

GOVERNING MATTERS

June 2022 | nga.org.uk



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The schools white paper
and the questions it does
and doesn't answer

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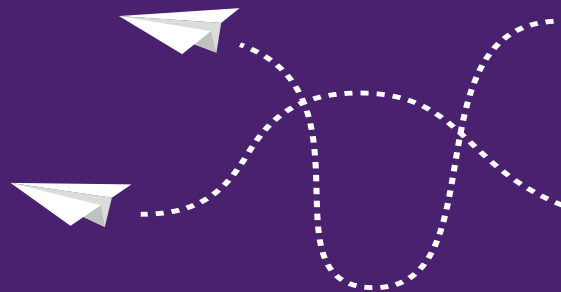
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The clerk's programme is a fully accredited qualification and is designed for practitioners with at least three months experience in all school and trust settings. The programme costs £449 per participant. Learning takes place virtually face-to-face.



JOIN NGA

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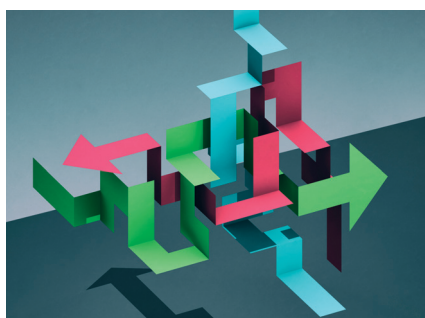
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✉ You can contact Sam at:
sam.henson@nga.org.uk

A word from the editor

Sam Henson, director of policy and communications, on how the schools white paper encourages us to imagine how education will look in 2030

Those leading and making decisions on the future of schools continually contemplate the changes needed to secure a stronger, brighter future for our children and young people. Yet the release of the schools white paper, whatever you think about it, creates a moment in time to stop and think about what the system will actually look like in 2030 – a date that features in so many of the government’s proposals, some of which we discuss on pages 16-18.

Looking forward to the end of the decade, there will be a wide mix of emotions – uncertainty, anticipation, excitement, calm, fear. With such a mixed and complicated economy making up the sector today, I imagine these only just scratch the surface.

The sector is full of millions of different stories, the history of each school forming a vast library of tales of different genres chronicling trials and tribulations and celebrations. Behind each of those stories lies a chapter that too often remains invisible, of the time, effort, passion and drive of the nation’s largest volunteer force who are determined to secure the very best for their pupils. One thing is certain, that level of commitment and passion isn’t waning, and it is integral to the realisation of a better tomorrow for our schools.


Governance has often not received the prominence it needs in the sector – something NGA continues to address through our Visible Governance campaign, which will have some exciting developments to share in the autumn. With your support, we can achieve a higher profile and better understanding of governance, and further improve outcomes for children and their communities – a goal which we know will be important to you too. But we are seeing some signs of progress – the increasing focus on governance from

“We hope the voice of the governance community will be given the respect and time it deserves”

the Department for Education (DfE) in the white paper itself shows perhaps a slight turning of the tide.

As I write, we are halfway through this term’s governance leadership forums, where members have had a chance to voice their view of the government’s ambitions for schools directly to the government. The governance community is having its say and we hope that voice will be given the respect and time it deserves. On page 28 we interview the editor of TES, Jon Severs, who talks to us both about the role TES can play in making governance be seen as the ‘social norm’, and the issues most impacting the sector.

On page 20 Mick Waters and Sir Tim Brighouse lay out their case for change and a new age of schooling characterised by hope, ambition and collaboration. While the white paper indeed contains some timely and constructive insight on the future of national education policy, it is perhaps an understatement to say many will question if it goes far enough to drive the sort of change the article calls for.

Meanwhile NGA continues to engage directly with the DfE on how those proposals will form reality in the future – please remember to send in any feedback, positive or negative, and any ideas and suggestions directly to us (editor@nga.org.uk) and as ever we will pass this on to the DfE. From everyone at NGA, we wish you all a pleasant summer. 

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TAKING THE NEXT STEP

Updated guidance has been released to support governors of local authority maintained schools, trustees of single academy trusts and multi academy trusts (MATs), and school leaders in England in making the right decision for the next steps of their school or trust.

Jointly developed by the Association for School and College Leaders (ASCL), Browne Jacobson and NGA, the guidance takes into account the government's plans for achieving its vision to see "all children benefit from being taught in a family of schools, with their school in a strong

multi academy trust or with plans to join or form one" by 2030 in the Opportunity for All white paper published in March 2022.

This guide sets out a step-by-step process for joining or forming a MAT and will help

governing boards and school leaders to make the best long-term decision for their school.

You can read more and download the guidance at www.nga.org.uk/taking-the-next-step

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

There is still time to join us at an event this summer term. Our summer conference seminar series will cover the key issues affecting governors and trustees as we explore the board's role in achieving environmental sustainability, supporting disadvantaged pupils and achieving pupil wellbeing as well as focusing on the leadership challenge.

In addition, we have a range of network events for governance professionals, young governors and those responsible for SEND before we round off our summer term with the MAT Governance Network.

Book your place at www.nga.org.uk/events

Summer conference seminars

20 June	The governing board's role in achieving environmental sustainability
21 June	The leadership challenge
22 June	The governing board's role in achieving pupil wellbeing
23 June	The governing board's role in supporting disadvantaged pupils in 2022/23

Summer term events

30 June	Governance Professional Network
5 July	SEND Network
6 July	Young Governors Network
7 July	Regional Forum (East Midlands)
11 July	MAT Governance Network

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WELCOME TO GOVERNANCE LIVE - NEW DATES AVAILABLE

Designed for new governors and trustees, the Welcome to Governance LIVE sessions will support you in making an impact in your first six months as a new governor or trustee. We have opened dates in the autumn and spring terms for you to book.

The sessions will explore:

- what you can expect (the positives and 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'd like it to be and how to support achieving its vision)

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.



Emma Knights

#VisibleGovernance
@NGAEmmaK

Thanks to everyone who attended the 2nd of our 4 forums @NGAMedia this evening. A good discussion was had with local governors within MATs on the White Paper & their relevant experiences. Thanks to Paul Cohen @educationgovuk for presenting, listening & fielding questions

Steve Edmonds

@NGASteveE

Proud that NGA is supporting "Thank a Teacher Day". Those of us who govern are in awe of their unstinting professionalism and commitment to improving the life chances of children and young people. #ThankATeacherDay

Sam Henson

@NGASamH

Great to be listening to Paul Cohen from the DfE on what the white papers means and how the sector will be working together at the @NGAMedia governance leadership forum for MAT trustees and leaders

SOCIAL ROUNDUP

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EVERY COPY COUNTS

Did you know you can legally copy and arrange music in your school?

The Schools Printed Music Licence is your licence to copy and arrange sheet music for your classes, ensembles, choirs and bands. If you are a school in England, you are automatically covered by the Schools Printed Music Licence that allows you to make photocopies and scans, use score-writing software, make notations on copies of printed music and upload scans of music to a virtual learning environment.

Visit www.everycopycounts.co.uk and follow the simple steps to submit your data and unlock free resources, including exclusive teaching resources for your classroom, a free mixed ensemble arrangement, access to webinars and more.



DON'T FORGET

NGA members can now access robust, affordable salary benchmarking through a new partnership with Pay in Education (PiE). The discounted offer supports trusts and schools to make informed decisions on how to spend the pay budget. The PiE benchmarking tool is available for MATs, single academy trusts and maintained schools.

More information can be found at www.payineducation.co.uk or email subscriptions@payineducation.co.uk.

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Expenses: Do you know what you could claim?



Michael Barton, NGA senior advice officer, looks at the rules around expenses, and the benefits to recruiting governors and trustees

Allowances or expenses mean any payments to those governing made by a school or trust to cover costs incurred because of serving on that board. Examples include childcare or travel costs but must not include payments for loss of earnings. In no circumstances should expenses exceed costs incurred, as this would amount to paying an individual for governing.

Any payments should be clearly documented. In practice, this usually means expenses only being provided after a receipt has been obtained, and limited to the value set out on that receipt. If a receipt cannot be provided, additional care should be taken to ensure expense payments are accurate.

Different contexts

As is often the case, academy trusts have more flexibility in relation to expenses policies. We advise trusts to agree a policy, so all parties are clear about what can be claimed. The policy should set out the expenses available to members, trustees and local governors, and consider



how these different groups can make claims and have them approved. The Charity Commission has published advice on trustee expenses which goes into more detail.


