

GOVERNING MATTERS

September 2021 | nga.org.uk



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can evolve the culture of
the governing board

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**COVID RECOVERY:
WHY YOU MUST 'THINK
LIKE A MEERKAT'**

It's time to plan for the best case scenario.

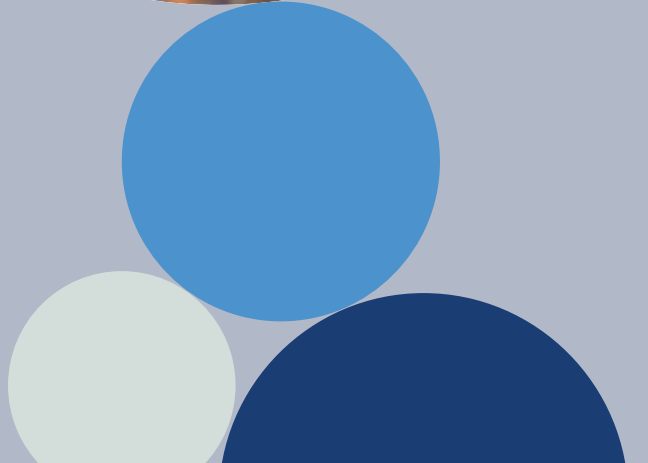
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JOIN NGA

The National Governance Association (NGA) is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and clerks 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 governance, providing information, advice and guidance, professional development and e-learning.

We represent the views of governors, trustees and clerks 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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Editor

Sam Henson
E: editor@nga.org.uk

Design

Craig Bowyer
Designer
Claire Echavarry
Picture researcher

Production

Aysha Miah-Edwards
Production manager

Advertising:

E: nga-sales@redactive.co.uk
T: 020 7880 7555
Further information about NGA is available from NGA, 36 Great Charles Street, Birmingham, B3 3JY.

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Building for the future

Educational policy will be a key focus in the next 12 months. With a vision to move to a fully academised model, trusts will have to tackle this alongside dealing with the impact of the pandemic. There has been little bandwidth for policy from the Department of Education, as schools have dealt with unimaginable disruption and challenges to their operation, young pupils and workforce.

Building for the Future helps leaders in the education sector find time and space to reflect on what they've learnt, how they see the future for the organisation, and how to manage opportunities and risks on the horizon, including levelling up and mental health.

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A word from the editor

Sam Henson, director of policy and information, on how being honest with ourselves about the hard work ahead will motivate us to keep moving

As the new academic year gets underway, we will all be hoping for something a bit smoother, a bit less relentless, while continuing our recovery conversations at pace.

'Relentless' describes both the times we have been living in but also the efforts of one of the nation's largest and most generous volunteer forces for the last 18 months or so. And as governing boards continue to drive ambitious vision-setting of their organisations, they do so against a more challenging assessment and accountability backdrop.

Society doesn't often give much thought to the governance of schools, but it should, because behind each school and trust is a governing board that is motivated by one thing – providing a pathway for children and young people to realise their potential while equipping them with what they need to not just survive but thrive in the world beyond the school gates – we can see this in how the Leading Edge Academies approached remote learning (page 32).


At the time of writing, the team at NGA's part-virtual/part-office-based HQ have been putting the finishing touches to this year's annual governance survey analysis. You can read more in November's issue, but you can also find more on our website.

While motivation was not part of this year's survey, we know from the conversations we have with you and the time and effort you put in that you govern because you care. You govern because you want to give back. You govern simply because you want to make a difference for children.

**“GOVERNING BOARDS
ARE MOTIVATED BY ONE
THING – PROVIDING A
PATHWAY FOR CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE”**

That motivation will be at the heart of your post-pandemic plans, and David Wootton challenges us all to behave more like meerkats and to dare to look up and scan our horizons, “surveying the surrounding landscape, assessing and signalling the reduction in danger and looking for opportunities to guide the troop towards greener pastures” (page 27). As well as horizon-scanning, now is also a good time to address how your board is made up and how you engage with stakeholders; the articles on pages 14 and 19 respectively are good starting points.

The 2021/2022 academic year marks a new chapter for us all and, as we continue to reflect, I'm sure we will continue to be humbled by the fact that our schools are remarkable places. They are held together by amazing people, and run by and for amazing people, who we have the opportunity to work with and for. I know governing is sometimes hard work, and sometimes we may even question why we do it and if we have it in us to do it for another year.

I think it is good to be honest with ourselves and admit we have those thoughts sometimes, but let us remind ourselves why we do it, and be more motivated than ever to keep at it, as the sector needs good governance more than ever before. 

1

MEMBERS ASSEMBLE

The AGM and Annual Conference will be held on Saturday 27 November 2021 at the ICC, Birmingham. The event is scheduled to be held face-to-face unless local COVID-19 restrictions are in place. If restrictions are in place, the event will go ahead remotely.

Please note this is a short version of the notice; the full legal notice of the AGM will be emailed to all members and posted on the NGA website in accordance with the Articles of Association.

The National Governance Association (a company limited by guarantee)
Registered No: 3549029,
Companies Act 2006

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN under the Act mentioned above of the annual general meeting of the company to be held at the ICC, 8 Centenary Square, Birmingham B1 2EA on Saturday 27 November

2021 at 3.30pm (or remotely if required) for the following purposes:
To consider and, if thought fit, pass resolutions as to the **ordinary business** of the company, comprising:
1. Notice of this meeting.
2. Approval of minutes of annual general meeting, 28 November 2020.
3. Notification of the directors elected by ballot.
4. The receipt and adoption of the report of the directors and the audited accounts of the association for the year ended 31 March 2021.
5. Auditors. To approve the auditors.
6. Any other ordinary business.
Special business
7. Subscriptions. To consider the level of subscriptions payable.



All members are welcome to attend both the conference and AGM. Booking is essential as space is limited. Full details of booking will be available on the NGA website: www.nga.org.uk/events

The AGM provides the board with the chance to tell members what they have accomplished during the year and gives members the opportunity to question the board about how NGA is run.

WELCOME TO GOVERNANCE LIVE - NEW DATES AVAILABLE

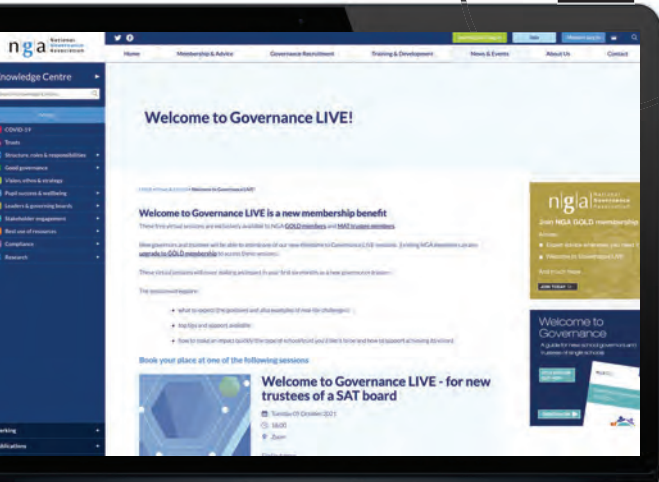
Welcome to Governance LIVE is our newest membership benefit available to NGA GOLD and MAT trustee members. Designed for new governors and trustees, the Welcome to Governance LIVE session will support you in making an impact in your first six months as a new governor or trustee.

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'd like it to be and how to support achieving its vision).

If you 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.

2



AUTUMN TERM EVENTS OPEN FOR BOOKINGS

We have a packed autumn schedule for you this year, with a range of forums, network events, conferences and webinars to keep you up to date with the latest information, advice and guidance. We will also see our regional events returning with four new regional forums this term, for members in the North East, North West, West Midlands and London.

3

**21 September
Local Academy
Governance
Leadership
Forum**
4.30-6.00pm

**22 September
Maintained
Governance
Leadership
Forum**
4.30-6.00pm

**23 September
Webinar -
CEO and
Headteacher
performance
management**
4.30-5.00pm

**28 September
SAT Governance
Leadership
Forum**
4.30-6.00pm

**30 September
MAT
Governance
Leadership
Forum**
4.30-6.00pm

**2 October
West Midlands
Regional forum**
9.15-10.45am

**2 October
North West
Regional
Forum**
11.00am-12.30pm

**6 November
London
Regional
Forum**
9.15-10.45am

**6 November
North East
Regional
Forum**
11.00am-12.30pm

**9 November
SEND Network**
4.30-6.00pm

**27 November
Annual
Conference**
9.30-3.30pm
AGM: 3.30-5.00pm

**7 December
Governance
Professional
Network**
4.30-6.00pm

**14 December
MAT
Governance
Network**
4.30-6.00pm

3 new resources to start the autumn term



Skills audit

The updated audit provides an opportunity for boards to evaluate their experience and understanding of the communities they serve and their capacity to lead an inclusive culture. New guidance notes have also been provided for each of the skills audit statements to clarify understanding and promote accurate and consistent evaluation of governing skills and knowledge.



