

GOVERNING MATTERS

January 2023 | nga.org.uk



CHANGING FOR GOOD

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sets out the big areas
to focus on to help
young people in 2023
and beyond

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DEVELOPING A WHOLE-
SCHOOL APPROACH

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The National Governance Association (NGA) is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and governance professionals of state schools in England.

We are an independent, not-for-profit charity that aims to improve the educational standards and wellbeing of young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. We are expert leaders in school and trust governance, providing information, advice and guidance, professional development and e-learning.

We represent the views of governors, trustees and governance professionals at a national level and work closely with, and lobby, UK government and educational bodies.

For more information on joining NGA, visit www.nga.org.uk/membership

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**“FINDING
WAYS TO FALL
BACK IN LOVE
WITH YOUR
WORK”**

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You can contact Sam at:
sam.henson@nga.org.uk

A word from the editor

Sam Henson, director of policy and communications, on taking action – and believing in hope – in these difficult times

In our last edition, NGA's director of advice and guidance Steve Edmonds discussed the worsening financial situation schools up and down the country have been facing. There was a very real and urgent need for the government to act.

Just a few weeks after I signed off on the copy for November's magazine, the chancellor delivered the autumn statement, with an announcement that was a surprise to many – that schools budgets in England would receive an additional £2.3bn of funding in 2023-24 and £2.3bn in 2024-25. This is welcome relief for all of us and, for some, is the difference between staying afloat or ceasing to function.

Absolutely no one is pretending that this will solve the ongoing challenges amid the cost-of-living crisis, but it was a result nonetheless. It was a culmination of a big push by organisations across the sector, including NGA, working together to help to secure additional billions when there was still a very real threat of cuts. That push was only made possible because you, NGA's members, lent your voice to the story of the huge impact the cost-of-living crisis has been having on your schools and trusts.

It clearly doesn't end the financial challenge. Since then the IFS's annual report on education funding has said schools in England still face a "significant squeeze". But it is a big step forward, and a powerful example of how member voice can change things. NGA will, as ever, continue to champion that voice and work with our friends across the sector to secure change for the better.

In this edition, on pages 16-20, we reflect on the powerful and thought-provoking sessions from NGA's 2022 annual conference in November. There was a strong focus on our children's future and the

"It is a powerful example of how member voices can change things"

day was an inspiring reminder of why governors and trustees govern in the first place and, indeed, why they put up with the challenges that have been more relentless of late. One line from our keynote speaker, CEO of the Children's Society Mark Russell, sticks firmly in my mind as we look to a new year: "The world is only ever transformed by hope-filled people." I, like most delegates, was struck by this simple yet powerful truth.

Hope and change go together, and this is something that shines through as you read through this edition. On page 22, Dr Nick Capstick underlines the importance of us getting the basics such as school food right, if we are to be successful in equipping our "future wealth

creators with the skills to work and the ability to be social". And on page 32 our friends at Place2Be talk about the governing board's role in a collective hope to deliver a stable and safe environment to promote strong mental health for all children and young people.

Undoubtedly, 2023 will continue to bring challenges and governing boards, working with their leaders, will have to make many of the difficult decisions ahead.

But as your dedication, perseverance and thoughtfulness continues, the lives of many children and younger people can be enriched – even during these times of uncertainty. 



OUR ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2022

NGA's annual record of achievements highlights our work supporting our members, the wider governance community and the school and trust sector over the course of 2022.

It shows how the services, advice and advocacy we provide has improved and how we continue to be the best source of information for governors and trustees.

It also underlines how we continue to meet our charitable aim of improving the educational standards and wellbeing of children and young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards.

Highlights include:

- **118,365** copies of Governing Matters magazine distributed
- **5,349** new Learning Link users
- **20,089** followers on social media
- **90%** of members say NGA had a positive impact on their board
- **63%** of GOLDline queries answered within one working day
- **12** new Learning Link modules.

Want to know more? For further information visit
www.nga.org.uk/news

GOVERNANCE LEADERSHIP FORUMS – OPEN FOR BOOKINGS

Join us at the first events of the new year where our governance leadership forums will focus on disadvantage.

Governors and trustees have a vital role to play supporting staff and pupils in addressing disadvantage. The forums will provide you with an opportunity to network, share experiences and discuss future plans with those governing and leading schools in similar situations.

Book your place at www.nga.org.uk/events, or for more information about NGA's work on disadvantage visit www.nga.org.uk/educational-disadvantage



Upcoming forums

31 January 4.30-6.00pm	Local Academy Committee Governance Leadership Forum
2 February 4.30-6.00pm	Maintained Schools Governance Leadership Forum
7 February 4.30-6.00pm	SAT Governance Leadership Forum
9 February 4.30-6.00pm	MAT Trustee Governance Leadership Forum

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YOUR VIEWS ON NGA MEMBERSHIP

NGA's 11th annual members' survey was undertaken in October and November 2022; this was your opportunity to tell us what we are doing well and what we need to improve. It is something all our staff use each year to focus efforts on improving your membership experience. We were delighted with your feedback this year, with the majority of NGA's services rated at least 4 out of 5 in terms of satisfaction. Some of the highlights include:

90%

of respondents said that NGA membership had a positive impact on the effectiveness of their governing board

58%

said that membership is good value for money, giving a score of 4 or above out of 5

59%

said they are very likely to recommend NGA membership to another governor/trustee, scoring 8 and above out of 10.

One area you identified as needing improvement was the Find us a Clerk Service, and we have made some positive changes to that already. There will be more improvements to your membership experience throughout the year, so keep an eye on the website and the newsletter for announcements.



Mark Russell (he/him)
@markrusselluk

It's been such a privilege today to speak at #NGAconf about @childrensociety #GoodChildhoodReport and I'm deeply moved by the response to what I've shared. Together we can and must overturn the decline in children's wellbeing by 2030

Tony Breslin
@UKpolicywatch

Again, @FarrarMaggie at #NGAconf: don't just have 'to do' list, have a 'to be' list! Think of governors as 'chief noticers'! For 2+ years COVID has meant heads have been on 'high alert' mode; they're exhausted: as governors we must enable them to fall back in love with their job!

Aizenay
@Aizenay95

Thanks to an idea from @NGAEmmaK, I had picked up some #visiblegovernance badges from the #NGAConf for members of my board. Governors have been wearing these to work, striking up many conversations and leading to some potential new governors. Thanks Emma!

NGA school and trust governance
#VisibleGovernance
@NGAMedia

We want to say another huge thank you to our inspirational speakers and lovely delegates who came to Saturday's #NGAconf. We also want to thank the NGA staff who made the day such a success. Already looking forward to next year!

SOCIAL ROUNDUP

NEED TO KNOW



WELCOME TO GOVERNANCE LIVE – NEW DATES AVAILABLE

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Welcome to Governance LIVE is our newest membership benefit available to NGA GOLD and MAT trustee members. Designed for new governors and trustees, the Welcome to Governance LIVE session will support you to make an impact in your first six months as a new governor or trustee.

The sessions will explore:

- what you can expect (the positives and also examples of real-life challenges)
- top tips and the support available to you
- how to make an impact quickly (the type of school/trust you want and how to achieve this vision)

If you have new members of your board but haven't received an email from us, you can book your place at www.nga.org.uk/Welcome-to-Governance-LIVE.aspx

Existing NGA members can also upgrade to GOLD membership to access these sessions.

Your questions answered: Trust AGMs

Victoria Hatton, senior associate at Browne Jacobson, answers some of the most frequent questions on one of the most popular topics on the NGA Goldline: Annual General Meetings, or AGMs

Do we need an AGM?

Not all trusts are required to hold an AGM. Until relatively recently, the provision in the DfE's model articles requiring the trust to hold an AGM was optional. But the latest model articles (June 2021) removed this flexibility and require trusts using these articles to hold an AGM.

Do we need to hold an AGM every year?

Under the model articles, an AGM must be held in each financial year (the first AGM must be held within 18 months from incorporation) and there must not be more than 15 months between AGMs.

How much notice do we give?