For maintained schools, the right to agree an expenses policy is explicitly set out in the relevant governance regulations. Many of the key principles, such as that expenses should be paid based on provision of a receipt

or HMRC mileage rates, are explicitly included in the regulations.

The benefits of expenses

It is important both to set an expenses policy and publicise its existence. For boards that struggle to recruit and retain high-quality governors and trustees, an expenses policy has the potential to make governance more accessible. For example, expenses for childcare or care for other dependants could help those with caring responsibilities to participate in governance.

Even if some on your board have previously declined to claim expenses, personal circumstances can change, so reminding everyone of the expenses policy is advisable.

Ultimately though, the most important benefit of an expenses policy is that it ensures fairness. No governor or trustee should be left out of pocket due to their volunteering. Similarly, no potential governor should be priced out of taking on the role. A clear expenses policy will help ensure those who want to govern are not deterred because of any financial hardship they may incur. 

n|g|a **GOLDline**
The NGA Advice Service

NGA GOLD members can access the GOLDline advice service for advice on this topic, or any other governance issue. GOLDline provides you with expert, confidential and independent governance advice. Our advisers can help with queries relating to education law, offer best practice and provide problem-solving advice. To find out how to become a GOLD member, see www.nga.org.uk/goldline.

Cyber attacks: could you be next?

Getting to grips with your cyber security could save you some major headaches. **Adelaide Chitanda** explains

Whether it's to store pupil data, staff records or financial information, the effective use of IT systems can provide schools and trusts with space-saving, time-efficient and accessible data management. However, alongside the conveniences and efficiencies that technology brings, there are risks that schools and trusts need to be aware of.

Impact of a breach

There have been some well-publicised cyber security breaches involving schools and trusts. Even a small, relatively localised cyber attack can cause great disruption to the operation of a school. Many schools and trusts rely on their computer networks for daily functions; a cyber attack could make it impossible to run as normal by halting access to school buildings, learning materials and personal data.

There is also the risk that personal data could be leaked or lost, both

of which could have serious consequences. There is also the reputational cost to consider – any cyber attack has the potential to seriously affect stakeholder confidence and, in extreme cases, that damage can last for years.

As the reliance on tech grows, governing boards need to be more mindful than ever of the need to review existing systems so they can be confident their school or trust has robust procedures in place to keep their IT systems protected.

Importance of culture

Cyber attacks can be sophisticated but there are steps that schools and trusts can take to minimise the risks. Although a cyber security strategy



ADELAIDE CHITANDA
SENIOR ADVICE
OFFICER

should be specific to its context, a consistent element should be a positive cyber security culture at all levels.

While the systems used will be an operational matter, setting the right culture and commitment to good practice starts around the governing board table.

Lead by example


Governors and trustees need to lead by example. The basics include only using a school- or trust-issued email address, and ensuring that confidential documents are password protected.

Policies and procedures need to be in place to support this approach and assure the board that staff have been trained to keep school systems safe and secure.

Governors and trustees should actively engage with and respect security decisions, and work collaboratively with senior leaders and IT experts to ensure that proportionate controls are in place, and that appropriate action is taken where necessary.

A culture of trust, engagement and accountability will help ensure that where weaknesses are discovered or an incident occurs, action is taken and lessons learnt.

Taking action

To help minimise the risk of a cyber incident, NGA has published an information sheet on GDPR and cyber security that governing boards can use as a starting point, setting out how governors and trustees can build cyber security awareness, how to ensure the right controls are in place and how to make sure that the school/trust is ready to respond to a cyber attack. 



More information

You can find the information sheet at www.nga.org.uk/Complying-with-GDPR

In 2020, NGA published *A View from the Board*, a report exploring the experience of governors and trustees under the then new education inspection framework (EIF). As full routine inspections of schools and colleges resumed in September 2021, NGA wanted a fresher picture of how governors and trustees feel about the inspection process – what was their experience like, and how does this compare with what we found pre-pandemic?

At the start of the year, NGA launched a survey gathering the views and experiences of 111 governors and trustees across the country whose schools had been inspected since September 2021, combined with an analysis of 120 published inspection reports. *School Inspection: A View from the Board, Two Years On* outlines the key findings and aims to identify any notable changes in inspection practice since 2020.

Inspecting governance

“Only 36% of governing boards tell us that Ofsted inspections helped governance”

Overall, there was a mixed response to inspections under the EIF. It

appears that governors and trustees are largely split on whether inspection has helped improve governance, with 34% of governing boards telling us that inspection did not help, while 36% thought it did.

While the curriculum and quality of learning form the main emphasis of the framework, there is an inconsistency between the questions about the school’s curriculum offer that inspectors are asking governing boards and the depth of the conversations that take place. Almost three quarters (71%) of respondents told us they were asked about the curriculum during the time inspectors actually spent with them.

“Inspectors are consistently asking questions that do not blur into the operational”

In 2020, we shared our lingering concern that inspectors were sometimes asking governing boards questions that strayed into operational,

leaving boards unsure of how to respond appropriately. Positively, this year’s findings show that, generally speaking, this no longer appears to be the case. Although there were some exceptions, we are more reassured than we were two years ago that inspectors are conscious of the strategic line of questioning and are broadly sticking to it.

But not everything is improving. Not all members of each governing board appear to be invited to feedback meetings on a consistent basis, with a higher percentage of respondents reporting that they were not invited to feedback meetings compared with the 2020 report’s findings.

That said, there could be a relatively simple explanation in that these outlier cases may in part be due to the impact of COVID-19 and the impracticality of meeting in person. We are grateful that Ofsted has made it clear that all members of the governing board, including the



Ofsted: a second look

Nina Sharma, NGA’s senior policy and information officer, gives a snapshot of our latest research on Ofsted

clerk, should have the opportunity to attend the feedback meetings, with notes taken. This provides an opportunity to log specific feedback that boards will want to return, as well as feedback that may not make it into the report itself given the limited space available.

“Governors, trustees and school leaders feel that the feedback meeting was valuable to school improvement”

Of those that attended feedback meetings, almost two thirds (62%) reported positively about them, saying they were valuable to their governing board and school leadership.

Ofsted has recognised the value of conversations between school leaders and inspectors. As part of Ofsted’s five-year strategy, the length of inspections will be extended to enable detailed conversations between school leaders and inspectors. We found that inspectors were also generally spending slightly longer with boards, with far fewer accounts of inspectors spending less than 20 minutes with them.

“Pleasingly, inspectors are clearly able to distinguish the roles and responsibilities of trust boards and local governance”

Reports

The analysis of 120 published reports from schools inspected between September and December 2021 revealed four key themes:

- the role and impact of governance continues to be diminished in Ofsted inspection reports; moreover, there is a significant lack of consistency between reports. Additionally, where governance is mentioned in reports, there is a disparity in the extent to which governance is covered
- the analysis found that where schools are rated below ‘good’, published reports often do not refer to governance at all, nor do they refer to the ways governing boards carry out their core functions
- there is inconsistency in how reports take account of the impact of COVID-19 on the school under inspection
- published inspection reports regularly report on the relationship the school has with parents and other stakeholders.

Multi academy trusts

Pleasingly, the findings from the research indicate that inspectors are clearly able to distinguish the roles and responsibilities of trust boards and local governance. Of those who govern in a multi academy trust (MAT), 83% said that inspectors spoke with either trustees, academy committee members or both as part of the inspection. This is an overall increase in the number of inspectors speaking with governors across MATs, strengthening the interpretation that inspectors understand different school structures.

The COVID-19 context

The continuing impact of COVID-19 means school leaders and staff are still handling and overcoming complex issues. Ofsted has said that, through inspection, it can establish whether schools are taking the necessary steps to fill any gaps that may exist.

However, some of the survey respondents had a different view. When asked if inspections should go ahead while schools continue to grapple with the effects of COVID-19, over two-fifths of respondents said that Ofsted inspections should not carry on. ⁶⁴

RESOURCES

- A guide to Ofsted inspections: www.nga.org.uk/ofsted-guide
- Information on summary evaluations of multi academy trusts: www.nga.org.uk/ofsted-guide
- E-learning: Ofsted inspections: www.nga.org.uk/Training-and-Development/NGA-Learning-Link-e-learning/Collections/Good-Governance-Step-by-step



Diversity begins with boards

When aiming to instil principles of equality, diversity and inclusion, governing boards should start by looking in the mirror, says **Rani Kaur**, NGA head of advice

To bring different skills, knowledge, experience, perspectives and approaches to a governing board – and to help ensure it is best placed to meet the needs of pupils, parents and staff – it is essential that the right people are around the table.