Model code of conduct

We've refreshed our model code and added some new elements that cover equality, diversity and inclusion as well as the Nolan principles of public life.



The governance of safeguarding

A guide for governing boards, our updated safeguarding guidance takes account of changes made to statutory guidance, Keeping Children Safe in Education, that comes into force on 1 September 2021.

Access these resources and more at www.nga.org.uk/Knowledge-Centre



ARE YOUR DETAILS CORRECT?

With changes to your boards and the arrival of new governors and trustees, now is the time to ensure all of your records are up to date.

Please check your details are correct and up to date to ensure you and your board are receiving the full range of NGA benefits, including:

- copies of Governing Matters magazine to nominated members of your board and school
- weekly e-newsletter featuring the latest education news and policy updates
- access to members' only content in our online knowledge centre
- free places at NGA member conferences and events
- discounted rates on NGA publications.

You can update your information at www.nga.org.uk by logging into your account and visiting the account management page.

4



You asked, we delivered

Every year, NGA undertakes a membership survey to help inform and improve how we deliver the support our members need. Here are some of the improvements we've made since the last survey in November 2020

Knowledge Centre

Our survey indicated that members wanted to see a greater range of content types: 'summaries of statutory guidance' and 'quick-read information sheets' were the most popular responses. NGA has published 27 new resources and carried out 23 updates to key existing resources.

This includes the publication of an information sheet summarising changes to the Academy Trust Handbook, on the day the DfE published its changes, and How to Support and Influence PSHE Education: a guide for governing boards in April – our most popular resource in the summer term.

NGA e-newsletter

We have undertaken a programme of extensive testing to understand what



NGA HAS PUBLISHED 27 BRAND-NEW RESOURCES AND CARRIED OUT A FURTHER 23 UPDATES TO KEY EXISTING RESOURCES

our members respond to in the newsletter. We have been testing the format, number and length of stories, and the effectiveness of titles and weblinks, alongside some audience analysis, to enable us to produce a more effective model for the newsletter from September. We have more improvements on the way, so do keep a lookout.

Governing Matters

We have enhanced the accessibility of this key membership benefit by continuing to deliver the content you told us you enjoyed and wanted to retain, but have improved page design and text colours. We have continued to feed in member voice, explore key areas of thought leadership and address timely topics of interest within the magazine.

Keep events online

Members wanted us to keep our events online, and as a result we replaced this year's Summer Conference with a series of four seminars, which were well received. In the summer term NGA ran the largest number of events ever, with a total of 24 online offerings for our members. During the last year our events have been accessed by 8,269 individuals.

Website

To ensure improved access to our website on mobile devices we have optimised the mobile landing page of the Knowledge Centre to improve access to the search box and categories. The landing page has also been simplified. We have also implemented fixes and optimisation to NGA's homepage to increase its page load time and speed.

New services for members

We have introduced a new membership benefit for our Gold members: Welcome to Governance LIVE sessions for new governors and trustees joining the boards of existing GOLD members. The sessions cover 'making an impact in your first six months as a new governor or trustee' and have proved very popular.

Office contact

One of the biggest changes when we moved to working from home was that our staff could not quickly transfer calls from our members to different teams. We have since invested in a cloud-based phone system. This has improved our channels of communication with our members as it allows us to transfer calls between our teams whether they are working remotely or are in the office. ☎

The Department for Education's Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE) has been updated for the 2021/22 academic year, alongside the DfE advice on sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges.

Following a review into sexual abuse in education, Ofsted also added a new section to its inspection handbook for 2021/22. Where sexual violence and harassment processes are not deemed adequate, a school's entire safeguarding approach will now be considered ineffective.

Sexual violence and sexual harassment is a disturbing, complex and worryingly prevalent issue in our schools. Ofsted's report concluded that sexual harassment and online sexual abuse has become 'normalised' and found teachers and leaders consistently underestimating its scale. This all underlines the importance of listening carefully to children and young people; their words and experiences must serve as a wake-up call to every adult involved in school governance, leadership and teaching.

The updated KCSiE emphasises the need for governing boards to facilitate a whole-school approach to safeguarding; culture is clearly identified as a factor influencing pupils' experience. The issue has been further amplified by social media, creating a damaging influence on children at an earlier age.

With this in mind, governors should take a multi-pronged approach. Safeguarding and child protection must be at the forefront of everything the board does; this sends a clear message that it is a priority, setting a culture in motion among staff and pupils.



Keeping children safe

With sexual violence and harassment becoming a more significant problem in education, NGA's head of advice, **Rani Kaur**, offers some tips on understanding the issue

Influencing culture

Boards can influence a school/trust's approach to safeguarding by showing a clear understanding of statutory and non-statutory guidance and approving relevant policies and procedures. The key to a good policy or procedure is to not only meet legal obligations but to place the interests of pupils at their heart.

But this is only the beginning. Governing boards

need to be confident policies convert to application and embedded culture; they do this by observing, listening and discussing.


Observe

In order to monitor effective safeguarding practice, boards need access to a range of data. Are there trends emerging in attendance, exclusions, safeguarding and behaviour incidents? How are they being addressed? Do preventative measures create a culture of safety and support for every child?

Listen

Is the governing board engaging with stakeholders to understand their experience of the school/trust's safeguarding procedures? How do staff perceive the safeguarding culture and what can they tell you about how policies and procedures work in practice? This information will give boards a good idea as to whether CPD effectively empowers and equips every member of staff to understand their role in safeguarding.

Discuss

Safeguarding should be a thread running through board discussions. Regular discussions between the board's lead for safeguarding arrangements and the designated safeguarding lead will ensure a culture of accountability and support at every level of your school community and maintain an open and transparent safeguarding culture. 

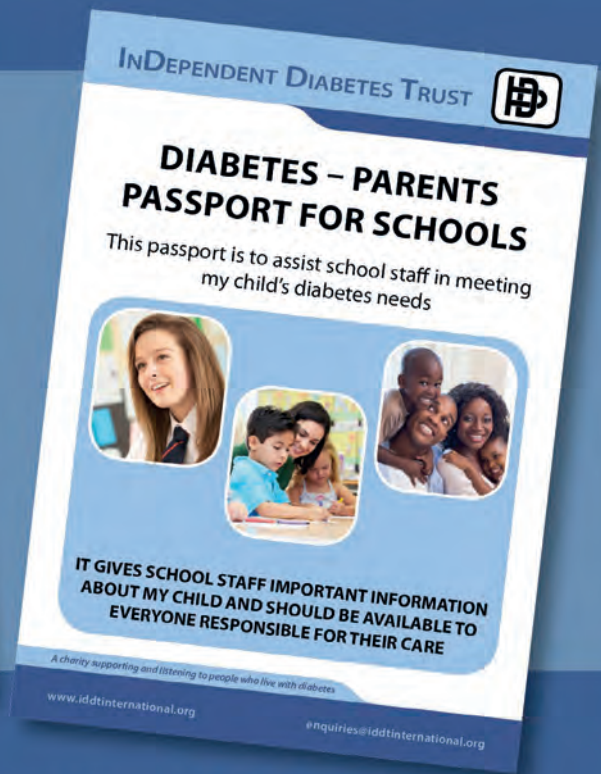
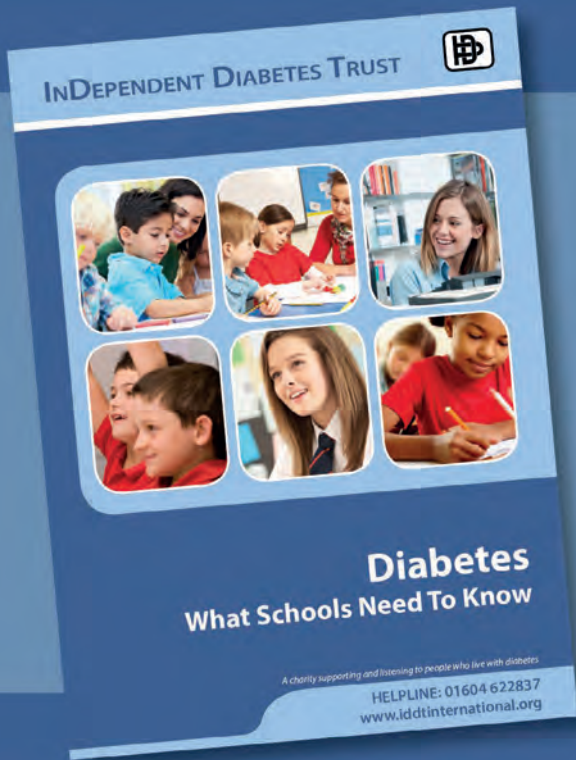


More information

NGA has updated its guidance on the governance of safeguarding at www.nga.org.uk/safeguarding-guidance



RANI KAUR
HEAD OF ADVICE



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At the time of writing, the DfE is consulting on the secretary of state's response to the latest School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) 2021 report, and on the draft 2021 School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD). The STRB advises the government on teacher pay.