AGMs must be called with at least 14 clear days' notice. The date the notice was issued and the date of the meeting do not count towards the 14 days. Model articles provide for shorter notice where members representing 90% of voting rights at that meeting agree.

Who should attend the AGM?

Notice should be sent to all the members, trustees and auditors.



AGMs must be called on at least 14 clear days' notice

For trusts on older articles, two persons entitled to vote upon the business to be transacted (each being a member or a proxy of a member or a duly authorised representative of a corporate member) shall constitute a quorum. The quorum is a majority of members present in person or by proxy.

While it's usual for the trust chair (whether a member or not) and the CEO to attend the AGM, all trustees are entitled to attend and speak at general meetings but don't get a vote (unless they are a member).

What should be on the agenda?

Expect some or all of the following:

1. to elect a chair for the meeting
2. to receive and adopt the trust's annual accounts for the last financial year together with the directors' report and auditor's report on those accounts
3. to appoint or reappoint the trust's auditors for the next accounting period
4. where retirement by rotation is adopted and the AGM is used as the meeting to make appointments, to appoint and/or reappoint trustees under the member appointment provisions in the articles.

Can we hold a virtual AGM?

The model articles allow trusts to hold an AGM virtually. For trusts that have not yet adopted these model articles, there is considerable doubt as to the legality and validity of holding virtual members meetings under the provisions of the Companies Act 2006. Essentially, the uncertainty relates to whether the 'place' of a meeting can include a virtual platform – most commentators consider that it does not.

At hybrid meetings, people who are not present together may by electronic means attend and speak and vote. It is worth considering the benefits and downsides of virtual platforms and whether they sufficiently facilitate effective and engaged governance, particularly of members meeting together just annually. 🗳️



Further information

You can read the full guidance at www.brownejacobson.com/insights/virtual-agms

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Access e-learning to help governors, trustees, chairs and governance professionals develop their governance skills and knowledge. With high-quality e-learning modules, and bitesize 'just in time' modules, Learning Link provides flexible e-learning anytime, anywhere.

Learning collections include: structures, roles and responsibilities; good governance; vision, ethos and strategic direction; pupil success and wellbeing; stakeholder engagement; staffing; finance; compliance; clerking and much more.

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- Tracked learning – revisit content, take a break and pick up where you left off
- A dedicated support service

NGA Learning Link is a cost-effective way to secure comprehensive training for governors, trustees, chairs and governance professionals on the full range of their responsibilities.

Without NGA membership, NGA Learning Link is £198 per year. NGA governing board members can purchase Learning Link at discounted prices.

Type of NGA membership	Learning Link price
None	£198
Standard	£139
GOLD	£99

Discounts are available for group purchases for multi academy trusts and local authority governor services.

NEW MODULES OUT NOW

ADVISING THE BOARD

Learning Link has launched three new modules on advising the board, available in the new Advising the board collection under the Governance professionals category on Learning Link.

How to support the development of the board

This new module will provide you with the tools and knowledge required to create a culture of professional development and will give you a clear picture of some of the options available to boards, which can be tailored to meet the needs of boards.

The module will help you to understand how you can access sources of information, advice and guidance to support your boards' development.

How to clerk courageously

Would you like to gain an increased understanding on how to use your governance skills and knowledge to clerk more courageously? This new module is intended to give governance professionals an understanding of the role and expectations of governance.

This study session will explore common problems in your role and help support you to use your knowledge, skills and behaviour to clerk more courageously and influence your chair or board.

How to become a trusted advisor

This module will help you to become aware of the principles behind building trust when it comes to advising your governing board or committee, enabling you to make decisions that are well researched.

Through the use of interactive activities, scenarios and helpful tips from an experienced governance professional, this module aims to help you build confidence in your abilities to provide accurate and well-sourced advice.

Sign up

Start your free trial today and preview a selection of our modules.
www.nga.org.uk/learninglink



Since relationships and sex education (RSE) became a statutory requirement in UK secondary schools there have been some tricky circumstances for boards and their schools/trusts to navigate.

RSE requires a balance of sensitivity to parents, pupils and staff, ensuring that pupils are equipped with the knowledge they need to stay safe, build healthy relationships and to understand the world around them.

The Sex Education Forum conducted a survey of 1,002 young people aged 16 to 17 in England in 2022, which found that more than one in five (22%) young people rated the quality of RSE as 'bad' or 'very bad', an increase of four percentage points since 2019.

The poll also revealed that 'basic, mandatory aspects of the curriculum, such as healthy relationships, and how to access sexual health services are frequently missed', with close to

three in 10 (28%) young people saying they had not learnt about 'how to tell if a relationship is healthy'. So how can we as governing boards ensure that young people are being protected and heard?

What is RSE?

RSE provision is a vital aspect of safeguarding secondary school age pupils and provides young people with the tools they need to make informed choices about their bodies, relationships and lives. The World Health Organization explains that comprehensive RSE considers topics beyond pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections and covers the 'cognitive, emotional, social, interactive and physical aspects of sexuality', 'supporting and protecting sexual development'.

Inclusive RSE

In the UK, the age of consent to any of sexual activity is 16; however, research has shown that around a third of

Learning key messages

Lucy Emmerson, chief executive at the Sex Education Forum, on the role of relationships and sex education (RSE)

"RSE has a vital role to play in safeguarding children and young people. Learning key messages such as 'my body is mine and mine alone' gives children an understanding about their rights. Learning that sexual harassment and sexual violence are not okay is the starting point to de-normalise harmful behaviour within schools and wider society. To be confident that RSE is fulfilling its promise to help keep children and young people safe, governors and trustees in every school need to ensure provision is adequately resourced and prioritised.

"The research evidence is very clear about the effectiveness of RSE in preventing harm, and the widespread support for making RSE a statutory requirement was built squarely on this."

Details can be found in the Sex Education Forum's 2022 evidence briefing, Relationships and Sex Education: The evidence.

Spotlight on sex education



Emily Harle, NGA policy and projects officer, explains the importance of good quality RSE provision as part of a broad and balanced secondary curriculum



young people engage in sexual intercourse before this age. RSE has been proven to be a key tool in ensuring that young people have the tools they need to effectively give and respect consent, understand their choices to protect their sexual health, and can engage in healthy relationships.

Parents and educators are often competing with the myriad of misinformation around healthy relationships that children are bombarded with online. Harmful sexual behaviour is more common than abuse, and can include sexist language, and non-consensual sharing of sexual images.

Ofsted's rapid review of sexual abuse in schools found that sexual harassment was so commonplace that many pupils considered harmful behaviours 'normal'. Educating pupils on the law and what a healthy relationship looks like is key to safeguarding pupils.

Discussions of healthy relationships need to be

The governing board's role – top tips

- Ensure schools have plans in place to meet the statutory requirements, including a written RSE policy. The PSHE Association's Roadmap to Statutory RSE is a useful tool. bit.ly/PSHE-roadmap

- Conduct audits to ensure RSE provision is comprehensive, accurate and meets pupils' needs. The Sex Education Forum's Whole School RSE Audit Tool can be used. bit.ly/RSE-audit-tool

- Ensure staff leading RSE lessons have sufficient training and feel comfortable delivering the classes. A survey conducted by the Sex Education Forum in 2018 found 29% of staff delivering RSE had received no training and 38% felt that their training was inadequate.

- Engage with parents, pupils and staff when planning and reviewing RSE. The Sex Education Forum's parental engagement surveys

about RSE can help to open up a conversation with parents about RSE, and their new 2022 publication, Relationships and Sex Education: The evidence, can be used to evidence the benefits of RSE. bit.ly/RSE-evidence

- NGA has worked with the Sex Education Forum to produce a comprehensive guide on the board's role in the planning, delivery and review of a quality RSE offer. www.nga.org.uk/RSE

inclusive. When abuse is only described in a heterosexual context, many young people interested in same-sex relationships incorrectly assume that abusive relationships cannot happen to them and are thus put at risk.

Good-quality RSE will take place in a supportive classroom environment, where open

discussion is encouraged, and different opinions are heard and respected. Pupils who 'feel good' will 'learn good'.

It is also worth considering how the 'hidden curriculum' may impact RSE learning; these are lessons absorbed by pupils through their teachers' manner of speaking, body language and the overall ethos of the school. 