However, our Increasing Participation in School and Trust Governance report showed a disconnect between the characteristics – and, by extension, the lived experiences, understanding and insight – of those making the decisions and the pupil population affected by them.

The principles of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) should be central to any school or trust, whether in relation to pupils, parents, staff or general culture. The role of governing boards is key to this as they set the ethos they want reflected throughout a school or trust.

However, the board's focus on EDI should start with themselves. That is why NGA is committed to promoting the diversity of governing boards. Our research has consistently shown that, when compared with the general population, certain groups – such as those aged under 40, or from a Black, Asian and other minority

ethnic background, or those with a disability – are under-represented on boards.

The first step is to review the diversity of your board. To help with this, NGA is creating a diversity indicators form, which governors and trustees complete anonymously. Boards can use this to gain a more complete picture of how diverse their membership is across a broad range of indicators, which can be adapted to fit a school or trust's circumstances.

The responses should help boards identify any actions that are needed, such as targeted recruitment, allocating roles and responsibilities, and ensuring full participation. It should also help to highlight instances where direct perspectives unavailable within the board should be sought before a decision is made or confirmed. The form will be available later this term.

Open and transparent

If recruiting, boards will be able to focus on seeking individuals with the necessary skills and characteristics. NGA's report outlines how boards can take a different approach to recruitment to make it possible for people to join. Boards should regularly review



RANI KAUR
HEAD OF ADVICE

their recruitment practices, which should be open and transparent so prospective governors or trustees can be confident their application will be considered fairly. However, if seeking governors or trustees with specific characteristics, governing boards will need to make this a priority.

In practice, this means advertising as widely as possible and providing lots of information about the role; research from the education sector shows governance does not have a high profile and is largely hidden from view.



Prospective governors/trustees may therefore be unaware of who is eligible to be appointed and what the role involves.

With interested candidates, the application process should be welcoming and informative. Prospective applicants should be told about the training and support the board offers. There should also be the opportunity to ask questions and address any concerns.

Any potential barriers should also be removed. For example, references can be helpful, but boards should ask themselves whether they present an obstacle; perhaps the applicant has not been in recent employment and so cannot provide a professional reference. Boards should consider whether a personal reference would suffice – or even whether references are necessary, given that numerous safeguarding checks are carried out to assess suitability. The interview stage will also provide ample opportunity for the board to discuss the individual's skills, knowledge, and experience.

However, a successful



NGA is committed to promoting the diversity of governing boards

appointment is not the end. Induction is key to both the contribution the new governor or trustee will make and the likelihood of them serving their term (and possibly a second). NGA has a wealth of resources available to assist governing boards with induction.

It's good to talk

New appointees should be made to feel welcome, but it is not realistic to expect boards to know about every competing demand in the life of a governor or trustee. Boards should develop an environment where governors/trustees feel able to come forward and ask for help.

The starting point should be a conversation with the chair. This should be frank and open and give the opportunity for the new governor or trustee to talk about any specific help or support they require. This could include asking for reasonable adjustments for a physical or mental disability; sometimes small changes, such as providing information in a different format, can make a huge difference to someone's ability to carry out their role effectively.

Governors or trustees may require support in other ways. For example, they may have caring responsibilities for a child or adult and may need to pay for care while they attend meetings. If so, are they aware of the school or trust's expenses policies (see page 8)? Are there any religious festivals they celebrate that need to be taken into account when planning meeting dates and times?

Having these conversations as a matter of course will help ensure new governors or trustees feel welcome and give them the opportunity to ask for additional support.

To help with retention, we

would recommend putting support from a buddy or mentor in place for 12 months after initial induction. Offering this for new volunteers can provide reassurance and provides a clear point of contact. School governance is a new area for many, and a named person for governors or trustees to direct their questions to can be invaluable. The opportunity to build a relationship with someone on the board can also help develop confidence in board meetings – as can an effective chair that ensures everyone on the board is encouraged and given the opportunity to contribute.

Keep reaching out

However, it is important to remember that diverse board does not remove the need to engage with all stakeholders, including those with specific characteristics. We have heard of instances where a governor or trustee with a specific characteristic is seen as a representative of everyone with that characteristic – this should not be the case. Diverse boards will bring in different views, but effective stakeholder engagement is still vital to help boards understand the needs of their school or trust and local community.

Although EDI is a collective responsibility, boards may want to consider appointing a link governor/trustee to help ensure it remains a priority. They can be a constant voice on the board reminding it to consider EDI in everything it does.

EDI is essential to any school or trust, and starts with the governing board. A diverse board will provide an excellent foundation to ensure EDI is at the heart of a school or trust's culture and threaded through everything it does. 🌍



How many of you have had your career meticulously planned and structured at every stage? That may be the case for some, but most careers are shaped by circumstance: we set out with a goal in mind and then stumble onto different paths, which cause us to re-evaluate.

I have met quite a few governance professionals whose careers started by accident. Some are now in senior roles with responsibility for supporting governance in large, geographically dispersed trusts. This, they will admit, was furthest from their minds when they became involved in governance via their children's school or other routes.

However, this belies the fact that school governance is different to what it was 20 or even 10 years ago. Governing structures have changed, and the government's ambition for all schools to be in multi academy trusts by 2030 is likely to increase the number, variety and complexity of professional support roles.

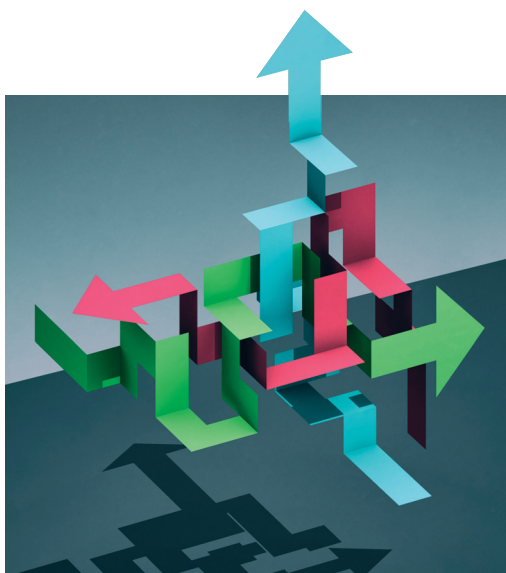
It is about time that those working or aspiring to work in governance had a pathway to help navigate this changing landscape and guide their future career decisions and ongoing development.

Last year, NGA committed to developing a career pathway in collaboration with the profession and other parties. This is no easy task – the varying roles, individual requirements and operating models are not conducive to a standard narrative.

There are issues relating to required qualifications and pay; these are emotive for many in the profession, who point to a lack of understanding about what they do and what is involved. Nevertheless,

Governance professional careers: Follow the pathway

NGA's career pathway aims to make governance careers more a matter of design than accident, explains director of advice and guidance **Steve Edmonds**




STEVE EDMONDS
DIRECTOR OF
ADVICE AND
GUIDANCE

we believe there is scope for bringing greater clarity to the profession as a whole, and the feedback we have received so far has been encouraging.

The career pathway will launch on NGA's website in December. It will explain different professional governance roles; detail routes into employment; give individual requirements for qualifications, skills, knowledge and attributes; and explain development requirements. It will also provide details on

working hours and conditions and pay range estimates based on market research. There will also be CPD and peer support resources, career stories and a recruitment platform.

Integral to the pathway are the three advisory levels associated with governance professional roles: clerking, governance coordinator and senior governance professional. Although it is not possible to fit every role neatly into this structure, it is open to interpretation and overlap. However, conflating roles with levels could reduce the value of the pathway. We will be guided by our focus groups on how to achieve the right balance.

Whatever level you work at, the pathway aims to show that a career in school governance gives an opportunity to do something different and make a difference. We look forward to updating you on our progress. 

 *To find out more, help with the pathway's development and join our focus groups, email clerkingmatters@nga.org.uk*

The commitment you make at board level to developing the people and talent we have in our schools really matters. Not only does it promote a positive culture in which leaders, teachers and other staff are valued and prioritised, it also drives improved performance and outcomes.

But the investment required may be difficult to fund, especially when budgets are stretched. Even more reason why those governing should be finding out how their schools are maximising government funding, available in the form of the apprenticeship levy, which can be used to upskill employed staff as well as recruiting new apprenticeships in the more traditional approach. When it comes to this funding, it really is a case of use it or lose it.

Employers in the UK with an annual pay bill over £3m are required to pay the apprenticeship levy to help fund the development and delivery of apprenticeships. Apprentices can be full- or part-time employees who

work alongside experienced staff to gain the skills needed to be fully competent in their chosen occupation.