Recommendations for teacher pay in 2021/22

The STRB has recommended a pay award of £250 for all teachers earning less than £24,000 (or the recommended equivalent value for teachers in the London pay areas). This follows the announcement made by the chancellor last year that public sector workers, including teachers, earning more than £24,000 a year would have their pay frozen in 2021/22. As a result the STRB were to only consider pay uplifts for those earning less than £24,000 a year.

NGA's view on the pay recommendations

NGA is a consultee to the STRB. Our written submission in February agreed with those organisations representing most teachers and school leaders in England, who say that any positive impact of a pay uplift for those teachers earning less than £24,000 will be negated by adverse impact of a public sector pay freeze. Addressing the decline in teachers' pay over the last decade should be viewed as integral to the strategy for post-COVID educational recovery.

The main changes to the STPCD

As well as the provision made for the recommended pay award, the 2021 STPCD makes the following changes:

Teachers' pay update

NGA director of advice and guidance **Steve Edmonds** provides an update on teachers' pay recommendations in 2021/22



STEVE EDMONDS
DIRECTOR OF
ADVICE AND
GUIDANCE

- The introduction of a pay points structure for the unqualified teacher pay range
- Changes relating to the new Early Careers Framework, access to high-quality CPD that all early career teachers in England now have
- The introduction of a payment mechanism for tutoring delivered by main pay range and upper pay range teachers to address learning disruption resulting from the pandemic
- Changes to the number of teaching day and directed hours to reflect the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Bank Holiday.

What governing boards need to do

Schools should review their pay and appraisal policies annually to clarify their approach to making performance-based pay decisions and to set out the extent to which any uplift to the national framework will be taken into account when making pay decisions. The publication of the final STPCD in September, should prompt the board's review of its pay policy in the autumn term.

The STPCD and requirement to have a policy applies to teachers employed in local authority maintained schools and to teachers in academies who were employed under the STPCD at the point where their employment transferred to the academy trust (unless they've since renegotiated).

The full governing board must approve the policy, and pay recommendations must be backdated to 1 September 2021.

We recommend you seek the advice of your governance professional (clerk) on how the policy review should be managed, taking into account local advice and consultation with unions. 🗣️

Edtech: Rise of machines

What will the increasing prevalence of technology in the classroom mean for our children's futures? **Philip Malsbury**, IT architect and chair of governors at Mayplace Primary School, offers a balanced view



The two children discuss what it must have been like to study together with a real person as a teacher, and the story ends with the girl daydreaming – while sitting before the mechanical teacher – about what it must have been like for the children and what fun they had.

The story resonated with me, as technology has been increasingly used to support learning during lockdowns and beyond. Governing boards need to think about how their organisation keeps pace, while using technology wisely.

Tech has undoubtedly played an essential role in helping children learn. Apps such as Times Tables Rock Stars really do help children learn their times tables using bright and colourful graphics and gamification techniques. Other apps such as ClassDojo enable interactions with teachers.

However, such apps cannot replace the hands-on approach adopted by teachers – or the interaction pupils have with their peers. Some children were more than happy to use technology to carry on their learning but there were

Technology in schools today

When our school started looking at amending the school strategy a few years ago, an Isaac Asimov 1950s short story called *The Fun They Had* came to mind.

Set in the future, the story imagines children learning at home on their own using only

a mechanical teacher. They did not have friends that they would learn with and go out and play with. It tells of a young girl whose neighbour finds a real book that reminds her of the stories her grandfather told of schools in the 'old days', when children learned in a group of students in large schools.

a significant number whose mental health suffered due to the lack of social interaction and support that a school gives. This is why I am so pleased our school has a clear vision and school strategy in using its fabulous woodlands to ensure our pupils interact with each other and their environment.

A future with education technology

It is fair to say that the tech giants were quick to see COVID-19 as an opportunity to accelerate their ambitions of extending their reach into the education sector. Indeed, the fusion of technology and education has been given a name: education technology, or 'edtech'. It refers to those practices that help deliver, facilitate and enhance learning.

Today's classrooms look very different to those of a few years ago, and tomorrow's classrooms will look equally different due to the integration of advanced edtech tools, which should enable more engaging, effective and personalised learning experiences. As governors and trustees we should ask what this really means for our schools, teachers and pupils.

Three-quarters of those working in education believe digital content will replace textbooks within the next five years, but digital content is just the start of how edtech is altering the landscape. Many edtech-facilitated changes are on the horizon, including virtual reality, gamification, and more individualised learning opportunities.

In the near future, the industry will continue to evolve, with the addition of more technologies and technology-enabled practices, such as robotic kits to teach coding, and the use of digital testing over

traditional standardised testing frameworks.

According to recent reports, the global edtech market size is anticipated to reach over 400 billion dollars by 2025. Even at this level, edtech and digital expenditure will only make up around 5% of the seven trillion dollar global education market in 2025, according to HolonIQ, the education market intelligence platform. Edtech is now a global growth sector.

Edtech ambition is to revolutionise the way we learn at school and in a corporate environment. Digital learning, thanks to instant access and customisation, is making the learning experience smoother, more personal and in line with the real world. Learners are able to learn anytime, from anywhere, at their own pace, with innovative tools such as micro-learning courses and gamified content. The ultimate goal is to reach the same

“THE TECH GIANTS WERE QUICK TO SEE COVID-19 AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO ACCELERATE THEIR AMBITIONS OF EXTENDING THEIR REACH IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR”

in-person classes experience and benefits for learners.

Recent technology leaps such as 5G, artificial intelligence, machine learning and augmented/virtual reality are considered as a game changer for edtech, and many believe this new trend will enhance awareness and transform the traditional techniques of teaching.

Some of those teaching methods are still in their infancy but are very promising. AI and machine learning applied to



**THREE-
QUARTERS
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BELIEVE DIGITAL
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WILL REPLACE
TEXTBOOKS
IN THE NEXT
FIVE YEARS**

edtech enables a more in-depth learning experience. In fast-paced environments such as universities and the workplace, AI-based individualised learning tools allow students and workers to get tailored help, depending on their strengths and weaknesses. Learning platforms, thanks to algorithms and data analysis, can adjust their learning courses and provide bespoke training.

Proceed with caution

In the early 2000s, interactive whiteboards were set to transform education. These internet-connected computer screens replaced old wipe-clean boards, and allowed teachers to show videos, demonstrate problems, or work on tasks with the class.

There was just one problem: they didn't really work. Study after study has shown that the 'smartboards' were frequently ignored by teachers, led to less creative learning, or had no impact on pupils' achievements. In the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (Pisa), children who used edtech for tasks such as posting work on school websites had, in almost all instances, lower scores in reading than those who did not.

Edtech could become a distraction from learning and is clearly not the answer to everything. Governing boards again should think about how to achieve an appropriate balance.

Schools don't just act as a place of education but also as a nurturing environment and a place of childcare, to some extent. Edtech needs to take account of child mental health and wellbeing, as it is clear that technology cannot solve everything. 📌

DIVERSITY

MOVING THE DIAL

Following the publication of our comprehensive report on increasing participation in governance, NGA's PR manager **Kirstie Ebbs** sets out some direction for boards to take practical action

Everyone involved in governance can contribute to increasing the diversity of characteristics and thought around the board table while ensuring volunteers feel included and valued in their role. NGA's new report on increasing participation in school and trust governance, and the accompanying launch event, offers insight and solutions.

Prioritise diversity as part of the solution

Strains on time and energy can mean that diversity and inclusion aren't regarded as a priority. But this can lead to a persistent lack of focus on the topic. Diversity and inclusion on boards and throughout schools must be viewed as part of the solution and support for many of those circumstances faced by staff, pupils and communities.

1 Transform recruitment

Opening up your recruitment processes by using a wide range of channels is one of the simplest ways to diversify your board. Being transparent about vacancies and how to apply is key, and this approach will widen the pool of potential volunteers. Ensure your advert includes that reasonable expenses will be covered – no one should have to be out of pocket to govern, and money can be a big barrier to access.

