as-Practised in a circular manner: what one does or is enabled to do through governance protocols, Role-as-Position (Sodiq and Abbott 2018), for instance being barred from certain activities results in a perception of the role and vice-versa. Naturally, even though the role maybe understood homogeneously across colleges, in reality what is observed to be an ASG's role is notably heterogeneous amongst the colleges as illustrated in the table and the differences can be attributable to a variety of professional status factors of the ASGs.

Analogies: ASGs' Power and Professional Status Model

The analyses presented so far facilitated the formation of the 'Power-Status Analogies Model of an ASG (see Figure 4). The analogies in the model conceptualise the power

[INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE.]

and status of an ASG's role in FE governance. The specific analogies applied were 'The Minimalist', 'The Watchdog', and 'The Communication Link' analogies used in Earley and Creese's (2001) school governance research and similar to the informal categorisation proposed by Krantz and Maltz (1997) and Mullins (2007) for use in organisational governance. In addition, the analysis resulted in a new analogy, 'The Doer' to describe an ASGs' status in governance. In Figure 4 above, The Restricted Communication Link, corresponds to the ASGs' power status. Using the analysis in Table 4, Y-ASG's activities were at first observed to share some of the features of a 'minimalist'; for instance, Y-ASG's minimal contribution in meetings and low

attendance (69%) in meetings (Table 5). His verbal contributions totalled 11.

[Insert Table 4 here – full page]

[Insert Table 5 here]

However, Y-ASG was engaged in other aspects of governance outside governance meetings, especially addressing the needs of the local community. In the meetings observed, 45% of Y-ASG's verbal contributions addressed this theme (Table 6). Some of the topics in the theme included requesting the SMT to have college

[Insert Table 6 here]

marketing leaflets translated to Urdu, one of the main local ethnic minority languages.

In the interviews, both Y-ASG and a senior governor confirmed the significance of this aspect of Y-ASG's role as an ethnic minority governor, giving examples of events Y-ASG had organised to foster relations between the community and the governors.

Therefore, it may not be accurate to assign Y-ASG the minimalist analogy. The central aspect of his role was his conviction that ASGs should act as links between teachers and governors (last column, Table 4); hence, he merited the label 'The Communication Link'. In the interview, Y-ASG stated his strong belief in this link role and had communicated governance matters between teachers and the GB but he found his overall governance role to be rather unclear because he had not been provided with any governor training. Interestingly, document analysis revealed that ASGs' communication of governance matters outside of the board was against the guidance at Y-College, and reported to be often discouraged in educational GBs in general in England (Lee 2000) to avoid unauthorised release of sensitive information. Y-ASG was also barred from representing interests specific to lecturers, raising the issue of organisational professional conflict (OPC; see Becker, 2018). This represented a clash of interest between lecturers' interests and the GB's interests. Therefore, his demonstrated

eagerness to act as a communication link was a difficult issue in practice and restricted in nature. Hence, the overarching analogy, ‘The Highly Restricted Communication Link’ applied to him. Both of his potential and expressed commitment in his interview to serve the needs of the community and his fellow professional lecturers are examples where ASGs could exercise communal power (Rucker and Galinsky 2016) in governance.

Z-ASG was portrayed as ‘The Minimalist’ (Figure 4, above) as his profile and role displayed three main characteristics of ‘The Minimalist’ analogy. These characteristics include his minimal activity in meetings: showing the lowest average of 2 contributions per meeting amongst the three ASGs (Table 6); his recruitment by SMT without any other competitors in the ASG election; and him regarding himself as a second-class governor (characteristic 11, Table 4, verified in the questionnaire responses). These three characteristics together with him not being part of the dominant coalition (characteristic 9) emphasised his low power status in GB. At all of Z-College’s board meetings, a regular feature was to ask Z-ASG to leave the second half of the meeting for reasons of confidentiality. This arrangement was confirmed in the Vice Chair’s interview. Z-ASG was very critical of such exclusionary practice. According to him, while specific discussions in meetings were of a confidential nature, it was ‘not right and proper’ to bar ASGs regularly from predetermined important parts of meetings as ‘there are all leaks within any organization’ and that ‘a lot of the information is available under a Freedom of Information Request.’ He was deeply suspicious about the corporation’s motive for barring ASGs from the remuneration committee and attributed the practice to SMTs’ aim of exercising undue power over staff governors and the college’s faculty. His overarching stance was that the reliance on systematic expulsion of ASGs from parts of meetings and the decision-making processes needed to be