Schools can use apprenticeships to recruit new employees, and to retrain or upskill existing staff of all ages and levels of experience in a variety of teaching and support roles: for example, teaching assistants, business professionals and sports coaches.

Large employer groups including local authorities and MATs pay into their apprenticeship levy account, which the government tops up

by 10%. Schools should be able to access the account for the purpose of staff development. It is worth finding out how it works in practice at the school(s) you govern at.

A key point to note is that if levy funds are not used within two years, then they are lost. Or to be precise, they are returned to HMRC. This is not what governing boards want to see, given that one of their core functions is to ensure the effective use of resources. It is concerning that schools generally lag behind other public sector bodies when it comes to taking up the levy, and have also missed the 2.3% target for numbers of staff undertaking an apprenticeship.

So let's bring about a change through governance and make the most of this fantastic opportunity to upskill the workforce at all levels, and at no additional cost. Ask your school leaders:

- How are apprenticeships and the apprenticeship levy being used to develop staff in our school or trust – do we know how to access the levy?
- What apprenticeships would best meet the workforce needs of our school or trust?
- How do we engage with and quality-assure apprenticeship providers?
- How are we engaging our staff in the opportunities and potential benefits afforded by apprenticeships? 



More information

To learn more, read the *DfE guidance on how the apprenticeship levy applies to schools*. The National College of Education also offers a free service to help schools and academies understand the apprenticeship levy and how to access it.



Schools have missed the 2.3% target for numbers of apprentices

Apprenticeship levy:

Use it or lose it

Gareth Alcott, director of strategic partnerships at the National College of Education, reminds governing boards of the opportunity to utilise their apprenticeship levy



The schools white paper

**Opportunity for all or an
opportunity missed?**



NGA director of policy and communications **Sam Henson** delves into the detail of the new schools white paper, Opportunity for All

The publication of the first schools white paper since 2016 was probably not the game-changer many expected. It is fair to say the reaction has been mixed or muted. While there is very little to actually disagree with, we couldn't help but feel underwhelmed.

The most newsworthy section of the paper was without doubt chapter four, the proposal to create a "stronger and fairer" system by making it a fully multi academy trust (MAT) based by 2030 (well, sort of). That feels a good many years away but it will be here before we know it.

We didn't necessarily expect the pace of change generated by the Schools Bill as it began its parliamentary passage in the House of Lords in May. As well as stating the goal for all children to be taught in trusts by 2030, the Schools Bill signals new reforms to bring in a single regulatory approach rather than continuing to make do with the current messy mixture of regulation, contracts and guidance such as the Academy Trust Handbook. This could be viewed as a tidying up exercise, but it will also give the department more powers to intervene where necessary, something it seems they are not wasting time in trying to accomplish.

A new level of standards and new powers

The focus on trust standards within the Schools Bill was inevitable for a system that has been centralising power and oversight since the Academies Act 2010. MATs play a huge role in the lives of so many children and young people, which is only set to increase as the DfE

moves forward with its vision for a fully trust-based system. Schools are essential pillars of the community, and the responsibility MATs carry in running them makes them a crucial public service, funded by large amounts of public money, which requires accountability and transparency. This also means the possibility of meaningful intervention if things go wrong.

The Schools Bill suggests this level of interjection could be more intrusive and controlling than we expected when the white paper itself was released. The bill sets out potential new powers for the secretary of state that give them more of a say in both governance structures and procedures.

The DfE has long held a role in setting the expectations and responsibilities of governing boards; at this stage we have no reason to think these new powers would be used in anything other than the spirit of providing meaningful support and direction for volunteers – we will have to wait and see.

More controversial and potentially problematic is how new powers are shaping up for local authorities (LAs) to apply for academy orders for schools. The Schools Bill suggests the power to request an academy order no longer rests solely with the governing body if the LA has made such a move. The potential for LAs and the DfE to bypass the legal decision-makers in enforcing academy orders on schools is a significant deviation from the line that academisation won't be mandated, albeit only for the schools in those particular LAs that request this.

While the DfE has made it clear consultation is required with

those governing boards, it has also admitted there may be circumstances where agreement can't be reached, and it is then up to the LA on whether to proceed.

A convincing case for a fully trust-based system?

NGA was an early adopter of the benefits of families of schools; in 2015 we published the first edition of guidance with ASCL and Browne Jacobson. The updated version of this is now available on NGA's website.

Regular readers may remember NGA talked to members prior to the white paper release. We wanted to get an up-to-date feel for the appetite for change from those schools not yet part of a MAT, and three issues came up time and time again:

- a clear and continuing attachment to locality and the importance of local collaboration
- a fear of being 'taken over' by a large organisation that will not have the interests of 'their' school and their community at the heart of their decision-making in the way the current board does
- the need for more conclusive evidence on the benefits to their pupils – people are not yet convinced.

The argument over the validity of the data that was used in the accompanying 'case for a fully trust-led system' goes to show that the process of winning hearts and minds will not be as straightforward as some think. NGA's 2021 annual governance survey revealed that just 5% of maintained school governors and 15% of single-academy trustees planned to join a MAT in the near future.

The future of governance

NGA was really pleased that governance featured significantly in the white paper. Governance has often been identified as one of the main challenges MATs face – but good governance is also fundamentally the solution to a host of other hurdles.

The inclusion of strategic governance as one of the five pillars that make up the DfE definition of trust strength means that governance will no longer be left to go under the radar; trusts will have to get it right to reach and retain a strong trust status.

Governance gets two other mentions. Robust financial governance is at the heart of the DfE'S push for strong trusts taking on more schools. The expectations placed on boards to discharge their financial governance duties has increased significantly since 2016's white paper. NGA's annual survey over the last couple of years has showed financial efficiencies are an area the majority of trusts are doing well on – the advantages of combining financial management and governance across a group of schools appears to be materialising at greater pace.

More respondents now support the idea of sharing their individual school's resources across the MAT: nearly half are in favour of pooling resources with other schools within the MAT (49%), whereas only 28% oppose it and 23% have no view. MAT trustees are also more likely to balance the overall budget of the organisation. But despite the positive trend, a few trusts continue to mismanage their finances or fail to follow the rules without the board of



Good governance is the solution to a range of MATs' hurdles

trustees rectifying this.

Of course, money goes hand in hand with growth, and the white paper firmly places an emphasis on growth, expecting

most trusts to be on trajectory for either 7,500 pupils or 10 schools.

A focus on growth alone is never enough and can be dangerous – it needs to be rooted in being one trust with one vision that all your schools and potential joiners can get on board with. We know 57% of MAT trustees told us last year that their MAT planned to grow – this figure is now surely set to increase. The main reasons MATs continue to drive for growth is in order to improve outcomes for more pupils, it being part of their strategy and only then having not reached optimal size.

While economies of scale are largely recognised as one of the benefits of forming and growing groups of schools, 'financial efficiency' as a reason for growth actually fell to 30% in 2021 from 48% in 2020.

Local governance

The third area of governance covered is the new expectation that all trusts should have local governance arrangements for their schools. This is an opportune moment to help set the expectations around local governance in MATs. We have gathered 12 suggested expectations on what our evidence tells us is needed to make local governance a successful part of the system:

Having trialled these at our MAT network last term and spoken to MAT CEOs and the leadership forums about them, we are pleased they are overwhelmingly meeting a warm reception. 🍷

FIVE HIGHLIGHTS FROM CHAPTERS 1-3 OF THE SCHOOLS WHITE PAPER

- **90% of children by 2030 leaving primary school with the expected standard in reading, writing and maths – up from 65 per cent currently**
- **No new money: the secretary of state for education has made a confident assessment that there is already enough money in the system to deliver what has been set out**
- **A new minimum expectation on the length of the school week of 32.5 hours by September 2023: while Ofsted will look at this, it is not statutory, and schools can in theory fulfil this by adding more time on to break or lunchtime**
- **The parent pledge: a commitment that every pupil who falls behind in English or maths will receive targeted support. Schools will make sure parents are told about it, and that the school is doing something about it**
- **A potential diluting of pupil premium funding after the government indicated that the money can be used to support literacy and numeracy skills "where needed".**



Further action

If you have any views or feedback, please let me know at sam.henson@nga.org.uk

When the government's SEND and alternative provision green paper finally dropped at the end of March it generally met a warmer reception than the schools white paper the day before (see page 16). But after so much delay, NGA, like many others, couldn't help but make known the feeling of regret that it had taken so long to arrive.