Our updated *Right people around the table* guidance provides practical advice on the recruitment process, with a focus on diversity, www.nga.org.uk/RPATT

2 Growth not fit

Recruiting for diversity of thought and characteristics means evolving the culture of the board and inviting challenge – not getting someone to fit in to 'the way we do things here'. By changing your recruitment and appointment process, you can equip your board with difference. This means different ideas, different dynamics and different ways of doing things.

3 Reduce bias

Diversity of characteristics can sometimes be considered unimportant because boards want to focus on 'the best person for the role'. Of course, finding the best person for the role is essential – anything else is tokenism. But everyone will have a different conclusion of what the best person for the role looks like. It is essential to challenge this bias; getting someone from another board to sit in on your recruitment process could offer key insight.



KIRSTIE EBBS
PR MANAGER

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Kam Kothia is chair of trustees at Star Academies. Speaking at the launch of our report, Kam picked out two themes he is passionate about and are central to everything the trust does.

Best serving our children and communities

Diversity and inclusion is not optional. A diverse board brings greater awareness of the different challenges experienced by the communities we serve. It reduces blind spots and leads to better decision-making.

As we grew our network of schools, we recognised that our board needed increased diversity to support our aspiration to replicate our educational model in very different types of deprived communities across the regions.

A central guiding principle

Setting a culture for equality and diversity to thrive is a critical role of the governing board. Tokenism does not equate to inclusivity or equality. As with most challenges in our society, widening diversity has to be built with strong underpinning values and commitment. There has to be a fundamental belief from the very top that diversity is not about compliance or political correctness. Diversity must be a guiding principle that is central to everything that you do.

4 Be visible

To the outside world, governing is still fraught with obscurity. Not knowing or understanding the role will be a barrier to people getting involved. Governors, trustees, governance professionals, executive leaders and governance support organisations being visible about their role and impact will transform this.

5 Move around

The benefits of joining the board of a different school/trust at the end of a term of office clearly stood out from NGA's research. This helps retain valuable skills and experience in governance while getting fresh perspectives on boards. Longer-serving volunteers can be encouraged to consider this, and schools and trusts can facilitate this to support succession planning and recruitment.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT FROM OUR EXPERT PANELLISTS

The launch event for our report saw many valuable opinions and experiences shared, a selection of which are below.

Dr Karl George MBE, managing director, the Governance Forum: “We’re almost paralysed by not knowing what to do. We haven’t got the resources... time. We can’t do anything about it... so we freeze... I think we’ve got the solutions – this is about talent, competitiveness, sustainability, and making sure we can get the best for the organisations that are serving our communities.”

Sharon Warmington, founder, the National Black Governors Network: “What we need is clear practical steps on

how schools and those governing can be more proactive rather than reactive. Each governing board can identify just three actions per term or per academic year that they can measure themselves against. There is a challenge to all organisations to be the change they wish to see.”

Penny Rabiger, co-founder, The BAMEed Network: “Unless we have a culture of self-awareness, challenging the status quo and a constant commitment to iterative learning, governing boards will remain limited at best and risk perpetuating prejudice and discrimination at every level. Being allies or advocates or even accomplices shouldn’t be left to any one particular

group or person around the table to be knowing, seeing, and doing something about the issues that are there.”

Alastair Cowen, NGA trustee: “We need to be prepared to have these uncomfortable conversations and challenge culture. I think it’s not down to underrepresented groups to have to drive this conversation. It’s for the majority group to take some action and not just talk about it and do some of the various things that have been mentioned in the report.”

Evelyn Forde, chair, ASCL’s BAME Forum: “If we don’t get the culture right... we’re not going to make a difference across any aspect of school leadership and improvement. I am


frustrated by the lack of diverse leadership in schools in senior leadership roles... and when you’ve got boards [that aren’t diverse] the chances of them appointing somebody who doesn’t look like them are low... We also need diversity so the young people we serve as school leaders can see people that look like them.”


Setul Mehta, trustee, The Pegasus Partnership Trust: “If governing boards and senior leaders start to embrace diversity properly, it is more likely to be prioritised, resourced, and embedded. If we can bring in lots of diverse people who want to be part of governance, it could do so much good for this generation and the next.”

6 Inclusion matters
Volunteers need to be – and feel – fully included in decision making. Creating an inclusive culture will help boards to retain and make the most of what volunteers have to offer. Overall signs from the report show the majority of volunteers feel very positive about being included on their board, but those from underrepresented groups are less likely to feel included.

7 Leading inclusion
Most powerful in making volunteers feel included is the actions of chairs, executive leaders and governance professionals. Inviting and welcoming support and challenge from volunteers,

and showing appreciation for the impact of contributions made by governors/trustees are particularly valued.

8 Induction
High-quality induction for all governors and trustees is crucial to giving them a confident start. Induction should always be available and accessible to all new volunteers, and tailored to their role and background experience. 

 **More information**
Read the *Increasing Participation in School and Trust Governance* report at nga.org.uk/increasing-participation



SKILLS AND DIVERSITY AUDIT

NGA’s popular skills audit has been updated for the new academic year – and renamed as the Skills and Diversity Audit.

No individual will have all the necessary skills and competencies for effective governance – the board is a team, and the audit is a way of assessing the overall breadth and depth of the board’s skills and knowledge. The audit also helps boards to evaluate their experience and understanding of the communities they serve, nga.org.uk/skills-audit



Race in education

Read the personal stories of education leaders from different backgrounds in a new free book from NAHT

At the end of June, NAHT launched its book, *You Are Not Alone: Leaders for race equality*.

Originating from NAHT's Leaders for Race Equality network, the book shares the experiences of 14 NAHT members from Asian, African, Caribbean and multiple backgrounds. It includes personal stories of the discrimination faced as leaders and individuals through school, university, interviews and promotion – often having to prove themselves at every step of the way to leadership, and facing overt and covert racism. Common to many stories is the impact of the school environment and how vital the support and influence of role models can be.

The stories shared are powerful, challenging and at times saddening. However, they are equally heartening, with examples of courage, determination and hope. The following quotes provide a glimpse into what is included:

“All I ever wanted to be was a teacher... and felt that announcing my dream was a good place to start. Even now, that line is tinged with many memories for me, as the path to teaching was not as romantic as I imagined it would be” - *Mayleen Atima, headteacher and author.*

“THE RACISM MY PARENTS SUFFERED HAD SHAPED ME TO BE AFRAID TO EXPOSE MY DIFFERENCE”

“I had never considered racism as an issue that affected me, yet in writing my chapter, I recognised that the racism my parents had suffered decades ago had shaped me to be a person afraid to expose my difference. Suppressed memories of micro-aggressions I had witnessed through my 20-plus years in education surfaced: colleagues mocking children's names; aggression I received from parents when I first started teaching – at that time my surname was Rahim and I wore a hijab” - *Ruhaina Alford-Rahim, executive headteacher and author.*

“It is my hope that those who read the book take the time needed to immerse themselves in our stories, to spend time with us, walking in our shoes, if only for a short while... To open up discussion and make everyone feel that they are a person, that they belong where they are. Equality is everybody's responsibility... In order for the whole of the education profession to be an ally, to become allies, you have to delve into that personal reflection, you have to delve into your own biases (and we all have them in different respects)” - *Diana Ohene-Darko, assistant headteacher and author.*

NAHT hopes that this book can play a part in igniting further conversation and awareness around the breadth and depth of discrimination within the sector. We therefore encourage people to not only read the book themselves, but to share it within their networks and local areas. SM



More information

The book is available to download at bit.ly/3y4YrFO
For more information, contact policy@naht.org.uk



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STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT:

the fourth core function of governance

Nina Sharma, Elizabeth Collin and **Sabreen Marashli** introduce stakeholder engagement as the fourth core function of governance

Meaningful engagement with stakeholders contributes powerfully and directly to providing enriching experiences and high-quality education for our children and young people. It also helps to ensure the

experience is relevant to the real world that those children and young people will shortly explore as adults.

Governance must always be grounded in reality, defined by both high-quality objective data and a full understanding

of the views and needs of the stakeholders – by which we mean pupils, parents, staff, the community and society in general. This is why NGA has identified stakeholder engagement as the fourth core function of governance.



Strategic decisions rooted in and influenced by the voices and views of stakeholders will go a long way to ensuring our organisations are fulfilling their brief. Simply put, engaging with stakeholders enables boards to develop a better understanding of how their organisation is operating on the ground, and how close it is to achieving its vision. Opening and maintaining channels of communication between stakeholders facilitates good decision-making.