IMAGE: ISTOCK



Introducing the career pathway

Steve Edmonds, NGA director of advice and guidance, explains how the career pathway for school governance professionals works

The much-anticipated career pathway was launched at the NGA's autumn networking event for school and trust governance professionals on 6 December following 12 months of research and development. We wish to thank the hundreds of governance professionals who have contributed by attending focus groups, completing various surveys and quality-assuring much of the content that makes up the pathway. It has been a genuine collaboration and there is more to come.

For the uninitiated, the career pathway is a resource hosted initially on the NGA website and free to access. It has a wealth of useful and engaging content highlighting the opportunities that exist to work and progress as a governance professional in the schools sector.

A directory of professional qualifications and CPD supports progression, either within an existing role or to a different level on the pathway. There is advice on where to find future roles, including

through NGA's governance professional jobs service. The career story videos and blogs provided by experienced governance professionals bring the pathway to life as well as demonstrating its collaborative nature.

While the pathway is intended to support both current and aspiring governance professionals, the content is also highly relevant to governing boards and employers in schools, trusts and service providers. We hope they will use it to improve understanding of the expertise and value that a governance professional brings to a school or trust and reflect it in the approach they take to recruitment, line management, appraisal, pay and ensuring the entitlement to professional learning.

The pathway describes three levels which, according to our research, most governance professional roles in schools and trusts fit into, and helps users access resources and development opportunities most relevant to them. It



STEVE EDMONDS
DIRECTOR OF ADVICE
AND GUIDANCE

also helps to provide a better understanding of what governance professionals working at each level might expect to earn and the comparisons with trainee and qualified governance professionals and company secretaries in other sectors.

The levels also demonstrate progression that can be achieved. However, there are countless types of roles and indeed job titles that exist. We hope that all governance professionals will identify the level that best represents the work they do, but the pathway certainly does not claim there are only three types of governance professional role in schools and trusts.

To emphasise this point, we have deliberately avoided including example role descriptions for each level. Instead, role description templates are provided to help employers 'pick and mix' from a range of tasks associated with governance professional roles at each level, design roles that fit their needs and, crucially, align them with role descriptions and the pay structure of other staff who provide a similar level of professional and skilled service in their organisation.

The pathway shows without a doubt that this is one profession serving both trusts and maintained schools, not divided in two by school structures, even though different governance structures require additional or different knowledge. It also shows that there are opportunities to work and progress in different employment contexts, including as a self-employed service provider.

Now, the pathway has been launched our attention turns to raising sector awareness and gaining buy-in. This is crucial: the pathway can be a game changer for raising the profile, status and reward of a profession that makes an invaluable contribution, but whose work is often largely unseen. Discussions have already taken place with other organisations about a joint ownership project to maintain and promote the pathway, and a separate, related, project to benchmark the salaries of school governance professionals against similar roles in comparable sectors and provide guidance for employers. Watch this space.

The buy-in we seek cannot be achieved without the support of those working at all levels in the profession. The pathway is merely a vehicle; you are the ones who lead the way on educating employers about the profession and making it attractive to new entrants. Whether you aspire to progress or are happy to remain at your current level, we need you to promote the pathway and help write the story about the contribution you make. 



Further information
Visit nga.org.uk/governance-professional-career-pathway



The three professional levels

Clerking level

Roles at this level include clerk to a governing board of a school, academy or multi academy trust (MAT) board. The main requirements of this level relate to direct support to board meetings and associated tasks. Governance professionals working at this level are more likely to seek help and information to guide their work.

Governance coordinator level

Roles at this level include governance coordinator and senior governance professional. The main requirements are comparable to the clerking level, but involve additional responsibilities relating to the delivery of a governance support service, such as training or briefings. Roles also tend to involve the line management of those working at clerking level and supporting those working at lead governance professional level.

Lead governance professional level

Roles at this level include head of governance or director of governance in a MAT, and provide strategic leadership of services that support governance across schools, which may fall under a single organisation or be separate. It therefore has higher levels of complexity and direct accountability. Lead governance professionals working in larger and geographically dispersed organisations are more likely to be supported by governance professionals working at coordinator level, whereas those working in smaller organisations are less likely to have coordinator level roles existing in their structures.

According to NGA's annual governance survey data, half of the 250,000-plus people who volunteer on governing boards are employed either full time or part time.

Governing is a significant commitment, with most spending the equivalent of 10 to 20 days per year on duties. So, for half of volunteers balancing this around work, their employers can have a huge impact on the manageability of the role, as well as encouraging more people to get involved.

That's why, as part of our Visible Governance campaign, we've produced a new toolkit to explain the benefits to employers of supporting their staff to govern. The toolkit outlines the role of governors and trustees, the benefits governing brings to staff, organisations, schools and trusts, and how employers can support this.

Making the case

As a governor of a primary school in Birmingham, I've come to learn the benefits of governing first-hand. It's

Visible Governance in schools



ELIZABETH COLLIN
SENIOR PR OFFICER

not just a hugely rewarding role where we get to make a direct impact on the lives of hundreds, if not thousands, of children and young people, but it also provides significant professional and personal development opportunities.

From budget-setting and performance management to communication, safeguarding and data analysis, governance offers many board level skills and experiences that most people wouldn't develop until well into their career.

For organisations, encouraging and supporting their employees to govern can help bring in sought-after skills – essentially providing free development opportunities. In addition, supporting governance is a valuable way to contribute to corporate social responsibility,

establish long-term links to communities and help build positive brand reputation.

What support looks like

There are many ways organisations can support staff to govern; it could be as simple as making governance roles part of development objectives, making governing opportunities visible through staff internal communications, providing paid time off for governor duties, or providing access to useful resources and support.

Organisations can also become active governance supporters by setting up staff governor/trustee networks – or setting up their own governance programmes with the likes of Inspiring Governance or Governors for Schools. Whatever the organisation, there are ways it can support its staff to volunteer.

Be your own advocate

So how do we best make this case to organisations? NGA is working to engage organisations across the country to recognise the value of supporting school and trust governance, but we need help. Governors and trustees are the best advocates for the role; by sharing what you do, you can help us encourage more organisations to get involved. One simple step is sharing our new resource with your line manager or HR lead to explain the benefits governing brings to you, your organisation and the wider community. 



Further information

Find our employer resource at www.nga.org.uk/employers. We'd love to hear how you get on, and if your employer supports you to govern. Get in touch at visible@nga.org.uk

Engaging employers

Elizabeth Collin, senior PR officer, explains how you can spread the good word of governance and gain support from employers



NGA's 2021 Outstanding Governance award winners receiving their awards in Westminster

Outstanding Governance Awards

Nominate yourself for an award!

NGA's Outstanding Governance Awards provide the sector with a unique opportunity to celebrate the inspiring contribution governing boards and governance professionals make to schools and trusts across the country. We are excited that nominations are now open for the 2023 awards, and we can't wait to honour some of the amazing contributions to society.

Governing boards and the governance professionals who support them often remain unsung heroes in the strategic leadership and decision-making of schools and trusts through difficult times. It is more important than ever for us to recognise this huge commitment to the education and wellbeing of children and young people and the wider community.

We want governing boards and governance professionals to share their journeys of improvement and achievement; the challenges they have faced and overcome; and how they have innovated and engaged to create and spread good practice.

Our five categories for 2023 are:

- ★ Outstanding governance in a single school
- ★ Outstanding governance in a multi academy trust
- ★ Outstanding governance in a federation
- ★ Outstanding clerk to a governing board
- ★ Outstanding lead governance professional.

This year we will be selecting winners for the outstanding vision and strategy award from those who apply to our single school, federation and multi academy trust categories. We encourage each applicant to shout about their inspiring vision and clear strategy, and how they've worked with stakeholders to develop it.

Nominate now

We encourage boards and governance professionals to self-nominate in our five categories. The awards are an opportunity to have your commitment and good practice

recognised through a high-quality judging process. You can reflect on how you are making a positive impact on the children and young people in your schools and communities, be an exemplar of good practice, and inspire your fellow governors, trustees and governance professionals with your outstanding achievements.