reviewed. Such structural arrangements could be seen as the cause of minimal involvement of governors (Masunga 2014; Ebbutt and Brown 1978) - a feature of weak GBs and poor strategic-decision making (Castellanos and George 2020; Hendry, Kiel, and Nicholson 2010; Schofield, Matthews, and Shaw 2009). The negative emotions and feelings expressed in Z-ASG's interview may have risen from a self-perception of low status in organisations (Hohmann and Walter 2019). According to Anicich et al. (2016), those in leadership without status and power as in the case of Z-ASG, any expression of negative emotions related to their low status would put them at significant risk of being penalised by the more powerful, for instance, the SMT. Therefore, Z-ASG was in a difficult place in governance and this explained his minimalist role. Some features of 'the Watchdog' analogy (Figure 4) were also applicable to Z-ASG. However, these were not dominant features of his activities. For instance, he was not seen as an outspoken governor in the meetings observed; moreover, according to Z-ASG, regarding his membership with his lecturers' union (characteristic 12, Table 4), he was not politically motivated and the union was amongst 'the least militant of the unions'. Therefore, it was unlikely he was an active trade unionist and as his profile did not fit the 'The Watchdog' analogy (Earley and Creese 2001).

As for X-ASG, her activities bore the main aspects of 'The Doer' analogy in the ASG's power-status model. A notable feature of the analogy is that it captures more of the positive aspects of the role than the ones in the study by Earley and Creese (2001) because the analogy reflects the governing activities of a dynamic and relatively influential ASG. X-ASG's activities that reflected The Doer label were her contribution in meaningful activities, her influential role in policy approval, enthusiastic participation in meetings, regular attendance (self-assessment reports) and having ensured substantial governor training as confirmed in her interview and self-assessment

reports (characteristics 1-4 and 7, Table 4). Two of such aspects were noted in her interviews:

1. Her activity in significant governance tasks such as organising governor training in TLA matters:

X-ASG: I suggested that the governors join in our training days, so they're aware of what we do about TLA... We do a lot of teacher training and a lot of it is peer teaching; it's showing best practice, it's getting staff involved in teaching strategies and finding out themselves.

Researcher: Do you think it's going to happen?

X-ASG: they'll definitely get an invite... Because we have a staff conference and they are all invited and I encourage them to come. If they want to come in and look in the classrooms, my staff would not have any problems with the governors walking into their class. So they are welcome to come and see these things happening, they don't just have to sit and wait to get a report from [the SMT].

2. The number of X-ASG's meeting contributions were notably more than Y and Z-ASG's: X-ASG's total contributions numbered 27. The average was 9 per observed meeting, while Y-ASG's average was four and Z-ASG two per meeting. (Table 5). External governors may have favourable opinions about TGs or ASGs who participate in educational activities, as in X-ASG's keen involvement in the graduation events at her college, and about ASGs who take the initiative in identifying opportunities for external governors to take part in the institution's activities (Earley and Creese 2001).

These findings are in congruence with the ideas presented earlier under the theme of power: X-ASG's level of participation and the evidence demonstrating the extent to which ASGs were hindered or included in meeting discussions. Moreover, governors achieving a high feeling of status, for instance through contributing to meaningful professional tasks such as training other governors, are likely to express

their feelings and viewpoints in leadership circles (Anicich et al. 2016; Galinsky et al. 2008; Anderson and Berdahl 2002; Chen, Lee-Chai, and Bargh 2001; Hecht and LaFrance 1998). X-ASG's involvement in governor training and engagement with college activities were likely to raise her professional status amongst other governors. In addition, from a good governance perspective, institutions are known to be more efficient when professionals bring forth their experiences to governance and management (Marchington 2015). Therefore, X-ASG was identified as enjoying a high professional status in the board as well as contributing to good governance.