59% OF RESPONDENTS FROM OUR ANNUAL GOVERNANCE SURVEY 2021 WOULD SUPPORT THE INTRODUCTION OF ENSURING EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH STAKEHOLDERS AS A FOURTH CORE FUNCTION

WHAT STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT ACHIEVES

- Governing boards challenge and question the headteacher and leadership team from an informed position - because they know what stakeholders think and feel about the way the strategy is being implemented
- Boards remain accountable to the community they serve - by being visible and transparent with stakeholders about decisions that affect them
- The values, vision and strategy set by the governing board has the support of the community - because the community has had a role in shaping them.

Parental engagement

In recent times, parents have played a greater part in their children's education than ever before. This has presented a valuable opportunity for governing boards to capitalise on a deepened parental investment influencing

academic achievement. Research suggests that the relationships parents and schools have impact upon the aspiration, achievement and experiences of children and young people. Listening to what parents say and think adds a valuable dimension to holding school leaders to account from an informed position, and making informed decisions.

Governing boards and leadership teams should analyse the effectiveness of their communication and consider how they are reaching out to parents. NGA's 2021 annual governance survey findings show that 76% of boards engage with parents through surveys. To enable impact, boards should go one step further and use parent voice as an opportunity for challenging their senior leaders, and engage with the leadership team to identify how parent voice has been embedded.

POST-PANDEMIC DYNAMICS

NGA's annual governance survey found the dynamic between parents and schools has shifted as a result of the pandemic:

"The school have supported parents to engage with learning."

"Visiting parents during lockdown to provide learning materials was an eye-opening experience!"

"Video presentation to parents on website to increase parental engagement."

Staff engagement

No group will know a school better than its staff; this is why their knowledge and views should be sought and

used to inform a range of key governance decisions. Staff engagement is essential to knowing how your staff feel and what they think about how the school/trust is being run.

The mental health and wellbeing of staff can have a huge impact on the school environment and its pupils. Where education staff are mentally and physically healthy, quality of work can be better, and pupils benefit. Teacher wellbeing is significantly shaped by the culture and values fostered by the governing board, so boards need to engage to see how those are being understood and communicated.

While many schools run staff surveys, boards can engage with staff using all forms of communication and collaboration at their disposal. School visits, focus groups, and attendance at board meetings are just a few ideas. Remember that to some staff, the board can remain invisible or even be seen as scary. By meeting, listening and talking to staff, those misconceptions can be addressed.

The best vision-setters are those that collaborate meaningfully with staff to build a sense of shared ownership. Involve staff in your discussions in a constructive and strategic way as you seek to monitor the impact of various policies and initiatives, including staff CPD and wellbeing. Staff should feel like their views are valued and acted on.

A strong and talented workforce is essential to the success of any organisation; building trust and understanding between the governing board and school and trust staff is an investment that unifies and cements organisational identity.

Visible Governance in schools

For governing boards to engage with stakeholders effectively and meaningfully, they need to be visible within their school or trust. As part of NGA's Visible Governance campaign, this autumn term we are working to raise the awareness of governance among parents, pupils and staff. We will be sharing resources and guidance to support governing boards to successfully engage with stakeholders. You can now access our bitesize e-learning module, which explores how stakeholders can be involved in meaningful decision-making, at www.nga.org.uk/learning-link-modules


NGA will continue to promote the fourth core function of governance across the year. To support this work, we would like to hear from you on how you engage with stakeholders in your school or trust. Contact Nina Sharma at nina.sharma@nga.org.uk to share your views, thoughts and experiences.

committee to carry out an audit of stakeholders as part of the strategy development process. This should identify the stakeholders with the most potential to support the strategy.

Respondents from the annual survey shared the different ways their school or trust engaged with the community, particularly during the pandemic:

"We make effective use of the community website and Facebook page, which together reach well over 75% of local adult residents."

"We engaged with local business forums."

"We have been engaging with the community via our local parish church." 

Pupil engagement

"All children have the right to express their views and have them taken into account and given due weight according to their age and maturity, in all matters affecting them" – Article 12 of the UN convention on the Rights of the Child.

The rights of children and young people to have their views heard and valued should be at the heart of the board's desire to engage with, and support, effective engagement with pupils. Research shows 'pupil voice' activities: promote emotional wellbeing, feelings of agency and independence; fosters a sense of belonging in their school; and encourages buy-in to learning.

For governing boards, pupil voices provide valuable insight into how their vision and strategy works in practice, and what it is like to be a pupil at your school or trust.

All schools are expected to 'pay due regard' to the UN's Rights of the Child by listening to the views of pupils and/or involving them in decision-making. Most schools can say they satisfy the requirements. But the value of pupil voice should inspire boards to look beyond the tick-box exercise and be ambitious in how they incorporate pupil voice into their decision-making.

Culture is key. Governing boards should champion an inclusive culture where all pupils feel comfortable to make their voices heard and trust they will be valued. Boards and leaders should ensure a range of methods are available that are accessible to all, considering how different children and young people may communicate and address barriers to participating.

Governing boards can also challenge leadership on the

effectiveness of the strategies used and their impact. Surveys or focus groups are a popular way to gather the views of pupils, but ask how these are used, what actions resulted and if feedback was given to pupils – these are the actions that will separate tokenistic from meaningful engagement.

We are increasingly seeing inspiring examples of pupil-led action on issues that affect them, from climate change to racial justice. Schools have an opportunity to support and encourage children and young people to share their voices, and empower them to be an active part of their learning, school and wider community.

Other stakeholders

Methods of engagement with other stakeholders will vary according to context. However, it should not be overlooked as some of the best ideas, solutions and support can come from beyond the immediate environment. Engaging with

stakeholders in the wider community can also help to cement links between schools and their communities.

It is good practice for the governing board or a

PUPIL STATS

NGA's annual governance survey explored the ways in which boards engage with pupils:

66% monitored pupil surveys

30% met with or observed student councils

26% invited pupils to attend governing board meetings

33% held pupil focus groups.

FUTURE CHAIRS**THE NEXT
STEPS**

NGA's **Simon Richards** reflects on lessons from the programme to improve recruitment of chairs, and the future of the mission to carry on improving



SIMON RICHARDS
MANAGED FUTURE
CHAIRS AND IS NOW
NGA REGIONAL
GOVERNANCE
DEVELOPMENT LEAD
FOR THE SOUTH
EAST, LONDON AND
EAST OF ENGLAND

After four and a half years of supporting school boards with the crucial task of recruiting a high-calibre chair, NGA's Future Chairs programme drew to a conclusion in March.

The project emphasised succession planning for governing boards as opposed to crisis management, allowing for an interim period where the future chair would join the school board for a period of time, ideally a year, before becoming chair.

What did we learn?

We proved that recruiting externally can be a very successful solution to the challenge of developing an effective chair. Candidates who have highly developed skills in leadership, corporate governance, change management, transformation and non-executive responsibilities are very capable at transferring their skills and experience into a school or trust governance environment. There are

some crucial factors that make this approach more likely to succeed:

- **Transparency:** all the successful candidates were entirely comfortable with including the prospect of chairing in their first discussion and, moreover, were seeking an opportunity to make best use of what they could offer. When recruiting, boards should be clear they are seeking a candidate willing and able to chair – the right candidate will be comfortable with this dialogue.

- **A collective decision:** the board, not just the existing chair, should approve the concept of externally recruiting a chair or future chair. This is to ensure there are no surprises when the appointment is made. Not all boards are comfortable with recruiting an ‘outsider’ even when there is a vacant chair. Boards should avoid having a vacant chair as it puts pressure on the existing members to nominate a successor from their midst; usually a reluctant successor in these circumstances.

- **Support:** all chairs, regardless of length and diversity of experience, should have access to support. This is therefore even more crucial when recruiting a chair or future chair with no previous school governance experience. While the functions and responsibilities of school governance are comparable with other sectors, we all know there are particular nuances and intricacies to education that candidates need to learn quickly, as well as familiarising themselves with their new setting.

Taking chairing to the next level

The completion of Future Chairs does not mean that the problem is solved; NGA has resolved to do more. Last October we published our report *Chairing a Board: developing governance, sharing leadership*, which highlighted the lack of diversity in the chair role, the considerable time and commitment by chairs, the difficulties in recruiting chairs and the continuous need to develop and support board leaders.

Since publication, we have been working on doing more for chairs and delivering on the commitments we made for ourselves.

Earlier this year we launched our new governance leadership forums for chairs, vice-chairs and their executive leaders to provide a safe virtual space to share experiences, best practice and solve problems, and these events will run termly. We will also support local chairing networks where invited to do so; please get in touch if you would like our involvement.

We continue to offer the Leading Governance development programme for chairs, albeit without the advantage of DfE funding. We also continue to offer our publication *The Chair’s Handbook*. Now in its

“WE NEED A PIPELINE OF SKILLED VOLUNTEERS TO STEP UP TO CHAIR”

eighth edition, it is a comprehensive bible on all things chairing for leaders of governing boards and academy trusts, including guidance on delegation, co-chairing and the role of the vice-chair to share the workload of board leadership.