Deadline for nominations is 9am on Monday 27 March 2023

The awards are open to governing boards and governance professionals in all state-funded schools in England. Nominations will be reviewed by NGA's expert team, which will compile a shortlist for judging. A panel of judges will interview shortlisted entries and consider evidence that supports the

nomination. Finalists will be invited to a prestigious ceremony at the House of Commons where awards will be presented to the winners. 

Further information

Information on the categories and how to apply can be found at www.nga.org.uk/awards



An illustration of a diverse group of people holding hands in a large circle, viewed from above. The people are wearing various colorful and patterned clothing, including sweaters, jackets, and hats. The background is a light pinkish-white with large, soft, pinkish-white circular shapes. The text is centered within the circle.

NGA's Annual Conference
**Getting
together**

In her annual conference address, chief executive **Emma Knights** reflected on the key challenges boards have faced over the past 12 months, unveiling the big areas of focus for 2023

Greener governance

Environmental sustainability was a golden thread that ran through the conference and Emma reflected on the success of NGA's Greener Governance campaign, which has been informed by schools and trusts embarking on this work together.

In 2023, NGA will be supporting partners, in particular Students Organising for Sustainability UK and Climate in the Classroom, powered by the University of Reading, with a pilot project to assist schools and trusts to develop meaningful climate action plans. This project aims to include those with well embedded activities to learn from, but also – even more importantly – schools and trusts that have not yet begun.

The future of the school system

This year continued to be a big one for our focus on the future of the school system through the release of the schools white paper. Emma highlighted the role that NGA has had influencing the definition of strategic governance. She also celebrated the inclusion of local governance: "Evidence tells us local governance at academy level in a multi academy trust (MAT) is here to stay."

PRIORITIES FOR 2023

Emma then listed a number of key priorities for 2023 – here is a snapshot:

1 Governance recruitment

This is something that is becoming harder for many boards. NGA will be encouraging employers to support staff that govern as part of the Visible Governance campaign, and celebrating those organisations that already do this.

2 Governance professionals

We will be promoting the use of the brand new careers pathway (page 12), a new resource developed with and for the profession to continue to enhance the role in 2023.

3 Improving the education of disadvantaged pupils

Building on our newly released toolkits and our push for schools and trusts to look at disadvantage in its widest sense (page 26), NGA will be engaging members to develop these resources further, adding practical strategies used by you, our members, to help other boards as they look to tackle all forms of educational disadvantage.

4 School funding

NGA will continue its commitment to advocating for its members, lobbying the government and using evidence and your stories to make our case and ensure your voices are heard and financial burdens decrease. We will be here for boards as they deal with the "difficult decisions to come".

Emma closed, stating: "NGA says thank you. Where would schools be without your dedication, perseverance and thoughtfulness? I do not say that lightly. It is a very good and important thing that you are engaged with."

A message from the schools minister

Speaking via video address, the schools minister Baroness Barran celebrated the role of governors, trustees and governance professionals, thanking them for their dedication and congratulating NGA on both the success of the Visible Governance campaign (page 14) and the reformed National Leaders of Governance (NLG) programme (page 30).

The address reflected on the schools white paper, with the minister insisting she wanted to ensure strong governance support is embedded in all schools and academy trusts, while also acknowledging the impact of rising costs on budgets, hailing the crucial role boards play in making effective spending decisions.

Delegates also heard a message from Stephen Morgan, the shadow schools minister, who paid tribute to “the wonderful work you do in driving up standards in all our schools ... you all bring such unique insight and expertise, as well as a crucial understanding of the communities that you serve.”

THE WORLD IS ONLY EVER TRANSFORMED BY HOPE-FILLED PEOPLE

Mark Russell, CEO of The Children's Society, reflected on findings from its latest Good Childhood report, delivering a powerful and sobering message about child wellbeing and mental health in the UK.

The Children's Society's vision aims to see society working for every child, regardless of postcode, background or income: “Every child should have the best chance to have the best childhood.” Mark shared that while there are currently 4 million children and young people living in poverty, without radical change that figure will reach 5 million in the next 24 months.

The Good Childhood survey has been conducted for the past 17 years and measures child wellbeing through questions that children and young people are asked about 10 areas of their life. This year's survey showed one in 10 children are deeply

unhappy in every aspect of their life, and while 80% of children surveyed are happy, the number of those who are not increases year on year. The number of children struggling with mental health is growing and the support available to them is getting smaller.

As a school governor himself, Mark acknowledged the role of governing boards to ensure schools keep a focus on the wellbeing of children. One step his board has taken included approving a wellbeing and mental health policy for both pupils and staff. He encouraged delegates to consider doing the same, using the policy as a reference point against school data on behaviour and attendance.

“The world is only ever transformed with hope-filled



Visit www.childrenssociety.org.uk/good-childhood to read the report

people, people who believe their choices, their voices, their behaviour can change the world.

I want to tell you that the reason I got up at 5.30am today is because I wanted to say thank you for being a hope-filled person. You volunteer, you put yourself forward, you are helping your community; I think you are amazing, and I

NGA chair Lynn Howard speaks at the AGM



want to say thank you for being individuals who dare to believe that your energy and your talent can bring change.”

What needs to change for children?

Mark said life is too hard for too many of our children and three changes need to take place to ensure children have the best start in life:

1 The country needs to value children much more than it currently does.

2 An investment of £2.5bn to fill the gap that currently exists as a result of a decade of funding cuts.

3 The metric for levelling up should be children's happiness – not improved results.



Forrest Governance @forrestgov

The words and passion of @markrusselluk at the #NGAconf continue to echo this evening. Children's wellbeing has never been more important, the evidence for making it the No 1 priority is overwhelming, yet it has a vanishingly small share of our attention, budget and focus.

Reflecting on the words of Gordon Brown, Mark agreed that “children are 20% of our present and 100% of our future” and emphasised “right now we are failing too many children in this country”.

EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP – MAGGIE FARRAR

For our second keynote speaker, delegates heard from Maggie Farrar, author and founder of

Greener Governance – Pupils of tomorrow

A first for NGA's annual conference, we were joined by a panel of young people to hear how they feel about the climate crisis, how they have raised the issue in school and how governors and trustees can get involved to make positive change. The young people represented St Christopher's CE High School, UK Schools Sustainability Network (UKSSN), Mock COP and Teach the Future.

Why should this subject matter to governors?

Research has shown time and time again that the climate crisis affects how young people feel about the future, and our young panelists echoed this sentiment.

“A lot of adults will ask what you want to be when you grow up and I know myself and a lot of young people think: do we actually have that future?” – Eliza Kinder, UKSSN

So, if it's a topic that our young people are passionate about then governing boards should take note. As one of our delegates stated – what business would not listen to its customers? Student voice is filled with rich, unique insights and our panelists were pleading to be listened to.

“We know what's going on and we are smarter than people give us credit for.” – Thiziri Boussaid, Teach the Future

As our deemed fourth core function, listening to pupils should be a key element of governance. For the panelists this has looked like governors attending their eco councils, pupils sitting as associate members at governing board meetings and eco governors liaising with the school regularly.

What can governors and trustees do?

It is important to remember that governors and trustees often come across as unapproachable authority figures to pupils, causing opinions and progress on environmental sustainability to stall.

“You [governors] are scary ... the headteacher is scary, and you are the headteacher's boss!” – Honey Bradshaw, St Christopher's CE High School

Governors and trustees can take practical steps to break down this divide by improving student voice interactions, but also in their strategic decision-making. Overseeing the implementation of climate action plans will result in visible changes that pupils will feel and see.

“Empower your children and make sure your staff have the ability to make decisions.” – Wendy Litherland, St Christopher's CE High School

A final plea came from director of sustainability and assistant headteacher Wendy Litherland to listen to pupils while giving staff the capacity to make meaningful change. See our latest guidance for more information on how to start conversations on sustainability.

What next for Greener Governance?