Too many children and young people with SEND continue to receive poor outcomes and simply don't have access to the support needed to change that. The inconsistency across the SEND system is in need of desperate reform. The government finally published its vision for a single, nationwide system, backed by £70m of funding, which will introduce new standards in the quality of support given to children.

The proposals include some big steps – a more holistic, system-wide approach, with new national standards. There will be new local inclusion plans and dashboards, a focus on earlier intervention that lasts from early years through to the long term, and more focus on the needs of SENCOs, their status and development.

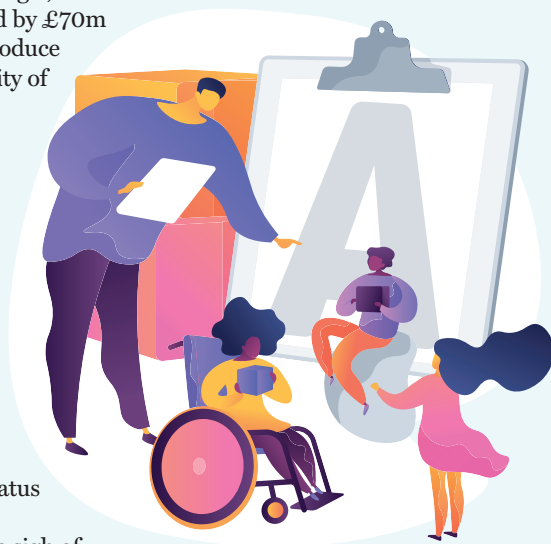
There will also be a huge sigh of relief once a simplified and digitised approach to education, health and care plans (EHCPs) is implemented. This was particularly welcome as the number of pupils with an EHCP has been increasing since 2017.

But the frustration hasn't gone away, and it won't until the system is in place and children and young people are able to benefit from it. It has taken nearly three years to reach this point – the government's SEND review began in September 2019. And we should remember that we are not venturing yet

THE GREEN PAPER

The pathway to a more inclusive system

There is still a long way to go, but the green paper on SEND and alternative provision has much to recommend it, says **Steve Edmonds**, NGA director of advice and guidance



for parents and carers, and unsustainable financial pressure on councils. And more children and young people need to access support as the number of pupils with SEN but no EHCP continues to increase. Crucially, it also impacts on the ability of governing boards to use their best endeavours to make sure that a child with SEND gets the support they need.

The regret over the timing doesn't take away the good ideas and positive steps forward the green paper proposes. The green paper, or rather the eventual implementation of its ideas, marks a turning point – the potential to make bold improvements, with real system change that focuses on improving outcomes for all, making it easier to navigate the system and more effective use of resources.

However, the government needs to show urgency in implementing the reforms, get implementation right and provide sufficient funding. This will go some way towards creating the conditions for boards to promote inclusive cultures in their schools and trusts and build capacity to meet the needs of all pupils. 🌱

into full implementation of the green paper; that is some way off and subject to completion of the accompanying consultation.

In the meantime, many thousands of children and young people will continue to pass through a broken system characterised by poor experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND, delays in accessing, frustration



STEVE EDMONDS
DIRECTOR OF
ADVICE AND
GUIDANCE

A new age of schooling



Professor Sir Tim Brighouse and **Professor Mick Waters** discuss the future of education, and outline the argument for change with an overview of their latest book

After the huge disruption of the past two years, we might be on the verge of a new age for the English schooling system. In our book, *About Our Schools: Improving on Previous Best*, we argue that the doubts and concerns caused by the pandemic shouldn't disguise the fact that we are at one of those rare occasions when the siren call of 'get back to normal' is not enough.

It isn't simply that teachers have accelerated their competence in digital-based provision and therefore are ready for developing the new possibilities the pandemic has revealed, it's the fact we have allowed our curriculum to be 'baked into an inappropriate shape' by an examination and testing system that is backward-looking and in danger of preparing our youngsters for a world that no longer exists,

rather than ready to meet the multiple opportunities and challenges of tomorrow.

Working lives and careers are being rapidly changed by the impact of a combination of automation, robotics, nanotechnology, electronics and artificial intelligence. Social lives are being altered by changes in the family and social media. And that's before we've even mentioned climate change or the vexed issues of domestic and world politics. It will be our pupils as future citizens who will need to solve these issues. And that calls for more than getting back to normal.

A rare moment of change

We believe we are on the verge of a new age of schooling that should be characterised by hope, ambition and collaborative partnerships, especially of schools working with and learning from each other.



About Our Schools is published by Crown House Publishing and costs £24.99

Moments of change in the culture and direction of schooling have been rare. The first, prompted by the Second World War, was characterised by a political national consensus that schools were a vital factor in the defeat of 'ignorance', one of the five great enemies of progress identified by the Beveridge Report.

And so, in an age of 'optimism and trust', new schools were built; the school leaving age was raised (twice); teachers trained in colleges of education and kept up to date through teaching centres; and new enhanced provision was established, such as music schools on Saturdays, residential centres for field studies and outdoor education, and youth and careers services. The engine room was the local education authority as an arm of local government.

This age began to run out of steam in the 1970s, when the oil crisis induced a set of economic changes and setbacks that fuelled doubts about the effectiveness of what was being achieved in schools. This was epitomised by a series of educational polemics dubbed by the press as the ‘black papers’ and what became known as the Ruskin speech of then prime minister James Callaghan.

It is here that we started the story of our book because these events led to Kenneth Baker’s Education Act and the age we still live in: of ‘markets, centralisation and managerialism’, which has achieved much – not least in knowing far more about how to improve schools.

The forgotten third

Our book analyses what has worked well and not so well in that age and how we might now try to get closer to the goal of ensuring far more pupils emerge from their schooling experience equipped to lead a fulfilled life and committed to contribute to the fulfilment of others.

We were haunted by a phrase used by Geoff Barton of the Association of School and College Leaders when he talked of the ‘forgotten third’, echoed and understood by so many of our witnesses in describing the proportion of youngsters who get little or nothing from their schooling. After all, we recalled,

Half Our Future was the title of the Newsom Report in the 1960s, which described the same phenomenon then.

Had we simply reduced a half to a third in having made such little progress over our working lifetimes? Progress for just one-sixth of our young?

In putting together evidence for the book, we interviewed more than a hundred witnesses – including 14 former secretaries of state, some of their special advisers and other ministers and senior civil servants. We also talked to heads of Ofsted, chief executives of multi academy trusts (MATs),



ILLUSTRATION: ISTOCK / SHUTTERSTOCK

directors of children's services, headteachers, teachers, governors and trustees, and many others, including Emma Knights of NGA.

We wanted to find out the vital factors governing how policies were made and what others thought were the priorities for a new age for schooling – one of 'hope, ambition and collaborative partnerships'. They were remarkably frank, and the first part of our book covers the making of policies and the influence of Downing Street, special advisers and the ministers that made the most difference.

The book is intended to be dipped into and we devote separate chapters to curriculum, assessment and pedagogy; admissions, attendance and exclusions; special educational needs and disabilities (SEND); school improvement and leadership; securing sufficient suitably qualified teachers and keeping them; accountability; governance and finance; and other factors such as parents, childhood, adolescence and disadvantage.

Finally, we make recommendations for a better future. We identify six 'foundation stones' designed to supplement current provision, and what we call the 39 Steps

“Although the white paper may lack ambition and hope, it does point to collaborative partnerships”

– identifying and removing undesirable features.

A vital role for governors

Since we wrote the book, the white paper Opportunities for All and the green paper on SEND have been published. Their destiny might match that of former education secretary Margaret Thatcher's ill-judged white paper of 1972, A Framework for Expansion, which misread the economic runes of the 1970s as we tumbled into an oil crisis, repeated economic setbacks and falling school rolls (something similar is happening today).

By the mid-1970s however, Thatcher joined in the debate started by Callaghan's Ruskin speech and proved to be the architect of the new age of markets, centralisation and managerialism, which the doubt and disillusion morphed into.

In fairness, although it may lack ambition and hope, the current white paper does point to collaborative partnerships, which we are sure will cause much debate in governing bodies across the country. We

would be delighted therefore if governors take aspects of the conversation in our book to their own governing body.

We cite governance as a vital part of the school system and highlight the importance of ensuring local voices are heard. We believe MATs and free schools have opened up possibilities but also created some new challenges, not least their own regulation. We propose ways that governors and trustees can enable their schools and academies to make a positive impact in their local communities, and celebrate the work that governors can and should be doing.