Preparing the pipeline

It is estimated we need approximately 5,000 new chairs every year for the state school system in England and therefore we need a pipeline of skilled volunteers willing to step up. Through the Young Governors’ Network and BAME network governors’ hub we will continue to encourage and equip governors and trustees from underrepresented groups to take on chairing positions.

We advocate that the role is a professional one that should be filled by a person with the necessary skills, attributes and ethics to carry it out effectively. Or they should at least show the potential and capacity to develop into the role, which means

that not everyone is suitable. We therefore encourage experienced chairs to move around the system and share their governance knowledge with other schools or trusts, so that boards gain from healthy turnover and new candidates have the chance to step up. Long-term commitment and loyalty to one school is commendable, but nearby is a school desperate for strong board leadership. We encourage effective chairs to aspire to leave governance at their current setting in a better place than they found it, then move on and find another setting that will welcome their expertise.

Recruiting any board’s next chair will continue to be a challenge, and despite the success of the Future Chairs programme we advocate that your next chair is likely to come from your existing board members, unless chairing skills are being specifically targeted through current recruitment. Boards need to be self-sufficient in preparing for the future through succession planning to identify the right person with the right skills, in the right place, at the right time. Having a plan for the next chair might seem to contradict the notion of a contested election, but rarely do we hear about a board with multiple nominees for the chair position.

A succession plan provides certainty and reassurance, not just for the other board members, but also for the future chair themselves who can prepare for their new responsibilities. We will continue to support the development of succession planning through our guidance, Learning Link module and our virtual face-to-face training course.

External recruitment can be successful when conducted well. NGA still advocates that long-term succession planning to identify and develop suitable future chairs is the best practice approach to maintaining this ever-important element of effective governance. 🍷

Join us to make a difference

Lynn Howard invites you to consider using your skills to help improve life chances for children in your region by nominating yourself to be an NGA trustee

As we move into the autumn term, we begin to look forward to our AGM where we will be appointing trustees for our North East, North West and Yorkshire & Humber regions. It is a huge honour to be a member of the board. Working alongside NGA's CEO and senior leaders, trustees have the privilege of helping to steer our organisation towards ever stronger governance in our schools and trusts. Governance that is visible, ethical and not afraid to make the right decision is the very essence of what we do. The board is proud to support our organisation as it in turn supports and enables its members to meet the high standards we must set ourselves in order to ensure better life chances for our children.

If you govern within one of these regions, share our drive and passion for all that governance can achieve, and feel you have something to add to our board, we invite you to consider joining us. As has become our practice, I will be hosting a meeting later in the term for all those who would like to hear a little more about what it means to be a member of the board before making a decision to put themselves forward. Details will be circulated in the weekly newsletter.



STANDING FOR ELECTION

You should read the following documents on the trustees' page at www.nga.org.uk: NGA trustee role description; trustee person specification; trustees' skills audit; declaration of eligibility for trustees; declaration of interest form.

If you decide to stand, complete and submit the nomination form on the trustees' page. Nominations should be submitted no later than Friday 8 October, 2021. If you have any queries, please contact Heidi Copland at heidi.copland@nga.org.uk



LYNN HOWARD
CHAIR, BOARD
OF TRUSTEES

Diverse voices

Diverse boards make better decisions. That is a fact borne out in NGA's recent report *Increasing Participation in School and Trust Governance*. NGA has never been an organisation which says one thing to its members and does something different itself. As such, alongside appointing our elected trustees at this year's AGM, we also hope to confirm the appointment of an Asian trustee.

This appointment reflects what we believe to be a missing voice on our own board and will, we hope, lead to the board being more representative of society and consequently ensure we make better decisions. The co-option process will be carried out over the summer and autumn terms.

Improved stability

At this year's AGM we will be presenting some changes to our constitution aimed at ensuring greater stability. Those proposed changes will alter the length of term a trustee serves from the current three years to four, and reduce the number of terms a trustee can serve to two rather than the current three.

These changes will mean a one-year decrease in the total length of service of a trustee, but longer service in each term will mean NGA benefits from the experience each trustee brings to the board for a longer period. Full details of the proposed changes will be set out in the calling notice for the AGM.

I very much hope to see you in November, in Birmingham, for our AGM as we celebrate all that we do and the difference we can make to outcomes for children. 🙌

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Developing your leadership team

School leadership professional development can be surprisingly difficult, as the range of opportunities have significantly grown, and we have seen convergence at executive leadership

That is why the Institute of School Business Leadership (ISBL) has created three documents to help governance colleagues, headteachers and school business professionals identify the best development opportunities for colleagues within their school.

1 ISBL Professional Standards

This document contains the ISBL Professional Standards within which all school business professionals (SBPs) should work. They are recognised and endorsed by the sector, and more than 1,000 SBPs contributed to their development.

The standards underpin national qualifications such as the L4 ILM Diploma for School Business Managers and the L4 School Business Professional Apprenticeship, as well as being used to contextualise the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship (CMDA) and others.

2 Headteacher and governance guidance

It is important that the ISBL Professional Standards are understood by senior leaders, the headteacher and governors. This professional framework can be used in organisational development, recruitment, training and development, performance management and pay structures.

Many schools are embedding the Professional Standards in their performance management systems to help assess what skills exist across the organisation and what gaps might need filling (development opportunities and succession planning). This evidence can then be used to create development

pathways for all staff and feed into performance goal settings and appraisals.

This document has been produced for senior leaders within schools to make them aware of how the Professional Standards can help their school and staff, and it is useful for SBPs too.

3 Professional development guide

This new guide provides information on all the main qualifications available specifically for SBPs.

It helps show those that have specific content for SBPs or that have been contextualised using ISBL Professional Standards as guidance.

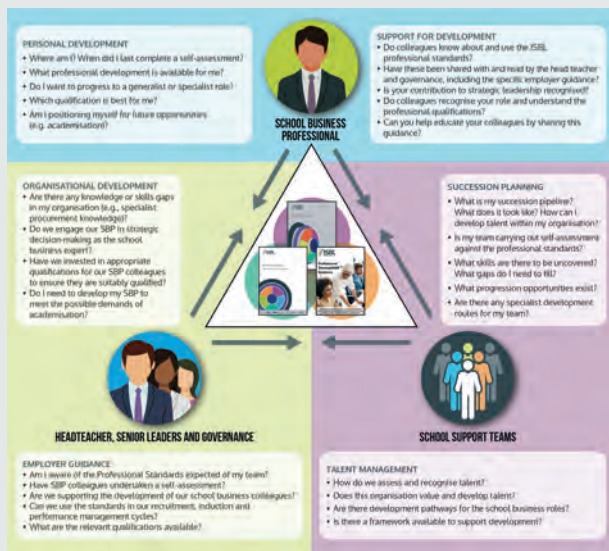
These three documents are designed to help you question the investment and development of your school workforce.

As supportive governance colleagues, are you asking the right questions on organisational design and growth? A qualification can be a big investment of time, energy and resource, so selecting the best qualification is essential. Feedback from practitioners who have completed the programme can point to the difference it has made to their careers and schools, providing assurance of its value.

DOWNLOAD GUIDANCE

Three ISBL documents can be downloaded from the following links.

- Professional Standards: bit.ly/ISBL-Professional-Standards
- Employer guidance: bit.ly/ISBL-Employer-guidance
- Qualification guidance: bit.ly/ISBLProfGuide2021



More information
Visit www.isbl.org.uk

Reacting to the COVID-19 pandemic, governors and trustees have shown how resilient they can be in the face of unprecedented challenge. Now, as we move away from this emergency, with some sense of normality returning to our schools from September, we are talking of recovery and looking towards repair.

I want to use this article to challenge our thinking in

our governance roles, and encourage us to consider how we might guide our executive leaders to build back better. To do so, I want to encourage us to think: 'it's time for the meerkats'.

Governance at all levels has shown that it can think outside the box and react to unprecedented situations effectively and with pace. A welcome outcome of the pandemic has been the great

validation of the flexibility, innovation, creativity and the skills of our staff, leaders, governors and trustees.

Undoubtedly we have much to thank our staff for but we should also truly admire and acknowledge the tenacity, resilience and sensibleness of our pupils too. We need to reassess and capitalise on how they and their parents found a deeper understanding of the vital importance of education,

RECOVERY RISKS and OPPORTUNITIES

Education adviser **David Wootton** advises taking a meerkat-like approach to your school or trust's post-pandemic recovery

not only in advancing knowledge, learning and understanding but in facilitating, structuring and nurturing growth as rounded people. Perhaps now we have reached a watershed, where the true value of what we do in schools and trusts is gaining more appreciation.