Returning to the ASG Power-Status Analogy Model (Figure 4, above), an important feature of the model is that it emphasises the potentially restrictive aspect of ASGs' roles in FE college governance - the surrounding circle marked with 'the Restricted Professional' description, denotes the highly managed nature of ASG roles. The restricted nature of the three ASG roles arose partly from their omission in the dominant coalition (Argote and Greve 2007; van Ees, Gabrielsson, and Huse 2009), for instance, the powerful remuneration and governance/select committees observed in this research. The three ASGs used knowledge from multiple disciplines to contribute to the governance of the colleges (Table 7). In the case of Y and Z-ASGs, the knowledge used composed of both TLA expertise and own subject knowledge and expertise, while X-ASG was observed to use only TLA knowledge. However, collected evidence demonstrated that the ASGs contributed to a variety of matters, not simply topics that addressed TLA issues (Table 7). Furthermore, the diverse topics contributed to by ASGs lend a credible challenge to the historical evidence in school governance research that ASGs/TGs may not possess significant governance expertise beyond pedagogic matters (Earley and Creese 2001; Lee 2000; New 1993). Nevertheless, and despite this heterogeneity of knowledge and interest amongst ASGs, there was clear evidence of

[Insert Table 7 here]

further restrictions associated with ASGs' insider status as college staff. According to X-ASG, ASGs had 'a similar role as other governors' but perhaps the role could be different because 'they [SMT] are your boss at the end of the day' and the role is 'a tricky one'.

According to Y-ASG, in assigning a governor to an academic department as a Link Governor to review its performance, the GB 'will never assign us, a staff governor' to a Link Governor role. He added that when he had expressed an interest in the role, he was told his participation was unnecessary. At Z-college the trend continued. Z-ASG was sceptical too about the GB's opinion of ASGs and was of the view that the GB would not consider ASGs assuming Link Governor roles a useful prospect in governance because they considered ASGs as a 'nonentity.' Both the audit committee chair at Y-College and the GB's Vice Chair at Z-College in their interviews confirmed that external/lay or independent governors as opposed to ASGs had been assigned Link Governor roles due to conflict of interest originating in ASGs' affiliation to various college departments. Z-ASG's counterargument was that external/lay governors were not suitable to fulfil a Link Governor role for underperforming curriculum areas because such governors' experience in TLA matters was limited and 'education is a very different ball game to real world industry.' Nonetheless in practice, it appeared that ASGs' insiderness prevented them from participating in activities external governors were involved in. Therefore it is safe to emphasise that in FE colleges, ASGs despite their professional capacity, may operate in a significantly restricted environment potentially limiting the diversity of professional knowledge and expertise college governance could benefit from. As Baxter (2020, 17) argues, power influences 'the extent to which individuals engage with civic and state institutions'

resonating Bush and Gamage's (2001, 41) view that effective self-governance of educational governance depends on governors' 'ability to fulfil the role effectively.' Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise as noted early in the research context, that currently there is no statutory requirement to make ASGs a mandatory constituent in FE governing board's membership (Sodiq and Abbott 2018; HM Government 2011); the current requirement is representation of the wider staff through elections amongst staff and the elected governor may or may not be from the academic staff community of a given FE college. This structure could further limit the power and professional status of academic staff and their potential contribution to FE governance.

Conclusions and Recommendations for ASGs' Governance Practice and Research

In this research I aimed to explore the nature of power and professional status of ASGs as educators in the governance of three 'Outstanding' Colleges in England. This exploration was conducted at a time of renewed interests in educational governance by the state as explained early in the paper. The study has identified a number of ways ASGs' power and professional status may be affected as summarised below.

ASGs in governance may be excluded and feel inhibited by the presence of the college's SMT. In some case this may be due to the power differentials arising from the boss-employee relationship between ASGs and the SMT. This relationship could influence how ASGs challenge/support SMTs' proposals. The research suggests that in the bigger picture of governance, the extent to which ASGs could influence educational strategy depends on the how effective strategic-decision making is: if the governance process is marred by pre-emptive decision-making on governance matters, there is less of a role for the whole governing body to play, let alone ASGs.

The current research presents evidence that ASGs, if present in FE governing body membership, may contribute to governance using their professional knowledge (in both TLA and specialist disciplines) and may educate other governors by providing insights into TLA matters. Deferring to ASGs in training other governors in TLA matters may raise ASGs' professional status. At the same time, there are aspects of the role that are seen as symbolic and inferior in governance perhaps because of issues of trust, or being routinely excluded from the decision-making processes attributable to their status as a member of staff. There is a need to delve deeper into this important issue in future research, for example, whether this mistrust of ASGs is a product of the overall relationships between FE staff and SMT. There may also be variance in the level of professionalism amongst the ASGs depending on their individual status as practising educators or affiliation with professional bodies. The wider impact professionalism has on other governors' perception of ASGs as professionals and on their practice need further exploration too.