In the next issue of Governing Matters, we will identify some of the foundation stones and some of the undesirable features that prevent teachers weaving their magic to inspire pupils to a better future. Governors and trustees play a vital part in this process. 



More information

NGA members can receive an exclusive discount on *About Our Schools* and all the books in their basket at checkout until the end of September. Visit www.crownhouse.co.uk/about-our-schools and use the code **ABOUT25**

E-LEARNING ANYTIME, ANYWHERE

INTERACTIVE
FLEXIBLE
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ESSENTIAL

NGA Learning Link offers flexible e-learning to help governors, trustees, chairs and governance professionals develop their governance skills and knowledge. It delivers over 50 high-quality e-learning modules and access to bitesize 'just in time' modules.

NEW Introduction to Clerking e-learning programme

This new programme supports governance professionals in their career development and is aimed at new and aspiring clerks or more experienced clerks seeking a refresher of the basics.

Each of the eight modules explores different aspects of the role and 'how to' topics, providing a comprehensive induction. The programme takes just four hours to complete.

1. What does the governance professional do?
2. How governance works
3. How to clerk in different types of school organisation
4. How to find and use key sources for governance
5. How to arrange meetings
6. How to minute a meeting effectively
7. How to manage information and documents
8. How to support the recruitment, appointment and retirement of governors and trustees

The first module – What does the governance professional do? – can be accessed as part of the free trial for Learning Link.

Sign up

Start your free trial today and preview a selection of our modules.

0121 237 3780

www.nga.org.uk/learninglink/introduction-to-clerking

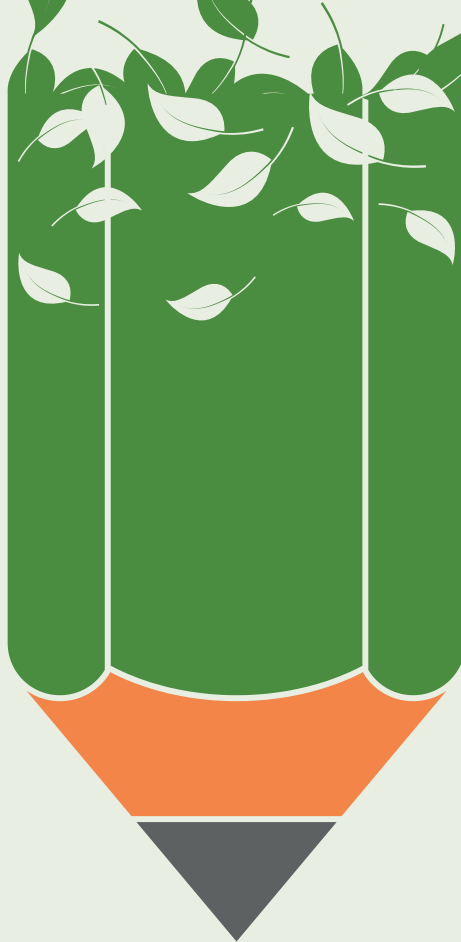
Type of NGA membership	Learning Link price
NONE	£180
STANDARD	£132
GOLD	£90

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

Learning Link has been invaluable to me in my new role as a clerk.

As a clerk I have found the courses extremely helpful and enlightening.

The materials are excellent, well targeted and covering a wide range of topics.



Greener Governance

Following the DfE's strategy for environmental sustainability and climate change in education, **Megan Tate**, policy and research officer, introduces a range of organisations that offer solutions

In April 2022, the Department for Education (DfE) launched Sustainability and Climate Change: A Strategy for the Education and Children's Services Systems, giving the green light for the school sector to act on environmental sustainability. Aiming to make the UK's education sector the world leader in sustainability and climate change by 2030, the strategy outlines plans to address the curriculum, green careers, buildings and procurement, staffing and much more.

Despite this push, a common narrative we hear from governors and trustees through our Greener Governance campaign is that their schools and trusts want to do more, but, due to resource and funding constraints, they are only 'nibbling around the edges'. This is understandably frustrating, and as our chief executive covers in her Last Word (page 34), we have been raising this at every opportunity and will continue to lobby the government for more funding in this vital area.

However, there are a range of low-cost actions schools can implement which should not be underestimated as they can help to realise your climate action plan. For example, children turning off lights is influential in instilling a socially responsible culture while adding sustainability as a criteria during procurement can also be a fairly easy win.

In this article we hear from organisations that offer further accessible ways to encourage environmental sustainability in your school

or trust. They do, of course, require leadership and staff time, but that is unavoidable. We have also added more to our refreshed guidance on the range of actions that can be taken for each of the four Cs: curriculum, campus, culture and community. And we have continued to add resources to our Greener Governance campaign page.

Blazer vision - Child Poverty Action Group UK

At Child Poverty Action Group UK we see pre-loved uniform provision as a straightforward way for schools to be more environmentally sustainable and financially inclusive. Schools need to review their uniform policies by September 2022 to ensure they are compliant with the new statutory guidance introduced by the DfE, to make uniforms more affordable for families. Included in the new guidance is a requirement for all schools to ensure that second-hand uniform is available. Establishing easy-to-access and stigma-free ways for families to get pre-loved uniform serves a dual purpose of both reducing costs for families and encouraging recycling.

Through our Cost of the School Day project we have seen some outstanding practice around pre-loved uniform provision. One school in Scotland set up a hire system for blazers with families paying £10 to hire a blazer for two years rather than needing to purchase

“Online elections need lower overall costs, lower staff time and, importantly, higher voter turnout. One school saw the response rate for a parent election rise from 15% to 97%”



A uniform rental scheme in Scotland allows families to recycle 'pre-loved' blazers after two years

them outright. After two years, when pupils leave the school, pupils return the blazer to the school to be recycled and re-used, and received a £5 deposit back. This system not only significantly reduces costs for families, but also creates a positive whole-school culture around uniform recycling.

As the hire system is available to all pupils, it lessens the stigma that sometimes exists around pre-loved uniform, and instead makes recycling an integral part of the school's approach to uniform provision.



For more ideas on how to set up effective pre-loved uniform provision at your school lots more

ideas and tips are included at cpag.org.uk/right-blazer-school-uniform-guides.

Elect wisely - Choice Voting

Many governing boards and schools hold elections. This can be electing parent-governors or electing a head pupil. These activities demand a high level of resource, including the heavy usage of technology, paper and ink, all of which have a knock-on environmental impact. As a

board, by adopting an online voting platform such as Choice Voting you can lead by example and set a culture of consideration for the environment while enjoying many other benefits.

Through Choice Voting, for example, we offer a safe and quick process to set up and launch your online elections. Online voting improves your environmental impact by eliminating paper and ink waste and reducing your carbon footprint by removing the need to post and return paper voting slips. Alongside environmental benefits there are other advantageous consequences, such as lower overall costs to run the election, lower staff time and, importantly, higher voter turnout. One school saw the response rate for a parent election rise from 15% to 97%.

As an environmentally conscious organisation ourselves, we take pride in using servers based in data centres powered by renewable energy sources. In the same token, by going virtual, governors can set an important tone that exemplifies the value placed on environmental sustainability to the whole school.

Choice Voting

If your school you would like to find out more about Choice Voting, please give us a call on 01202 078866, or book a no obligation demonstration by visiting our website. Alternatively, you can reach us by emailing education@choicervoting.co.uk.

Purchasing power – the Schools Commercial Team

The Schools Commercial Team supports schools with procurement. Our aim is to support the DfE's commitment to sustainable development and the belief that it is important to prepare young people for the future. The DfE's approach is based on empowerment and the belief that schools perform better when they take responsibility for their own improvement.

We work closely with suppliers on the frameworks we approve as part of our Find a Framework online service, to try and provide as much information and support to help schools reduce their carbon footprint and contribute to the 2050 net zero emissions target.

Collectively, schools account for a quarter of UK public sector carbon emissions. Included in the range of DfE approved frameworks, school buyers have an option to request Smart Meters that provide energy data that can be used as part of the curriculum. For example, one primary school has pupil energy champions who use sensors to spot heat loss in the halls.

We have frameworks that offer heating and renewable energy technologies including ground source heating systems that reduce carbon outputs. The Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) is working with its members to identify schools with boilers that are approaching end of life.

We support the social value element of procurement: the DfE Furniture framework includes suppliers that provide



Greener Governance
in schools and trusts

nigla National
Governance
Association

Join NGA's Greener Governance pledge to:

- reduce carbon at your school or trust
- put your school or trust's contribution to environmental sustainability on the agenda
- ensure a climate action plan is developed to make this happen in 2022.

furniture made or part-made from recycled materials, consider packaging and sustainable transport plans including electric delivery vehicles and delivery routes to reduce fuel consumption.