Work on Greener Governance will continue into 2023 with the launch of climate action planning pilots in association with Teach the Future, the University of Reading and Students Organising for Sustainability. This will create exemplar schools at different stages of their journey to sustainability. For more information, please email megan.tate@nga.org.uk

Empowering Leadership, who delivered an inspiring session exploring how individuals bring their best and authentic selves as leaders, governors or trustees, and how we enable ourselves and those that we work with to handle the complexity of leading and learning.

Maggie told delegates to encourage leaders to have a 50/50 approach – shifting attention from the leading and management of the school or trust and having 50% of their attention on their internal reality and what is going on inside. Maggie said our attention and where we choose to place it is “our greatest resource ... yet we squander it”.

As a result, we should regularly ask ourselves three questions:

1 What is my core intention today?

2 Where am I going to place my attention? If I get distracted, how do I get back to my intention?

3 When I am placing my attention, what is my attitude?

Practising mindfulness and shifting posture is something that can improve meetings, according to Maggie, who offered techniques to bring attention back into focus:

- Put both feet on the ground to feel balance
- Bring the torch beam of your attention (which is always in the head) down into your feet
- Place your spine to the back of your chair
- Keep a strong back and soft front so you keep your authenticity and step back into the present of what is going on around you.

Taking the time to assess whether you are completely authentic is important and taking a pause can help to create micro moments before you decide to respond or make a decision.

Maggie encouraged delegates to “pause to allow



Leaders should have 50% of their attention on their internal reality

doubt to emerge and allow for constructive descent”. Instead of rushing into a decision as a group of people, take the time to look at it from another perspective – but this is not always easy. Maggie had delegates thinking about how governors and trustees dare not to be a passive consumer of the culture of business and cultivate a culture where business is not worn as a badge of honour.

Balance

Maggie explored the two modes of living and leading: mode one is striving, driving and doing and mode two is being, sensing and experiencing – both of which are important for the inner and outer reality. Maggie encouraged delegates to consider the mode they are in as a governor or trustee and encouraged them to take a pause to bring the less dominant mode into balance with the other.

The art of renewal

Maggie reflected on the importance of renewal and the need to sustain ourselves and school leaders.

“The antidote for exhaustion is not rest, the antidote for exhaustion is wholeheartedness ... finding ways to fall back in love with your work,” she said.

Parting with a final challenge, Maggie said sometimes we lead with one hand tied behind our backs because we are not always present – we’re living in anticipatory worry. “We do it to ourselves, but we can break those habits. It is our role to help our leaders to be upright again so they can keep their leadership in balance.” 



More information

To watch all of the sessions from the conference visit: nga.org.uk/Annual-conference-2022.aspx



Charlotte Harding and Leading Governance graduate Tyrone Fowles at the NGA's Annual Conference

New governance development

for executives and senior leaders within MATs, SATs and maintained schools

NGA's NEW governance sessions for executive leaders explore how to work effectively with your trust or governing board.

Governance for MAT executive leaders: working with your trust board

The session will explore:

- What constitutes strong multi academy trust governance
- The power of good governance
- Current challenges and opportunities for MAT governance
- Building and maintaining successful relationships with your board and chair
- Working together to develop the vision and strategy for your trust
- Getting structures and delegation right
- Efficient and effective reporting
- Making the most of meetings

Book now

To book your space, please call 0121 237 3780 or visit:
www.nga.org.uk/governance-training-for-MAT-executive-leaders

Governance for academy leaders within MATs: working with your local academy committee

The session will explore:

- The power of good governance
- Challenges and opportunities for local governance
- Building and maintaining successful relationships with your local committee and chair
- Understanding delegation in your MAT
- Working together to develop a local strategy for community engagement
- Efficient and effective reporting
- Making the most of meetings

Book now

To book your space, please call 0121 237 3780 or visit:
www.nga.org.uk/governance-for-academy-leaders-within-MATs

Governance for maintained school leaders: working with your governing body

The session will explore:

- What constitutes strong maintained school governance
- The power of good governance
- Current challenges and opportunities for maintained school governance
- Building and maintaining successful relationships with your governing body and chair
- Working together to develop the vision and strategy
- Getting delegation right
- Efficient and effective reporting
- Making the most of meetings

Book now

To book your space, please call 0121 237 3780 or visit:
www.nga.org.uk/governance-for-maintained-school-leaders

Governance for SAT leaders: developing your trust board

The session will explore:

- What constitutes strong single academy trust governance
- The power of good governance
- Current challenges and opportunities for SAT governance
- Building and maintaining successful relationships with your board and chair
- Working together to develop a vision and strategy
- Getting structures and delegation right
- Efficient and effective reporting
- Making the most of meetings

Book now

To book your space, please call 0121 237 3780 or visit:
www.nga.org.uk/governance-for-SAT-leaders



A taste of the future

Dr Nick Capstick OBE, former CEO of The White Horse Federation and chair of the School Food Review Working Group, tells NGA how the sector can create a good food culture fit for today and tomorrow

School food is an increasingly prominent topic of discussion across society. Millions of children enjoy a free lunch every day, and many schools and trusts have prioritised embedding a good food culture in their organisations. But many children continue to miss out. NGA has been working with educational leaders, school food campaigners and caterers to get a better understanding of what needs to change. As part of this we interviewed Dr Nick Capstick, chair of the School Food Review Working Group (SFRWG).

Why did you choose to get involved with the SFRWG as chair?

For my whole 38-year career, I have chosen to work in schools and localities that are underserved by society and among the most impoverished in the country. We know that children from disadvantaged communities do not have the same educational outcomes as their peers from more affluent communities. The figures are stark in that by the time a disadvantaged child leaves secondary school they can be as much as two years behind their peers.

A desire to address this inequity formed the foundations of the multi academy trust, The White Horse Federation, which I co-founded over 10 years ago. Our simple ambition was to work in areas of deprivation to see if we could improve the lifestyles and ambitions of young people, which, in turn, would make them better able to thrive in the world of work and society.

At the heart of this is food!

Not any food but hot, nutritious and delicious food in a world where children are bombarded via social and broadcast media with adverts about convenience and fast foods. The evidence is clear: well-nourished children have improved educational outcomes and are physically and mentally healthier. As teachers, we see the positive impact of a healthy school meal in the classroom with more engaged, alert children.

School is about equipping our future wealth creators with the skills to work and the ability to be social, healthy beings in a more equitable society. Food sits at the heart of this, especially for children whose lives are impacted by being part of cash-poor, and

“A good, if not great, school food culture has ‘co-intentional design’ at its heart”

therefore time-poor, households where many parents, even if they are in work, often need multiple jobs just to survive.

This is all a long-winded way of saying that when the opportunity came to chair a group of 36 organisations, including educationalists, school and child food campaigners, unions, dietitians, academics and food charities, I leapt at the chance. To chair this passionate group of experts, campaigning together to ensure that free school meals are a right not a privilege, was an opportunity too good to miss.

What does a good school food culture mean to you?

A good, if not great, school

Four steps to a good school food culture

Creating a good food culture in a school takes four things in my experience:

1 An honest understanding of the school’s current situation and relationship with food. Ask yourself whether outcomes could be better if food was more important in the life of the school. Consider food as a way to achieve positive outcomes for pupil progress, attendance, exclusions and bullying. Consider whether pupils and students would be calmer and more content with access to good nutrition, and as a result, do better in school.

2 Responsibility. A senior member of staff, supported and monitored by governors and trustees, needs to own the school food transformation.

3 Enabling and empowering. Has the person responsible for change been given the gifts of change? Are they given the time to understand and research how things could be different and how improvements can be made? Do they have a legitimate authority to enable change in their school? Are they supported and mentored through the journey of change by governing boards?

4 An effective communication strategy. Change can often be painful, confusing and costly, but changes that effect practical improvement and result in better outcomes are invaluable. The biggest change will come when people understand, through vibrant and effective communication, what’s in it for them. Help them understand how children and young people who are well fed and nourished, are likely to be happier and perform better in their studies. Show how the school’s perception of food has an impact on learning.

food culture has ‘co-intentional design’ at its heart. It welcomes creativity, innovation and a degree of risk-taking to see beyond lunch and break as refuelling times for young people, and it embraces an understanding that food does so much more than merely providing energy until the next top-up.