The above concluding statements were evidenced through a deep exploration of the three ASGs' roles in meetings; their sense-making of own contributions in observed meetings, their activities outside meetings, and their relationships with other governors and the SMTs. The exploration led to the conclusion that ASGs in FE governance may be regarded as restricted professional as portrayed in the Power-Status model of an ASG's role. The findings are located in a small number of case studies and there is a need to establish how prevalent the issues are for ASGs in educational governance both in FE and in wider educational governance. Research involving wider surveys may help depict a wider picture of the issues.

Recommendations for Governance Practice

The current study has revealed the low power status and restricted professional status of

academics such as lecturers in FE College GBs. GBs should raise ASGs' status and allow them to make maximum use of their expertise and experience and refrain from maintaining roles without power and professional status. As Anicich et al. (2016) have recommended, and using the research presented here I emphasise a need for educational leaders to avoid creating roles that lack status. ASGs' status could be raised in governance by giving serious consideration to the use of ASGs as Link Governor roles to scrutinise and support various aspects of the colleges and this idea could be explored for potential application to governance practice in educational institutions in general, for instance in schools and universities. ASGs' restricted professional status could also be freed by empowering them in the decision-making process, for example by allowing them to be members of strategic/statutory governance committees. A general recommendation is, in order to heed the FE Commissioners' advice regarding ensuring that FE boards have post-16 experience (DfE 2021), it may be helpful to install a statutory requirement for FE boards to have the ASG constituency in the board membership. External stakeholders such as FE lecturer trade unions, Educational Training Foundation (ETF), the Association of Colleges (AoC) and governance professionals (clerks) could be useful consultants in the debate about such change. ASGs themselves could work on strengthening their communal power (Rucker and Galinsky 2016) by increasing their affiliations to both the local community networks through prosocial activities (Cho and Fast 2018) and their own professional bodies through potential status-elevating activities (Hohmann and Walter 2019).

Post-research discussions in events with practitioners, education leaders, British Educational Leadership and Management Society's Governance Research Interest Group in 2019 have highlighted some ways forward regarding governance practices. For instance, to address insiderness of ASGs in governance that dilutes ASGs' status as

credible practitioners in scrutinising and supporting the SMT's work, suggestions have been made by FE leaders that perhaps ASGs' role should be expanded to allow them to work in GBs of colleges other than their own. This would eliminate the insiderness issue and at the same time allow them to inform educational governance in a meaningful way using their professional knowledge and expertise. They would then be less likely to be intimidated by the presence of their own SMTs and would engage in both support and constructive challenge roles when scrutinising management decisions and activities. For such a change in governance practice and structure, ASGs may require more time out of their day-to-day professional role in their own colleges. Recently, there have been some debates around remunerating governors for their work (Forrest, Hill, and James 2021; Wilkins 2014; WiredGov 2014). However, accounting for governors' time is already enshrined in employment law within the remit of reasonable time off for public duty as a member of the GB of an educational establishment ("Employment Rights Act" 1996). Therefore, the model for ASGs' involvement in the governance of other local colleges could still be supported within the current ASG Staff governor arrangements. Another way to address the insider issue, as two ASGs in the study suggested, is to conduct a part of the board discussions in SMTs' absence so that the board can have a more independent discussion with more liberated contributions from ASGs.

The current study highlights ASGs' professional knowledge as a crucial embodiment of ASGs' professional status. Further research is needed in order to gather data and create a live databank of ASGs' professional profiles to capture their rich multi-faceted professional knowledge. It is not simply TLA and educational expertise that ASGs possess. ASGs rely on their curriculum subject knowledge, expertise grounded in a variety of their roles within the organisation, for instance, managerial or

leadership positions. Further research could look into the extent to which external lay governors are aware of ASGs' professional profiles, skills, practising-status and expertise and find out to what extent ASGs' professional profile impact on their image and professional status from external governors' perspective, and on the practice of educational governance.

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Tables on Individual pages

ASGs' Contrib. index	Following who	Target Speaker	Topic	ASG's Communicative Function	General Governance Function	Role specific to ASGs' profile	Length Min./sec	Next Contributor	Voice / Visual gestures
								who Communic.	