During the pandemic, many governing boards reshaped and restructured governance structures to facilitate timely responses and participate in executive roles. We had our ‘tin hats’ on to support and advise our leaders in being flexible and resilient, while our schools were under attack. We have learned that we, our leaders and our children can do what we would never have imagined or possibly allowed before COVID-19.

Back to the ‘bigger picture’

Despite all this, we in governance face a further challenge, a positive one with potentially significant opportunities. The decisions and support we gave our leaders to facilitate learning and successfully respond to the needs of our learners (safeguarding, learning, wellbeing and in some cases, food deliveries) leaves us at an important strategic crossroads where there is both an opportunity and a need for change.

How we respond to this is vitally important. We can support our leaders to repair and reconstruct our system to recapture what we had before and there are no problems with that – in the main what we had was good. But let’s not forget in the rush back towards whatever normality was, is, or will become: we in governance are learners by nature, so many of us will want to adapt and make strategic changes to improve what we previously offered to mirror the things we have learned.

Now is the time for governance to move away from the operational issues of the pandemic, back to the critical roles of shaping strategic direction, balancing risk, and supporting and challenging our executive leaders. At this pivotal moment we could choose to respond to what we’ve learned in much greater depth, making a quantum shift from risk mitigation to considering the opportunities of taking bigger steps, giving strong and clear strategic direction for the future.

But how do we know if we should be reacting relatively incrementally in our approach or if we should be reacting boldly? To do one may waste opportunities, while to do the other may damage what we already have.

This is where the meerkat approach comes in. I want to encourage governors and trustees at this point to behave

more like those small creatures, on the top of the hill surveying the surrounding landscape, assessing and signalling the reduction in danger and looking for opportunities to guide the troop towards greener pastures.

A reflective review

As the dust settles, we should find time with our executive leaders to step back, take time, reflect, review, reconsider and potentially rewire and reconstruct our approach based on what we have learned in the past 18 months.

Reflection is a process that will undoubtedly take time and careful thought.



FIVE TOP TIPS

- 1** Focus on keeping an ethical organisation, syncing with values, integrity and a moral purpose
- 2** Start with the basics, creatively expand with a rule that says there are no stupid ideas to broaden the definition of what success looks like
- 3** Be prepared to be brave and make big steps should the need arise
- 4** Be mindful that little things matter and sometimes it’s the smallest of changes that bring about the biggest results
- 5** ‘Keep your eye on the prize’ by aligning what the future should look like, using way points and metrics, but fundamentally simply doing the right thing.

I would urge any thoughts of significant change at a rapid pace be quickly shelved. Tactical moves that can easily be accommodated should be capitalised on as soon as practical, but the wider big picture leading to strategic change should be given the time it needs to be shaped as fully formed developments.

The difficulty with this situation is how you enable a significant strategic review while returning to normal schooling. I suggest we pause and take a deep breath, then begin to review what has happened. Consider what we experienced, reflect on what we've learned, carefully construct what we still need to know and, finally, agree and share what we want to achieve.

Some governing boards may feel the need to return to bedrock to revisit and reaffirm mission, values and vision. Others might begin with how we want recent experiences to colour the culture and behaviours it drives. Gaining agreement and buy-in to the start point is vital. In taking our strategic review forward, I suggest the following themes:

● **Realistic optimism**

We, as leaders of strategy, pursue a course of realistic optimism. Realistic in that accepting whatever we have learned from the pandemic, there is much about what we did in the past that is good and should be retained. Optimistic in the sense that however good the past was, we can and should make the future better. This plays significantly into our role in a self-improving system.

● **Revising culture**

The revision of culture happening now in our schools

“BUT HOW DO WE KNOW IF WE SHOULD BE REACTING RELATIVELY INCREMENTALLY IN OUR APPROACH OR IF WE SHOULD BE REACTING BOLDLY?”

is all about a return to normality, building back from a crisis that dictated situations beyond our control and experience. Now this practical activity is underway in our schools, it is time for governors and trustees to fully regain control of strategic direction and how we take things forward into the future.

● **Staying balanced**

In situations like this, it is all too easy to dash headlong into change, to simply decide that what happened in the past was not good enough. However, what could and should happen in the future is an opportunity to be analysed, so a critical piece of advice in this regard is to stay balanced and respond appropriately.

● **Getting started**

The most effective way of getting started is to engage with appropriate stakeholders (executive leaders, etc) in open discussions about what the post-pandemic future could and should look like, and compare and balance this against what the past delivered for us. That way we make strategic, informed decisions about replacement, rewiring, rebuilding, or reimagining.

● **A recovery marathon**

We all want to make a success of the future 'new normal' but in any discussion around this we are talking of a marathon rather than a sprint. In this

recovery phase we need to take care of our leaders, ourselves and others and communicate well, engaging in collaboration, challenge and support.


● **Our approach**

It is important for us to be open and creative, while clearly maintaining expectations around responsibilities for our executives and ourselves. We need to show conviction, fairness, and be courageous, if needed, to embrace big moves.

● **The way forward**

Navigating a way forward is simple at one level and yet so much more complicated in practice. The principles are clear: have a desire for renewal and wanting to do things better, keep things simple and stay true to our vision and values.

● **Strong, sustained and successful futures**

Clearly, there are significantly more contextual issues and developing broader national developments for individual governing boards to consider. Nevertheless, I fundamentally believe in the 'good' that strong strategic governance brings to our schools and trusts. Further, if genuinely undertaken, a process such as this will lead to better outcomes for all, and a stronger and more sustained strategic approach stress tested for the future. 



David Wootton is chair of the board of trustees for The Learning and a freelance consultant, trainer, writer and speaker specialising in governance, MATs and leadership. David was previously a MAT CEO and an adviser to the DfE. david@wootton.org.uk, [@wootton_david](https://twitter.com/wootton_david), www.wootton.org.uk

Creating a SEND culture

Making SEND a whole-school issue will ensure all pupils have a chance to thrive, explains NGA senior advice officer **Adelaide Chitanda**

How do we ensure SEND becomes part of the fabric of our organisations?

When NGA hosted its biannual SEND conference in June, our speakers, including Professor Adam Boddison, chief executive of SEND charity nasen, and André Imich, SEN and disability adviser at the SEND division at the DfE, evoked this ambitious yet necessary challenge. We summarise the key messages and practical tips to help you make this happen.

How to achieve a whole-school approach

This fundamental question is based on how we shift the focus from SEND compliance to creating a whole-school culture of SEND. In order to cultivate and maintain this, governing boards can start with the following:

- Give SEND an equivalent status to pupil premium
- Make SEND everybody's responsibility
- Ensure that every leader is a leader of SEND
- Simply think 'SEND'
- Maximise the impact of the SENCO (SEN coordinator).

Proactively elevating the status of SEND is the best place to start and simply means

looking at SEND through the lens of your organisational vision, in much the same way as pupil premium, for instance. By making SEND a strategic priority, it becomes the responsibility of all, thus channelling a unified effort to creating, cultivating and maintaining an inclusive school/trust culture in which all pupils can thrive, regardless of ability.

If every leader sees themselves as a leader of SEND, governors and trustees can meaningfully ask how each incorporates SEND into the decision-making of their area of responsibility. Effective and regular collaboration between the board and SENCO provides assurances that legal responsibilities and pupil needs are being met.

The board's role in monitoring SEND

This depends on striking the right balance between compliance, which encompasses the board's legal responsibilities, and culture, which encompasses the quality of provision for those with SEND. One without the other will lead to problems.

A board that is familiar with its legal obligations is well informed to monitor the school's/trust's strategy. But achieving the right balance between compliance and culture requires aligning the visible elements (the board's legal responsibilities, beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviours that characterise the school/trust), with the invisible elements (the ideas, customs and social behaviours of those within the school/trust community).

Using the past and present to create a better future

Although the need to understand the board's legal obligations and to foster an inclusive culture is imperative, so is understanding and reviewing the current context and future



ADELAIDE CHITANDA,
SENIOR ADVICE
OFFICER

landscape of the system for pupils with SEND.

All pupils being given the opportunity to thrive depends on boards having an understanding of the barriers those pupils

face, including the impact of the pandemic. The tragic reality is that many SEND pupils are now more vulnerable than they were before COVID-19.

Invite the SENCO to the next board meeting to gain that up-to-the-minute understanding, discussing what support is being provided to pupils with SEND to mitigate further worsening of an already wide attainment gap.