Leaders, and especially governors and trustees, need to explore where their ambition lies in ensuring that children are healthy and free from the stresses and fear of hunger. Our job as leaders is to remove barriers to effective learning and the social wellbeing of our pupils.

What are the problems with the school food system?

Creating a better school food culture in schools is not easy because the current system is far too complex. It is often lacking in the strategy needed to embed a whole-school approach, but it's never too late to start.

Currently, income streams that support school food are diverse and lack coherence and therefore often appear troublesome and become more about functionality and providing a meal rather than the progressive improvements a well-designed system can bring.

So where does the SFRWG fit in with all of this?

The group's ambition is to see wholesale reform of what is happening in our schools, but most significantly in the provision of a hot and healthy school meal for every child. Plans are already afoot in Scotland and Wales to make school food free, and elsewhere in the world, where governments and local leaders have made change happen, the gains for the pupils and society are immense.



The SFWRG has five pillars where change is needed.

- **Entitlement:** the eligibility criteria that excludes children who would benefit from free school meals. This needs to be equitable and reasonable. Over 800,000 children live in poverty but still don't meet the restrictive criteria for free school meals.

- **A better school food procurement and operations system** that prevents a failure to deliver consistently nutritious, sustainable, and enjoyable food to our children. This is often not the fault of the current providers but the lack of an intentionally designed school food system which has authority behind it.

- **The creation of an effective accountability mechanism** to support quality provision and ensure that all children receive nutritionally balanced food at school. Wales covers this by their Well-being of Future Generations Act. School and



Over 800,000 children live in poverty but still don't meet the criteria for free school meals

trust governors and trustees should be at the heart of this accountability framework.

- **Improve uptake** by reducing the administrative and stigmatic barriers to children accessing school food.

- **Change the convoluted funding system** that does not guarantee delivery of good nutrition onto children's plates.

In short, the disadvantages of cash-poor/time-poor families, where children lack nutritious food and the wholesome social experiences which come from eating well, is a blight on our country. Maybe with the SFWRG's collective genius and expertise, combined with the collective strength and persuasion both internally in our schools and externally as societal leaders, governors and trustees can help bring about the change which must happen and happen soon. 



More information

To find out more about the School Food Review Working Group and the work of School Food Matters, visit www.schoolfoodmatters.org

Leading Governance Development Programmes

**Lead and support your governing board to have
real impact on your school's improvement.**

NEW Development *for* MAT trustees

The Development for MAT trustees programme of eight practical, MAT-specific workshops will support current, new and future trustees with the fundamentals and differences of MAT governance. Led by experienced facilitators with expertise in MAT governance, each small group workshop covers the essential areas from 'Good MAT governance', 'Financial oversight and Risk management' to 'How MAT boards work' and 'Setting expectations for local governance'. Participants can choose to complete the entire programme or select individual workshops.

Places available for January 2023.

Development *for* Chairs

This programme provides both current and future chairs the opportunity to develop their leadership skills to deliver effective governance and lead school improvement. The programme offers a blend of flexible learning and will take approximately three terms to complete. Dedicated cohorts are available for those governing at maintained schools and trusts.

Cohorts are now open for registration on our website. The cost of this virtual programme is £270 per participant.

Development *for* School & Trust Governance Professionals

Level 3 Certificate in the Clerking of School and Academy Governing Boards

This accredited NGA Leading Governance programme is designed for governance professionals with at least three months' experience and currently working in any school or trust setting. It helps develop the knowledge and skills needed for high-quality clerking and is delivered over three terms.

The cost of the programme is £480 per participant.



Widening the lens: Addressing educational disadvantage

Fiona Fearon, NGA policy and projects manager, explains the principles of looking beyond pupil premium parameters to identify and tackle disadvantage

Disadvantage in education is consistently reported as one of the biggest challenges schools and trusts face. This persistent issue can take on multiple different forms. Regardless of the root cause, inequity in education leads to reduced life chances and missed opportunities for children and young people to fulfil their potential.

While the Department for Education (DfE) doesn't explicitly define 'disadvantage', it largely makes pupil premium funding available to schools to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils based on restricted socioeconomic factors. In doing so, schools largely look at addressing educational disadvantage through this lens.

But research shows there are other groups of children we should be looking at

in pursuit of closing the attainment gap who are statistically at a significant educational disadvantage. Back in 2018, NGA published *Spotlight on Disadvantage*, a report exploring the role of governing boards in spending, monitoring and evaluating the pupil premium.

It concluded that receipt of pupil premium was not the only determinant of disadvantage; a more holistic approach was needed. Although the majority of survey respondents who contributed to the research defined 'disadvantaged' as those eligible for the pupil premium, other criteria was also being used in schools and trusts.

So over the past year we have been exploring some of this in more depth, identifying five drivers of educational disadvantage that are the

focus of this phase of our work on disadvantage.

It is important to note that we are not attempting to look at learners through a deficit lens. We instead encourage boards and their leaders to broaden their view on who may be vulnerable to educational disadvantage, and ensure the systems and processes in place create a learning environment where all pupils can flourish.

Building on our research we have published five toolkits along with an accompanying guide, *Widening the Lens on Disadvantage*.

The toolkits have been produced with support from the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), The Place2Be, Two Ten Therapy, The Children's Society and Class 13, all experts in their field and key contributors. 



FIONA FEARON
POLICY AND
PROJECTS MANAGER



Find the toolkits at www.nga.org.uk/educational-disadvantage. On page 32, Place2Be talk more about how mental health and wellbeing can impact on academic attainment. They explore the board's role in taking a 'whole-school approach in creating a supportive culture that encourages good mental health and wellbeing.'

The DfE launched the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) in 2020 to provide targeted academic support to pupils whose education was most disrupted by the pandemic. It provides primary and secondary schools with funding for one-to-one or small group tuition, delivered by trained and experienced tutors and mentors.

We recognise the vital leadership role played by school governors and trustees in improving educational standards and supporting teachers to provide high-quality education for their pupils. We encourage governors and trustees to work with leaders to review their tutoring strategy and discuss how NTP funding can be used best in their school or trust. In time, we want to establish a sustainable tutoring model that improves academic outcomes for young people and reduces the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers.

There are three routes through which schools can access tuition, giving school leaders the flexibility and choice to decide how best to provide targeted support to their pupils. These are:

- Tuition partners: tutors recruited by external tutoring organisations; quality assurance overseen by the DfE.
- School-led tutoring: schools can use existing staff or recruit new support staff for tutoring.
- Academic mentors: full-time, in-house staff members employed to provide intensive support to pupils. Cognition Education carefully select academic mentors and match them to schools based on skills and experience.



Super tutors

Lisa Keenaghan, deputy director of the National Tutoring Programme, gives advice on how you can use tuition to boost pupil attainment

To support schools to access tuition, governors and trustees can:

- View your school's funding allocation and discuss the routes available to access tutoring with your headteacher (tuition partners, school-led tutoring or academic mentors): NTP funding can be used to subsidise 60% of your school's tuition spend, using one or a combination of the routes. Schools are then required to pay the remaining cost using other funding sources.
- Encourage your school leaders to use the programme: evidence indicates that investing in high-quality tuition can

build pupil confidence and accelerate academic progress. The Education Endowment Foundation reported that pupils who are receiving high-quality tuition aligned to classroom teaching can make up to five months' additional progress with one-to-one tuition, and up to four months' additional progress with small group tuition.

Neil Wilkinson, executive headteacher of The Bemrose School in Derby, shares the positive impact of the NTP: "Since we started delivering tutoring via the NTP, our GCSE exam results are now in line with what they were in 2019 and pupils see tutoring as a normal part of the school day."

Ann-Marie McGough, headteacher of St Patrick's Catholic Primary School in Doncaster, says: "Pupils' confidence has significantly improved since they accessed tuition. In the 2021/22 academic year, most pupils who had two or more interventions per week for at least half a term made accelerated progress in reading and maths." 

 For more information on the NTP, read the 2022/23 guidance for schools: www.bit.ly/3Gqkc8n

Local governance: The secrets of success

Megan Tate explains what local governance in multi academy trusts can look like in practice

In 2022 local governance undoubtedly secured its position as a permanent feature of the multi academy trust (MAT) system. Almost all (98%) of MAT respondents to NGA's annual governance survey said they have some form of local governance arrangements in their trust.