Table 1: ASG Contributions in Observed Governance Meetings

ASG	Number of Contributions Challenging SMT	Number of Contributions Supporting SMT
X-ASG	6/27 (22%)	10/27 (37%)
Y-ASG	1/11 (9%)	6/11 (55%)
Z-ASG	1/4 (25%)	0/4 (0%)
Total	8 out of 42 (19%)	16 out of 42 (38%)

Table 2: Contributions from ASGs Challenging/Supporting SMT in Meetings

	X-ASG	Y-ASG	Z-ASG
Power Status	Officially excluded from the remuneration committee	Not involved in the powerful statutory committees (the dominant coalition)	Not a member of the powerful statutory committees or in the dominant coalition
	Active governor with influence in policy but not with exceeding influence/power.	Not seen with exceeding influence or power	Not seen to have significant influence or power.
	- officially barred from being board Chair/Vice Chairships.	Officially barred from being board Chair/Vice Chairships.	Officially barred from being board Chair/Vice roles + from significant sections of all meetings;
	Some capacity to challenge SMTs but unease in expressing overt disagreements	- unease in expressing disagreements with SMT	Unease in expressing disagreements with SMT
Professional Status	Mutual trust between her and the SMTs	Mutual trust between the Principal but not with all SMTs.	Trust of the SMT not high; did not agree with SMTs' presence in whole meetings
	Undertaking a professional role; some uncertainties about prof. status evident	Fulfilling a multi-disciplinary professional role	Fulfilling a multi-disciplinary professional role
	Limitations to governance role arising from 'insiderness'	- limitations to governance role arising from insiderness	Limitations to governance role arising from insiderness
	Professional status not higher than other governors;	Professional status equal or lower than the rest of the GB.	professional status not seen high; lower status attributable to markedly minimal role
KEY: Level of Power / Professional Status	= HIGH		
	= NEUTRAL		
	= WEAK		
	= MARKEDLY WEAK		

Table 3: Summary of Findings: ASGs' Power and Professional Status

		Characteristics of ASG Role that Applied to Each of the Role Analogies														
ASG	1. Active in Meaningful Specialist Tasks	2. Influential in Decision-making	3. Active in All Observed Meetings	4. High Attendance	5. Recruitment influenced by SMT AND/OR no other competitors	6. Presents Staff Views / Interests & Reports back	7. had Governor Training	8. Uncertain about ASG Role	9. Part of the Dominant Coalition	10. Has Little Trust in the Board	11. Sees themselves as a 2 nd class governor	12. TU Member	13. Professional Body Member	14. Openly Challenges Principal / SMT	15. Links to the Community & its Needs	16. Sees Main Role as Link between Teachers & Governors
X-ASG	T	T	T	T 100%	T	T ONLY occasionally when TLA-related	T substantial	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F Not significant	F
Y-ASG	F	F	F Not in board meeting	F 69%	T	T	F	T	F	T	F	T	F	T Significant	T Significant	T Significant
Z-ASG	F	F	F	T 88%	T	F	T, a good amount	F	F	T	T	T	Only Occasionally	F Minimal Overall Contribution	F	F

T=True; F=False; Coloured squares indicate role analogies for each ASG;

Role Analogies: = The Communication Link; = The Doer; = The Minimalist; = The Watchdog; For details of the analogies, please see below.

Table 4: Analysis of ASG Roles to Identify ASG Role Analogies, Using emergent themes from the research and concepts in Early & Crease (2001)

The Communication Link	The Minimalist
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sees the ASG's main or sole role as the link between governors and teachers presents staff views to the board and reports back informally has had limited governor training possibly a middle/junior manager average attendance level at meetings less likely to see themselves as 'second-class' governors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> unwillingly recruited to board because no other teacher has shown interest happy to present staff views to the board and report back informally potentially without governor training uncertain about ASG role more likely to see themselves as 'second-class' governors with limited power makes little contribution to the board meetings low attendance level
The Watchdog	The Doer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> presents staff views to the board & reports back affiliated with a teachers' union affiliated with a professional association has had some governor training possibly a middle/junior manager outsoken in meetings & challenges Principal/SMT less likely to see themselves as 'second-class' governors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engages in meaningful, Special activities only, no 'rituals' influential in policy approving decision-making Active in all observed corporation and committee meetings Has had substantial governor training High attendance level

	Number of Observed Meetings	Number of Verbal Contributions	Average Number of Contributions per Meeting	Attendance at meetings for the year
X-ASG's verbal CONTRIBUTIONS in meetings	3	27	9	100%
Y-ASG's CONTRIBUTIONS	3	11	4	69%
Z-ASG's CONTRIBUTIONS	2	4	2	75%