NGA's SEND guidance focuses on providing information and guidance to governing boards on meeting their legal obligations in order to secure high-quality outcomes for pupils with SEND, while creating, cultivating and maintaining an inclusive whole-school culture that allows all pupils to thrive regardless of ability. **GA**



More information

NGA's SEND guidance and practical resources can be accessed via NGA's Knowledge Centre, www.nga.org.uk/send-guidance



Is it time to embrace the Blended Career?

A career in education no longer resembles a straight ladder, but instead a climbing wall with multiple routes. Does your recruitment strategy reflect this new approach?

With almost a third of teachers leaving the profession within the first 5 years, the time has come to create more opportunities for educators and drive a less linear approach to the profession, where the education industry can expand on possibilities and create a more engaged, attractive and rewarding career. With the landscape of education changing forever due to the pandemic, the way we learn and the way we teach is transforming.

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PANDEMIC EXPERIENCES

REMOTE LEARNING

during lockdown

Trustee **Paul Taylor-McCartney** explains the findings of his research into lockdown e-learning in the Leading Edge Academy Partnership of schools in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly

A key aspect of my role is celebrating excellent practice when I see it, especially considering the past 18 months, which have been some of the most testing in education.

As we came out of the first national lockdown last year, we on the board noted that pupils' engagement in remote learning was substantially higher across our trust compared to the national average. A figure of between 75-96% across five schools, compared to a national average of between 35% for children of families from deprived backgrounds and 60% for children from more affluent families. As each of our schools serves a diverse community of families from different backgrounds, members speculated on the reasons. With my background in research, I offered to carry out a number of semi-structured interviews with key school staff and report back to the board.



Cause for celebration

All participants fully embraced the opportunity to speak honestly about their experiences and to mention 'standout moments' that they, colleagues, pupils and families had achieved during the first lockdown, including lessons learned. Positive themes and topics common to all case studies were:

- resilience
- community collaboration



ONE RESPONDENT SAID THAT DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY HAD HELPED ENHANCE LEARNING BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER LOCKDOWN

- co-constructed learning
 - supportive management
 - wellbeing
 - self-directed learning
 - pastoral care of vulnerable families/learners.
- More detailed answers to each question are below.

Explain a little about your role at school in relation to online platforms

This produced some interesting responses, with Phil Lane from secondary Mounts Bay Academy, Penzance, stating that digital technology had "played an integral role in terms of enhancing learning – before, during and after lockdown", even pointing out that "the national crisis... forced us to move forward in a really transformative way."

Of note, Rachel Lewin and Maddy Hicks at Five Islands Academy on the Isles of Scilly, an all-through 3-16 school, commented that their secondary team had even "built a digital

library of our whole curriculum over the past two years using Firefly... [whereby] each lesson for each subject [had been] curated and resourced online". This last point highlighted to me the nature of island-based school settings, many of which had already embraced and embedded e-learning prior to the lockdown, and done so out of necessity, compared to their mainland counterparts.

In fact, the high levels of pupil engagement in Five Islands, may well be attributed to the fact its primary and secondary learners were already highly IT literate prior to lockdown. Significantly, all five trust schools will have benefitted from the heavy investment in e-learning prior to the pandemic and my arrival in Cornwall.

How did your school retain close contact with groups of vulnerable/SEND learners and their families?

Rebecca Stott, of secondary Fowey River Academy, commented that her school "quickly recognised that these learners were not quite where they needed to be, especially as staff were very quickly putting things online". She also pointed out, "Pupil premium families were tracked and supported closely." This sentiment was echoed by Ashley Larter and Kate Ellis of St Hilary School, a primary in Penzance, who noted "we had some learners who did not want to engage with us but were well connected with peers and families."

As lockdown continued and staff became more adept at using e-learning platforms,

participants encouraged 'live' lessons, supporting research that has found settings with high levels of face-to-face teaching usually experience successful online, remote learning.


What are the key lessons or messages you and your staff have taken away from the experience?

This question focused on what lockdown had taught participants about their learners, as well as their own practice as teachers.

For Rebecca Stott, one key lesson stood out: "Don't underestimate young people; they want to figure things out, so encourage them to discover knowledge."

Elsewhere, for Ashley Larter and Kate Ellis, "Getting to know families has been a significant development. Our school's ethos was already about community cohesion... but lockdown amplified that for everyone."

Interestingly, Grace Wright at Ludgvan primary, described the experience as a "test of our systems and we passed that test!"

Differences aside, all participants remarked on how their learners had surprised them: Rachel Lewin and Maddy Hicks proudly stated "the most important thing that we have reflected on after lockdown is our students' wonderful capacity for independent learning, and the sense of achievement they gained during this period from producing beautiful, challenging, exciting work." 

SUMMARY FINDINGS

This research has not only helped profile the work of individual staff that went above and beyond during one of the most challenging periods for our schools, teachers, pupils and their families – it has helped put a narrative to the trust's excellent data regarding pupils' engagement in e-learning during this period.

In short, I uncovered some key reasons for the data being so positive:

- Across the majority of trust schools, there was already a defined infrastructure for e-learning, prior to the lockdown
- A sizeable financial outlay by the trust, investing heavily in 'leading edge' e-learning platforms and technology certainly helped soften the impact of the lockdown, particularly for vulnerable/disadvantaged pupils and their families
- Those who work and live in remote, coastal communities have proven highly adaptable and resilient, actively embracing the opportunity to collaborate and learn from one another – in many ways, the lockdown became an opportunity to show the trust schools and families at their very best
- The vast majority of learners across all five settings became more independent as a result of lockdown and much better at managing their own time, which in turn allowed some groups (HPAs/boys particularly) to achieve beyond what was expected of them, prior to lockdown
- Models of blended learning have been maintained since a return to on-site teaching in all trust settings. On both a personal and professional level this work has been a significant undertaking. That said, it has brought me closer to the very people I represent, while allowing me to record a trust-wide response to the type of crisis not witnessed before in my lifetime, and which is likely to stay with us for some time yet.



Paul Taylor-McCartney is currently assistant programme manager and QA support tutor for the Cornwall SCITT, and University Tutor for Bath Spa and Plymouth Marjon's Secondary PGCEs. He regularly presents at local, regional and national conferences related to his research and teaching interests

Your NGA, your voice

The NGA is your association – as it says in the small print on page 3, our charitable mission is to improve education standards and pupil wellbeing in state schools in England by improving the effectiveness of governing boards.

And we aim to achieve that in a number of ways, including by acting as the voice of governors, trustees and governance professionals. You will all know that a core function of governance is to set the values of an organisation – and our members agreed a number of NGA values at our AGM several years ago.

At NGA we value the following: the voices of all; evidence; expertise; and our independence.

The NGA team gathers your voices in many ways, including surveys and research, our GOLDline, our member events, and increasingly through virtual focus groups. Our board of trustees are also governors or academy trust trustees with a wide range of experience.

You – our members – are absolutely NGA's most important stakeholders and not just because the lion's share of our income comes from your membership fees. It's because governors, trustees and governance professionals actually bring that improvement of practice about. We must listen carefully to you to make sure our guidance, publications and e-learning best fulfill your needs.

NGA chief executive **Emma Knights** explains how a key part of our work is to gather your views and ensure they are heard by those in authority



Clearly not all governors and trustees have the same views and experiences. My job, with the help of the NGA team, is to look at that full range of opinions, and weigh them up. That is not just a simple matter of counting numbers, but considering underlying themes or reasons for the differences.

We triangulate what you tell us with other evidence. Our recent report *Increasing Participation on Governing Boards* (see Kirstie Ebbs' article on page 14) contains evidence from a literature review and a quantitative survey, but the richness comes from the voices of governors and trustees. I hope that NGA has a reputation for being nuanced in the way we do that.



EMMA KNIGHTS OBE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

We represent you at numerous groups at the DfE. Longstanding groups, such as the Advisory Group on Governance and the School and Academy Funding Group, are supplemented by several working groups on issues such as staff workload, wellbeing and flexible working. This year there have been many briefings and discussions on the effects of COVID-19 and the arrangements for exams, often with minister Nick Gibb. We also have many bilateral meetings, including a termly meeting with the governance minister, Baroness Berridge.

Over the last decade the DfE's interest in governance professionals, alongside their understanding and importance of the role, has really grown. The DfE has set up a working group to consider how the profession might be supported and developed. Having championed this for years, it is good to see the progress.

Amplifying the governance voice may not often bring immediate change, but over the years, being consistent – reinforcing the messages – pays dividends. You can rely on NGA to continue doing that, week in week out, year in year out. 🗣️

 *If there are things you want the DfE to hear, please do let us know your requests, demands or simply frustrations in any way that suits: email emma.knights@nga.org.uk share your experiences on our blog page nga.org.uk/blog or by writing an article for *Governing Matters* - email editor@nga.org.uk to talk to us about your ideas.*

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