Meanwhile, the DfE's short-lived 2022 schools white paper, Opportunity For All, said that strategic governance is inextricably linked to having "a strong local identity, engaging effectively with parents and the wider community" and as such all MATs should have local arrangements. During the last year we have brought together over a decade's worth of work on this topic – as we released MAT Governance: The future is local, back in April.

What may not be so clear to everyone is how local governance materialises on the ground, from trust to trust. Through interviews during the autumn term with a range of MATs, we sought to take our investigation to the next level. Here, we give a first look of what we found ahead of publishing our report later this year.

Delegated responsibilities

A trust's scheme of delegation provides the basis of the local tier's remit – and this simple yet effective document can mean the difference between success and failure. It is clear that a comprehensive document facilitates effective decision-making by defining lines of responsibility and accountability. Our interviews show us that clearly prescribed yet meaningful responsibilities bring the layers of governance together in harmony and leads to well-informed decision-making.

Through the course of our discussions, trust financial management generated particular interest. Despite the move by more trusts to increase centralisation, we have heard that local committees, when given the opportunity, can play a key role in ensuring the trust's financial decisions are informed by local contexts.

For example, the local governors' knowledge of the pupils they serve can inform a school's ability to effectively streamline funding sources



MEGAN TATE
POLICY AND
RESEARCH OFFICER

such as pupil premium, to the initiatives that need it the most.

This second layer in financial management isn't about duplication, but enhancement from an alternative viewpoint – where funding oversight at the local level is encompassed by the school improvement function – "ensuring that expenditure is aligned to the individual priorities" through school-specific CPD and resources.



Communication between tiers

NGA is a firm believer that two-way communication grounds a strong and cohesive relationship between the trust board and its local academy committees; our interviewed trusts are testaments to this.

Effective communication channels amplify the voice of the local tier, assisting central trust decisions regarding context-specific direction. A network including local chairs and the chair of the trust board can help embed the trust's values and ethos at a local level.

One trust we interviewed saw the benefits while recruiting a new headteacher where there were three viable candidates for the role. The ultimate decision came down to a thorough understanding and awareness of their trust ethos, bred through regular contact with the trust board, which was overwhelmingly noticeable in their final



Engaging parents with strong opinions and then asking them to local committees has resulted in some success

candidate. The symbiotic nature of their relationship essentially resulted in the recruitment of a skilled individual suited to both their individual and trust-wide setting.

Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement forms a large part of the local tier's role. From our interviews, we have seen that the local tier is most meaningful and successful when they can see the influence upon trust board decision-making.

An example: by listening to their community, a local committee of a primary school recognised the need for a pre-school provision. The trust board did not have pre-school provision on their agenda, but the local committee used the intelligence it had gathered to add it to plans. After much two-way communication, the trust agreed to alter its plans and invest significant capital into developing the provision. This was a success and has benefited the trust.

As a strong advocate and challenger, the local tier has had very strong impacts on the success of schools and in making local governors feel valued. But this only works well when a trust board welcomes challenge from the local tier.

Recruitment and retention

Seven out of 10 (70%) local governors in our annual survey said recruitment was difficult. As expected, this was a contentious issue, reflected in our interviews, especially for parent-governor vacancies. A direct approach has been beneficial for our trusts. Engaging with parents with

strong opinions and then asking them to attend local committees has resulted in some success. Combined with the possibility of becoming an associate member to 'try before you buy', this has given parents the confidence to investigate the role without the commitment and it means they are likely to stay in the role if they agree to formally join.

The future of local governance

There have been suggestions in the past that local governance models could achieve a more innovative approach, but this has not materialised at scale. This year, only 1% of respondents in our annual survey had no form of local governance. Our interviews did, however, celebrate what can be done through the tried and tested model, particularly via sharing practice and knowledge from local committees across the trust.

Examples:

- forums eg safeguarding
- buddying with other boards in the trust
- trust-wide stakeholder engagement framework
- staff only governing at other schools within the trusts.

Our trusts achieved this through increased horizontal collaboration. When combined with successful communication with the trust board, what was clear was the true benefit of this additional collaboration across the trust. 🗨️



More information

Thank you to all MATs that have supported us with this project. Read NGA's earlier thought-piece on local governance; the full report will be published this term.
bit.ly/NGA-TheFutureIsLocal

The review, conducted by York Consulting, found that feedback was “positive about the considerable skills, expertise and experience brought to bear through NLG deployments” and that “stakeholders reflected positively on the level of consistency, rigour and challenge that was offered compared to the previous less-structured support” under the previous iteration of NLG support.

NLG re-imagined

The reformed NLG programme was initiated by the DfE in response to recommendations from its NLG advisory group. Following a competitive tender process, it commissioned NGA to establish a service that built a cadre of highly qualified and experienced governance leaders who would conduct external reviews of governance for schools and trusts from October 2021.

The advisory group established new, broader eligibility criteria and professional standards, enabling the field to include governance professionals. NGA designed a rigorous quality assurance process. The reforms also introduced rates of pay for the work.

NLGs conduct external reviews of governance in settings where governance can benefit most. Reviews are commissioned by DfE’s Regions Group (RG) or Education and Skills Funding Agency (for trusts) and by local authorities (LAs) for maintained schools, with diocesan bodies also able to



National Leaders of Governance support to trusts and schools off to an **excellent start**

NGA is delighted that an independent external review commissioned by the Department for Education has reported that schools and trusts receiving external reviews from the newly reformed National Leaders of Governance (NLG) programme think highly of the support

commission in collaboration with RGs and LAs.

The DfE has funded reviews in trusts where they should have the most impact: if there is a concern about governance; if the trust has not had a governance review for a while (the DfE recommends these are conducted routinely as part of a wider programme of self-assessment and improvement); or because the trust is growing its number of schools or diversifying into a new phase or type of education. DfE funds reviews

in the maintained sector for schools that have an overall requires improvement (RI)

Ofsted judgment, with an accompanying RI in leadership and management.

There are 77 new NLGs working across England. Applicants were subject to a robust recruitment process, which was externally moderated by the Association of Education Advisors (AoEA), and assessed to ensure they had the governance experience and skills to work independently with credibility in the sector when conducting reviews.

NLGs are carefully matched in terms of skills and experience to each school or trust they work with. When conducting a review the NLG will give a comprehensive and independent view of the effectiveness of the board, concentrating on the three core functions, the six governance competencies and NGA's own eight elements of effective governance.

NLGs interview key leaders in both the governance and executive teams and review the board's set-up and paperwork. Importantly, they observe a board meeting in action to get a rounded view of how

governors and trustees work together and how effectively they challenge and support the executive team. Schools and trusts then receive a detailed report that includes a comprehensive list of findings, recommendations to improve practice and a practical action plan.

Following up

A key feature of the programme is that NLGs carry out a progress check three to four months after the initial report is issued. While we recognise this is not a long period to see fully embedded changes to practice, NLGs assess planning and reasonable implementation to that point, reflecting on any quick wins undertaken and early progress towards any more substantial improvements and emerging new practices.

While both the ERG and progress review are rigorous, they are conducted in a supportive way; the advice and recommendations seek to help boards improve, not to name and shame. Reports are only issued to the school or trust and the original referral agency, and are not externally published.

When conducting the external evaluation, York Consulting was asked to analyse NGA's

well as NGA's responsiveness. Reports were described as good quality, challenging, sensitive and constructive.

Over 300 reviews have been undertaken so far, with a good spread across the country and types of settings with lots of positive feedback from schools, trusts and the respective referral agencies. While some of the recommendations made by NLGs can be challenging, schools and trusts generally welcome this and recognise the value of an independent voice.

According to a senior leader, "the NLG was excellently matched and expertly delivered. It was very engaging, organised, detailed, challenging, open to discussion, transparent and sensitive."

While very positive about the programme so far, York Consulting's review makes some recommendations for how the service could be even better. The review also recommends expanding the eligibility criteria for maintained schools, which we would welcome.