Table 5: ASGs' meeting activity: number of contributions and attendance

Function: ASGs' Contributions Responding to Community's Needs		
College	Number of Community Needs Contributions / Total Contributions	Average Percentage in Observations
X-College	3/27	8%
Y-College	5/11	45%
Z-College	2/4	50%
Figures across 3 colleges	11/42	26%

Table 6: The ASGs' Function of Meeting Local Needs Function in Contributions

Types of Knowledge and Topics Used in Governance by ASGs			
	Teaching, Learning & Assessment (TLA) KNOWLEGDE	SUBJECT-SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE	Non-TLA Topics
X-ASG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - questioned College audits' effect on IT resources for curriculum areas and subsequently on students' satisfaction with courses - led the discussion & approval of the policy on Teachers' sickness & impact on teaching workload - queried the extent of providing career guidance for the community 	non-observed	College's academy-construction venture; student union matters activities; student reward programme; graduations; college's image; career guidance for local community;
Y-ASG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - provided insight on college's lesson observation arrangements and general impacts 	Specialist subject expertise - Personal & Social Development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - arranged governor-student 'speed-dating event - arranged governor-community relations event 	student progression and destinations; college's successes; college's image; community needs and revenue collection
Z-ASG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - presented an approach to conducting governor visits to curriculum areas and plan for governors' 'learning walks' in teaching sessions 	Specialist subject expertise - Computing/IT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - led scrutiny & discussion on e-governance as part of the college's plans for digitising governance. 	e-governance arrangements & students' health & safety

Table 7: The three ASGs' Use of Professional Knowledge and Diverse Topics in Governance

List of Figure Captions (Figures in separate image files)