Our new Get Help Buying for Schools' service gives access to free advice and guidance to support compliant purchasing; we also hold regular webinars that give attendees the opportunity to ask any questions they may have.

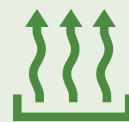
For regular updates about how we are supporting schools to make the most of non-staff spend, follow @buyingforschools on LinkedIn or sign up to follow the Buying for Schools blog.

Taps and toilets – Schools Water Efficiency

All schools have taps and toilets, using around 12,000 million litres of water per day, and costing more than £40m

a year. But climate change means there will be less water, and population growth means what we do have will need to go further.

At this point you may be asking, what can I do about it this as a governor or trustee? At board level you can start by adopting an environmental sustainability strategy and making water saving a priority within your climate action plan. At school level you can encourage and support your school eco-team or premises/business manager to use the Thames Water calculator to work out how and where your school is using water now and also look to build water efficiency into procurement to ensure bids prioritise water efficiency as well as energy efficiency. Your school will also be metered – looking at your water bills will give you great insight.



At one primary school, pupil energy champions use sensors to spot heat loss in the halls

waterwise

For other useful information visit the waterwise website

Conserving energy - Energy Sparks

Monitoring energy usage can greatly benefit schools and trusts – saving energy, money and creating a socially responsible culture. We at Energy Sparks are a registered charity that provides a free online energy analysis tool, energy education and a carbon reduction programme specifically designed to help schools reduce their carbon footprint and teach pupils energy saving and sustainability life skills. The unique online tool presents bespoke analysis of the energy data with suggestions of actions the school community could take to save energy and reduce the school's carbon emissions.

We have over 100 energy and sustainability education activities to support learning about climate change, investigating energy use, and taking action to reduce energy waste. The activities also have over 60 adult-led actions with supporting guidance on saving energy through changes to behaviour, heating system controls, policies, building fabric and operations. Participating schools are supported with free online training, free in-person education workshops and energy management mentoring subject to availability.

Most schools can expect to save around 10% in their first year of engagement with Energy Sparks, resulting in cost savings of at least £2,500 and eight tonnes of CO₂ based on an average two-form entry primary school. Best performing schools have achieved savings of up to 30%, generally by reducing

school holiday, weekend and overnight heating and electricity use. Examples of savings achieved can be found in the Energy Sparks case studies at energysparks.uk/case-studies.



To join Energy Sparks visit energysparks.uk/enrol

Walk the walk - Living Streets

We are Living Streets, the UK charity for everyday walking. For over 20 years, we have been campaigning to enable more children to walk to school. At Living Streets, we want every child who can to walk or wheel to school on safe, unpolluted and enjoyable streets. From better health to learning independence, switching the school ride for a stride has a myriad of benefits. When more families walk, there are fewer cars on the road, helping tackle congestion, air pollution and traffic danger outside school gates.



WOW schools see a 30% reduction in car journeys taken to the school gate and a 23% increase in walking rates

High air pollution negatively impacts children in particular, but the walk to school can play such a big part in improving our air quality. Through our walk to school initiatives, which span from early years to secondary school, and reach well over half a million children every year, we have witnessed the benefits this simple act can bring. With our flagship walk to school challenge, WOW, children self-report how they get to primary school using the interactive WOW Travel Tracker. If they walk, wheel, cycle, scoot or park and stride, they are rewarded with a monthly collectable badge. Each year, around 190kg of CO₂ emissions are averted per WOW school.

As part of a funded project, some schools can receive WOW resources for free. Find out if a school in your area is eligible.



For more information on the initiatives, walktoschool@livingstreets.org.uk

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AUDIT TOOL

SchooliP, National Association for Environmental Education (NAEE) and NGA have come together to provide schools and trusts with a free online tool to help governing boards adopt environmental sustainability as a strategic priority and

develop a climate action plan. Based on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, the online tool is designed to cover all aspects of school life and is organised into the 4 Cs of curriculum, campus, community and culture. It consists of a series of questions

and guidance to help schools and trusts focus their efforts on pertinent actions. To find out more about what you as a governing board can do, please see our refreshed environmental sustainability guidance at www.nga.org.uk/greengovernance

INTERVIEW

Talking to Tes

NGA's Sam Henson speaks to **Jon Severs**, editor of Tes, about the importance of education and governance's crucial part in it

Sam Henson: Tell me about your role and the role that Tes plays in the sector.

Jon Severs: We have narrowed our focus to four distinct areas: to inform the audience, to interpret policy and research to the audience, to challenge the audience and then to act as a forum for shared best practice. If we hit those four areas, we are helping create better outcomes. We're here as a servant to the sector and we try and react to what the sector needs.

What pulls you towards a role focused on education?

With education, you've got a real chance to improve communities and improve society as well. On a personal level I think if you're writing in the education sector, you have a chance to make a really big difference. There's very few sectors with journalists where you can write about sociology, about policy, about emotional and pastoral matters; the variation in the sector is huge.

What interests you in governance and why is it relevant to what you do?

Governance fascinates me because you have a group of people nobody knows that much about, made up of really key stakeholders. Their role is so crucial. Everyone says headship is so isolating, but it shouldn't be – there should be a governing

board there challenging and being a critical friend. Governance is critical for retention. The governing board empowers the headteacher, supporting them in the hard times. The training for headship is so poor, if you've got a good governing board, you can fill a lot of the holes.

Schools should belong to their community and boards make sure a school is locally focused. The governing board should be protecting its headteacher and saying this is the local context, this is what we need you to do and backing the headteacher in that situation. We need governing boards to have a stronger voice. Tes can try and amplify that voice.

What are the themes and topics that you and the team are covering most at the moment?

We've been dominated by funding, because of energy cost rises, the way the school funding is worked out, extra pressures from COVID and extra pressures from public services falling back. Headteachers, and, by extension, governing boards are having to make such difficult decisions around how you call that money back. The role of governors, trustees and heads now is so crucial because the decisions that are made now are going to be really important in two, three years' time.

What are the best and worst bits of what you're covering in the education system?

Standardisation is a big worry. Every dataset you see shows how variable things are between regions yet the government seems intent on a standardisation approach to education. Local context working in action is one of the best things you'll see. So whether it's Chris Dyson's model in Leeds or Reach Feltham in London, you see headteachers and governing boards, looking at the local context, reacting to it and having the confidence to produce a local solution. And they're not solutions that necessarily scale. It's both the best and the worst area in that there are some amazing examples of localisation but some real, real push from government to be academised through a standardised approach to everything regardless of local context. That's a real threat to how effective a school can be.

I'm really worried about the echo chamber of research, and how narrowly people are viewing pedagogy at a high level, and how there's a belief that this is the right evidence, and there's nothing else that we should be talking about. And you know, that's denied frequently, but if you look at the policy side of stuff, it's the same research that underpins it – where's the sociology and where's the anthropology? ▶



“We need governing boards to have a stronger voice. Tes can try and amplify that voice”

What is your reaction to the detail of the white paper and how have you interpreted the overall reaction?

I think the levelling up paper had the more interesting educational ideas. [Michael] Gove was driving that and it shows he's still got at least interesting ideas about education – whether I agree with them is another matter!

The white paper was a fatigued paper that looked to an election and pleasing parents, the parent pledge being a prime example. From a teaching angle, I don't really understand what this is trying to do. There was no mission, there was no innovation. Contrast it with the SEND paper, which was full of interesting solutions, very practical and logistical. The white paper was dull, lacking imagination – the reaction was almost relief, because after the pandemic, I don't think anyone wanted a huge change. My argument against that would be that the status quo at the moment is not great. Where are the innovative solutions for schools without big change?

If you could make one decision on behalf of the education secretary, what would it be?

The lack of trust centrally means that accountability is way overbearing, and the skew is wrong. I think by empowering governing boards, by empowering regional leadership, you can create an accountability system that aims to improve schools. At the moment, with a combination of Ofsted and punitive policy, you have a really damaging level of accountability. That is destroying retention and is making people scared to innovate. And I think at the moment we're seeing a dangerous

stagnation of the system. I think if we can get the balance right and put some more trust into the system, then we'll see the benefits. Scaling back Ofsted's remit, scaling back government intervention and empowering governorship and trusteeship is the way forward.

What's happening to elevate the status of the profession?