"The NLG was excellently matched and expertly delivered. It was very engaging, organised, detailed, challenging, open to discussion, transparent and sensitive"

management information and carry out interviews with a wide range of stakeholders to assess the recruitment, deployment and capacity of NLGs, and process efficiencies and the quality of the programme. All these aspects were found to have met DfE's success criteria.

Recruitment was found to be "rigorous", and the number of designated NLGs exceeded NGA and DfE's initial target with regard to trust expertise. Stakeholder groups interviewed were positive about the matching of NLGs with the settings to which they were deployed, as

And finally

NGA would like to thank all the NLGs for their hard work and commitment, RGs and LAs for their detailed referrals, and the schools and trusts that have engaged so positively with the process and worked collaboratively with the NLGs.

If you feel your board would be eligible and would like an external review of governance from our new cadre of NLGs, please speak to your local authority or to your contact at DfE's Regions Group. If you need support in identifying who to talk to, or would like to discuss the programme in more detail, please contact nlg@nga.org.uk

Mental health and wellbeing

For most children, school is a stable and safe environment that supports learning, social connections and much more. However, for some, school may be the only place that provides stable and safe surroundings.

Educational attainment

Poor attendance, a history of exclusions, and a lack of engagement with school can often be the effects of wider social and emotional issues, including poor mental health.

We know that mental health and wellbeing are strongly linked with educational attainment, and that pupils with better health and wellbeing are more likely to excel at school. With the cost-of-living crisis, and the lasting impacts of the pandemic, there has never been a greater need for support for children and their families. One in six children and young people now have a mental health condition and, if not supported, many may continue to experience these conditions in later life.

As a result, school-based staff are at the forefront in responding to these demands. Most teachers wish to see schools as fully supported learning environments that can



Fresh from collaborating with NGA to produce brand new pupil mental health and wellbeing guidance for governing boards, Place2Be outlines the key to achieving a whole-school approach

nurture good mental health practices, reflect the diversity and value of all individuals, and establish pupils on pathways that best meet their needs.

As the UK's leading charity delivering frontline mental health support in schools, Place2Be encourages a whole-school approach, where everyone is committed to supporting a child's emotional development, as well as their curricular progress.

Staff wellbeing

Excessive workload and a poor work-life balance remain key drivers of poor mental health for teachers and school staff, and can often lead to a lack of engagement, job dissatisfaction and poor performance.

Data from the Teacher Wellbeing Index shows that

77% of staff experience poor mental health due to their workload, while 72% are stressed – rising to 84% for senior leaders.

For governing boards looking to improve children's mental health, they must also prioritise staff wellbeing, so that schools are able to respond to a child's needs in a meaningful and purposeful way. As governors and trustees ensure staff have a good understanding of mental health, and the factors that affect workplace wellbeing, this will help build a healthy, happy and high-performing school.

Boards should prioritise access to training and learning that increases staff understanding of mental health and wellbeing, and support them to reflect on and improve their own wellbeing. This can also help staff to spot the signs someone may be struggling and respond in a way that remains child-focused – so every child and young person can receive the right support at the right time.

A whole-school approach

Unlocking a child's full potential in order for them to thrive in all areas of their lives, including education, is something Place2Be strives to

achieve through our work with children.

Schools and trusts are well placed to provide interventions to develop awareness and skills in children, which are essential to mental health, learning and development. A board focus on wellbeing will not only result in a healthy and happy school environment but can also promote effective learning.

You can focus on wellbeing in your organisation by:

- having dedicated staff resource, such as a senior mental health lead
- raising awareness: creating a shared language across the whole school and ensuring pupils and staff know where to get support. Place2Be has lots of resources to help you to do this, including our free resources for Children's Mental Health Week, which takes place every February.

How can Place2Be help?

There has never been a more important time for teachers to feel equipped and confident in identifying and responding to children's mental health needs. For schools that are thinking about taking the next steps to create a mentally healthy school, Place2Be is here to help.

Place2Be is a children's mental health charity, and the UK's leading provider of schools-based children's mental health services. Our vision is for all children to have the vital support they need to help them build life-long coping skills and to thrive.

We provide an embedded mental health service in 500 UK primary and secondary schools, supporting a school community of around 243,000 children and young people.

With over 25 years' experience delivering mental health services, our training equips the whole school with the skills and experience they need to support children and young people.

Our training programmes will support you in developing your understanding of mental health and creating your whole-school strategy to improving mental health and wellbeing.

Senior mental health leads training

This course will support senior leaders (or staff supporting senior leader) in identifying your school's priorities and supports a strategic approach to address those needs. DfE grant funding is available for most schools and colleges.

Mental Health Champions

This training for school staff aims to enhance understanding of children's mental health and introduce approaches that foster positive wellbeing.

Visit www.place2be.org.uk/our-services/training-and-consultations for details of the training.

Visit www.nga.org.uk/educational-disadvantage for the NGA toolkit.

You can increase understanding across the whole school with:

- staff, by training every member of school staff
- parents and carers, by involving them in what's being discussed in school and how they can access support for themselves and their children
- students, by encouraging student voice and participation that empowers students to access support and shape a whole-school approach
- senior leaders and governing boards, steering strategic change so that mental health and wellbeing are embedded across the school culture, ethos and environment
- multi-agency working with a range of public and third sector organisations in the local area – building capacity that responds to the multiple needs of children and their families. 

Does your trust chief executive or headteacher value governance? Year in year out, chairs of boards raise the question of trust and school leaders' commitment to and knowledge of governance. Their understanding and willingness to invest time in developing relationships with the board is crucial to good governance. Yet candidates for roles tend not to bring with them the requisite governance experience.

On the other hand, we hear from our leadership association colleagues that, when trust and school leaders face problems or are struggling, governance is often in the mix. Together we've laid out the basic expectations of each other, but this is just a starter. Leaders need to know how to navigate these situations well and capitalise on the benefits that good governance brings to their organisation – and to their own role.

When governance is not all it should be, it is not that the problems reside with the volunteers who govern – it can be that executives do not understand the relative roles and responsibilities. Or in a few cases they do not want to accept the roles and thwart the governing board's ability to do its job. Trusting, respectful relationships are at the heart of good governance, but both board and executive need to establish themselves as trustworthy.

Over the years, NGA has been involved in three reviews of the national professional qualifications that currently constitute a substantial investment by the DfE in leadership development. We argued tenaciously that there should be more expectation of knowledge of governance in the frameworks, especially



Filling the gap

Emma Knights, NGA chief executive, proposes a way of helping leaders understand and value governance more

for NLQH and NPQEL. And each time we are offered assurances that, although the framework doesn't include much detail, the delivery will be different this time.

So I am not holding my breath. It depends significantly on who is developing and delivering the frameworks. Claiming to be a governance expert doesn't make you one, nor does having served as trust or school leader give you the full view.

We try to ensure our secondary school pupils are taught by subject specialists: why does this go out of the window when it comes to leaders learning about governance?

School and trust leaders have a tough job, and most of them are former teachers: they may well be great at the

all-important development of teaching and learning. But understanding governance is also fundamental to leading an institution well, yet has been much overlooked for far too long. We need as a sector to increase the expectations on governance literacy. Yes, there has been lip service, but no real action, no real change.

So at NGA we have chosen another road: instead of shouting from the sidelines into the wind, we have stepped into that gap, aiming to solve the current problem. It is hard for education leaders, business leaders and future leaders to find time from governance experts firmly focused on their role. So we have developed a set of knowledge-packed induction sessions. We know how hard-pressed leaders are so they are only 90 minutes and there are four versions, each tailored to a different setting.

If your governing board has recently recruited a new executive leader, would this be useful for them? What other bespoke governance training have they ever been on? What were the credentials of the person who led the training session? Do you have future leaders who would benefit? This will provide the grounding they need to participate fully and appropriately in governance.

Likewise, if you are an executive or school leader, have you ever had first-class training on governance? If not, how about a new year's resolution? Might this be the starting point for resetting your contribution to governance? The value will outstrip the small investment of time and cash. ☺



EMMA KNIGHTS
OBE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE



Further information

Find out more about the training at nga.org.uk/training-workshops



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Contact us

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