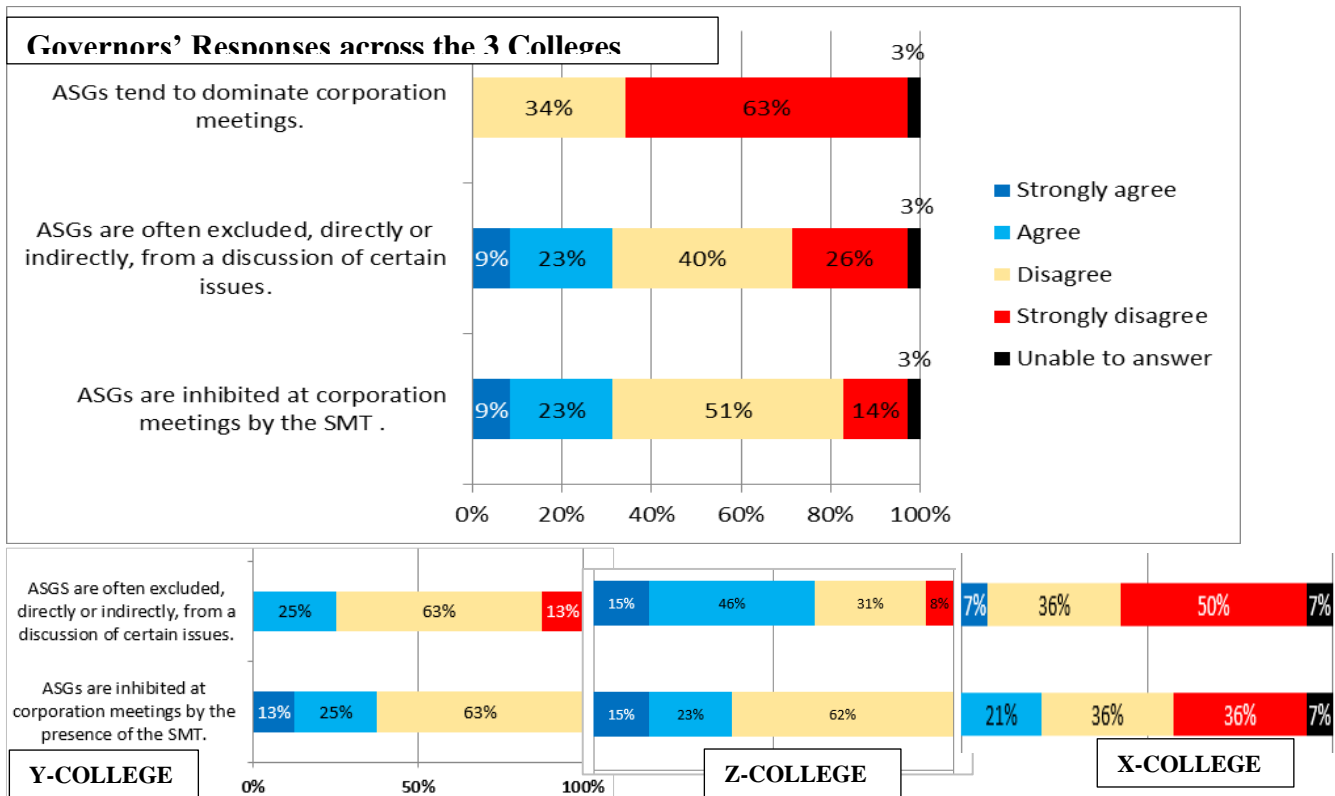


Figure 1: ASGs' active participation in Governance Meetings

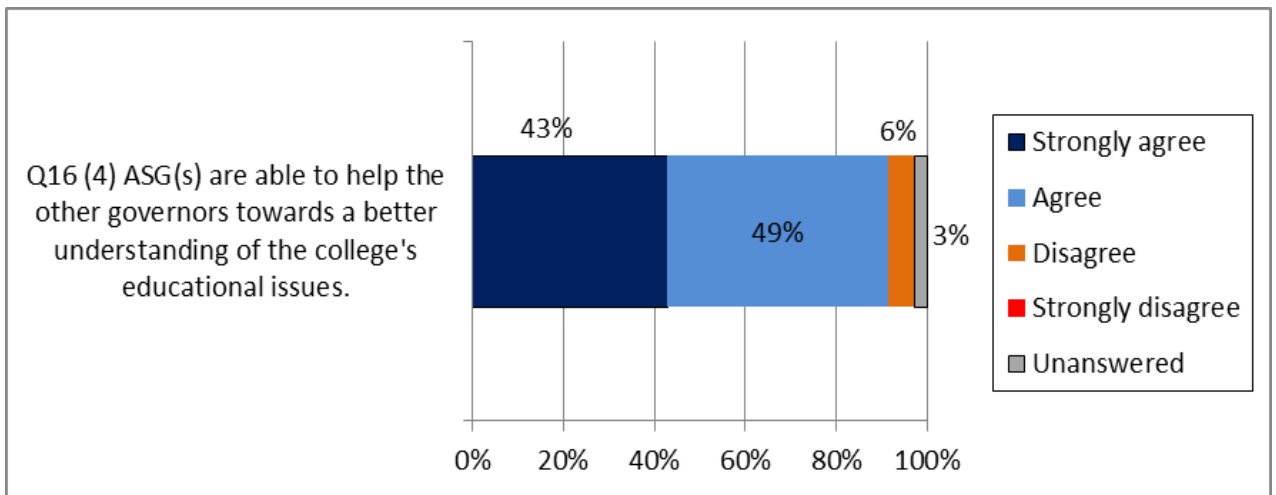


Figure 2: Cross college % of Governors feeling that ASGs Assist Governors Understand Educational Issues at the Colleges.