We've got one of the youngest professions in the world in average age. And I think that's because of, to a degree, what's demanded of teachers, I think teachers at the core love the job. If you've got the trust, I think they put up with a lot of other stuff. A teacher said to me the other day, "I don't need any more money. I need government to put all the money into external services so I can get on with the business of teaching." If they sorted CAMHS, SEND, social services, police – you suddenly realise how much schools have taken on. It's those elements that are driving people out of the profession. I think the core work of schools is definitely underpaid, and has never really attracted

the same authority as nursing and the medical professions for whatever reason, and it's shocking. How can you keep ignoring a two-year waiting list for a child who is suicidal? It's unethical and immoral really.

That really fits with NGA's survey results showing the ramping up of schools fulfilling those kind of wider societal services.

It must be shocking to be outside of schools or outside this world and then come into it through the governorship route and finding out just how much they do and what schools actually have to face.

“The status quo is not great: where are the innovative solutions for schools without big change?”

So you're obviously aware of our Visible Governance campaign for championing the positive difference that good governance makes. How do you think governance is perceived by the public and the system as a whole?

There are a few stereotypes – the protective mum or dad who joins the governing body while their child is at the school, the local busybody, and the governor lifer type. Some of those do exist. But the reality is that some governors start at their kids' school, and they stay being a governor or trustee because they want to do it for the community. We need to make it a social norm, that being a governor or trustee is part and parcel of being an active member of your community. I don't think people instantly think, "Oh, that's a good positive thing I can do for my community."

What can you do to draw more attention to the role of governance?

I'd like to have a big hand in creating that social norm around governance and I think, through better analysis for governors and trustees, by governors and trustees, we can begin to create our social norm. I also think it's really important we get a good understanding of how governance will work within a fully academised system. Being aware of that, and feeding into the general conversation is key. And I'm a big believer that one piece doesn't create it. And I think in the past, we covered governance off by doing a "Hey, here's the governance article this year." I think much more of a dripfeed of regular pieces, regular information, regular targeting can create the social norm, although it's not easy. 🗣️



Visible governance at www.nga.org.uk/News/Campaigns/Visible-Governance.aspx



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Please visit our websites for further information: garwoodfoundation.org.uk/ and rutherfordsschool.org.uk/

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ngla National
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Virtual College

Last year, Anglian Learning, an East Anglian multi academy trust (MAT), received the NGA award for outstanding governance in a MAT. This notable award recognises the contribution that governors, trustees and governance professionals have made on the education of children and young people.

Here, Kerrie Jones, who is responsible for advising and supporting the Anglian Learning board on statutory procedures, constitutional matters, duties and powers, reveals her top five tips for outstanding governance to help support best practice.

1 Communication is key

Communication is the glue that holds a good MAT together. To achieve this, Anglian Learning prioritises an approach that emphasises two-way communication and ensures governors at all levels are informed and have a voice that is frequently listened to and valued.

Kerrie says: “Part of my remit is to regularly attend governance meetings across the trust and its schools to oversee how they are working and offer support and advice where needed, helping to close the gap between the trust and its governors. My role in the trust helps form a centralised platform to make all governors across Anglian Learning feel valued and heard. It is important that they can see me as an approachable and a central point of contact.

“In turn, this has created a platform for relationships to be built between the trust and its governors, trustees and governance professionals,

What makes award-winning governance?

Kerrie Jones, head of governance support, compliance and risk at Anglian Learning, gives her top tips on creating outstanding practice in governance



allowing them to feel comfortable, to encourage constructive feedback and for all to understand the importance of their roles.”

2 Sharing best practice

Sharing best practice has long been critical to continuous improvement and being part of a MAT helps facilitate this.

Kerrie says: “To encourage the sharing of best practice, I help coordinate regular meetings and forums with governors from across our 14 schools. These forums create the opportunity for cross-school governor collaboration and are an excellent way of improving performance throughout our schools by replicating successes within the trust.

“This also gives governors a platform to talk to more-experienced members and learn from each other through setting standards, identifying what works best for each local governing body and sharing advice about specific issues

“Our governance network creates a community for governors and a support network they can call on”

they want to address. Our governance network creates a community for our governors and a network of people they can call on for support.”

3 Making yourself visible

Governing bodies need to be visible within the schools and the local community they serve as they play a vital role in ensuring that every child receives the best possible education. In 2020, the NGA launched its Visible Governance in Schools campaign to celebrate, champion and raise the profile of the impact of good governance on schools and highlight the contributions governance makes to success.

Kerrie says: “We recognise the importance of this initiative and are actively involved in promoting it through local governance meetings and ensuring governors are present at school events. This regular interaction ensures that governors feel appreciated and that the work they do to improve education for young people and their communities does not go unnoticed.”

4 Helping your members grow

Commitment, enthusiasm, a desire to learn and an interest in education are key attributes for any governor at an Anglian Learning school. Having the right training and support available are important to ensure governors can be effective from day one.

Kerrie says: “At Anglian Learning, we invest in the continual professional development of our governors and follow a strong culture of ‘what can we do better?’. Through this, we host our own training sessions, including a professional learning programme and sessions for new governors. We encourage our governors to take advantage of these and use a central platform to share available courses.”

5 Effective auditing

It’s impossible to understand the strengths and weaknesses of your governing bodies without a comprehensive and frequent programme of audits.

Kerrie says: “One of Anglian Learning’s core values is being ‘ambitious for ourselves and all those in our community to be the best we can be. To achieve this, we recognise the importance of constantly reviewing, auditing and providing feedback to ensure schools across the trust are achieving their full potential.

“I plan to regularly review local governing bodies across the trust and encourage our governance professionals to conduct audits. This ensures the governing body is compliant, helps check what skills are in place and what could be improved to ensure they are running as efficiently as they can be. Future plans also include attendance at governance meetings for quality assurance and to get a real insight into what changes can be made to help us work even more effectively.”

 [More information at
anglianlearning.org](https://www.anglianlearning.org)





Thank you to the many of you who last month completed the 2022 Governance Survey.

That is one more thing you are giving to the sector: valuable data. Yes, my team at NGA undertakes the analysis, but without your input there would be nothing to analyse.

Although we do try and persuade the government of the need for more academic research into governance, it does not invest in any sort of equivalent exercise. In the meantime, our annual survey is an extremely important source of information for policymakers and the wider sector. It is also one of the ways in which we aim to give the governance community a national voice. The answers to the open questions are just as illuminating as the numbers; they tell us how you feel about the challenges your schools or trusts are facing, what you are prioritising, what you are proud of, and if there is anything keeping you awake at night.

Your stories are a very important contribution in making the case to politicians. We hear these through our GOLDline, events, focus groups and feedback from our regional team and consultants, but also because some of you who feel very strongly email us.

Three of the issues you consistently raise have informed the topics for our summer seminars in the week of 20 June: supporting pupils from deprived families, pupil wellbeing, and the leadership challenge. The fourth is SEND, which was discussed in detail at

Your voice is vital

NGA chief executive **Emma Knights** talks about taking your concerns to the powers that be

our termly SEND network held in May. Please do make a last-minute seminar booking if you want to hear from our expert partners:

www.nga.org.uk/events.

Financial concerns were abated for some by the improved revenue funding from 2019 and many schools and trusts have significant surpluses. This has also gone hand-in-hand with more emphasis from governing boards and business leaders on financial benchmarking and efficiencies, supported by Department for Education (DfE) tools and offers.

But recently some of you have begun to report to us worries about budgeting, often prompted by the cost of energy and occasionally teachers' pay. Members ask if we pass the concerns on to government ministers and the answer is very much yes. Ministers at




EMMA KNIGHTS OBE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

the DfE are also hearing direct from hundreds of schools on this topic.

However, these are not yet influencing policy. On the launch of the white paper (see page 16), the secretary of state for education Nadhim Zahawi stated to TES that he was certain that schools have enough money. So certain, in fact, that when devising a white paper that sets targets requiring substantial school investment, he says he didn't ask for any more money from the Treasury to fund it: "I have been given a settlement [in last year's Spending Review] that I think is a big settlement."

If we are going to be persuasive, we need to understand where the shortfalls are and what that means for pupils. One very clear need in some schools is for more maintenance of buildings. Some premises are deteriorating. Those participating in our Greener Governance events have made it very clear that more resources are needed to make their schools environmentally sustainable, especially when it comes to the capital investment to bring buildings to net zero. We have lobbied for a pot of funding to do this, but despite an informal coalition of organisations working in this space, we have not yet been successful.

So please do take the opportunity to make your voice heard on this or any subject on which you'd like ministers to concentrate their minds. Email me at emma.knights@nga.org.uk. 

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