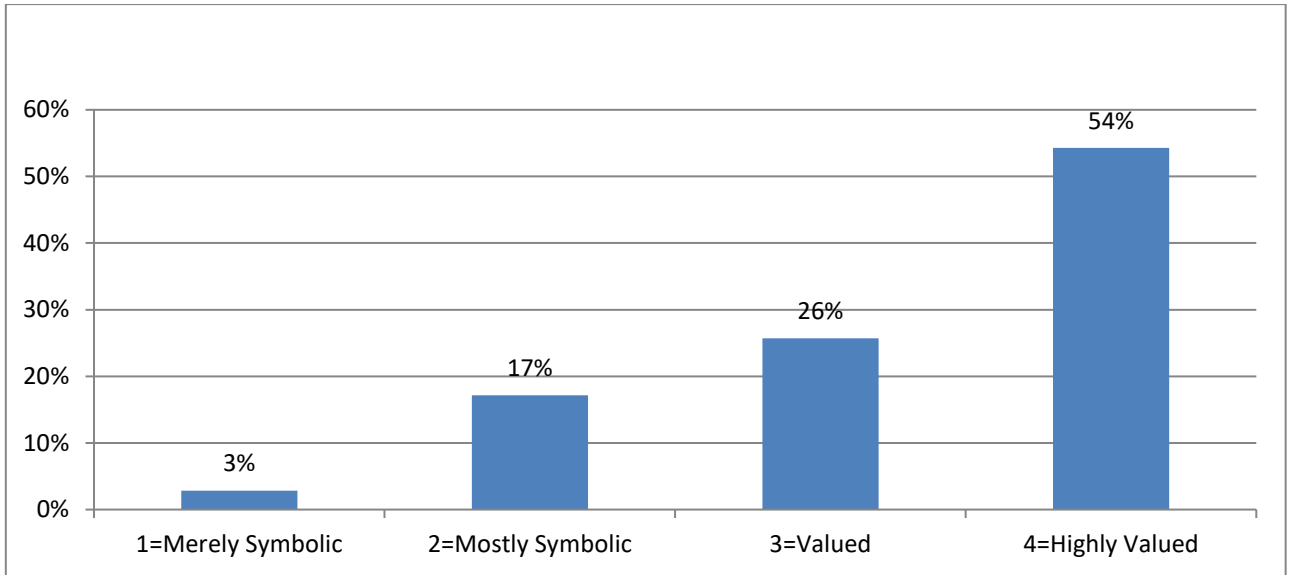


Figure 3: The three Governing Boards' Perception of the ASG Roles

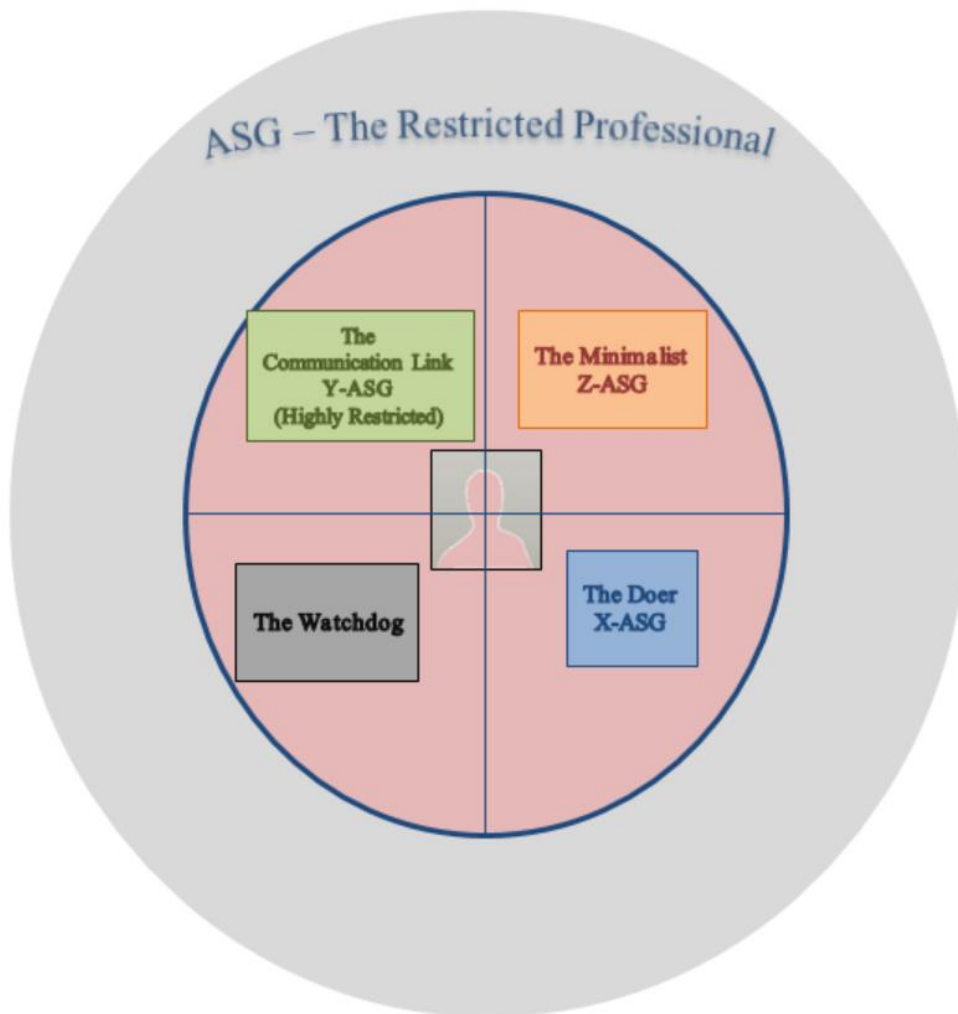


Figure 4: Power-Status Model for an ASG portraying the three ASGs' Role Analogies