

Strong Governance, Strong Schools

Welcome to the third edition of the NGA termly bulletin which replaces the monthly bulletin board. The focus of this bulletin is improving good practice in school governance in England. It will be sent directly to all the NGA corporate and local association members, and can be forwarded to anyone else.

The National Governors' Association (NGA) is a national membership charity for governing boards of local authority maintained schools and academies across England. We aim to support governors and trustees in their vital role of leading school improvement, and taking your views to the government to lobby for changes. This is a small example of the work we produce for our members. If you are interested in finding out more, please call the office, or email our membership team: membership@nga.org.uk.

NGA and TES launch the annual survey of governors and trustees

The NGA has once again joined forces with the Times Educational Supplement (TES) to survey the nation's governors and trustees.



Open to all governors and trustees in England, the survey aims to capture your thoughts on policy issues and the impact of government policy on your school or academy. The findings from this survey are invaluable to our work lobbying the government about governance issues, which is even more important in this election year. The findings also inform our wider work to support governing boards across the country.

Please note that this survey is only aimed at governors and trustees, but clerks please do forward to your governing board. We will of course welcome clerks' views as usual in our membership survey this autumn.

Last year nearly 2400 of you responded to the survey, and we'd like even more this year! Please forward the link below to other governors, as it is not just for members of the NGA. The results will be reported in TES and the September/October edition of NGA's magazine *Governing Matters*.

Take the survey:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NGATES2015>



Changing the culture around governor expenses

Does your governing body actively encourage governors to claim out of pocket expenses? No – you are not alone – but that doesn't mean you are beacons of good practice.

During March the NGA held its regional meetings and during the discussions one issue repeatedly came up; the fact that all governors, but more particularly chairs, were out of pocket because of the inherent costs of being a governor: travel to meetings and training events and also printing paper work off.

In 2004 the NGA (then NGC) carried out a survey for the Department for Education (DfE) about governors' expenses – as the DfE wanted to encourage governors to claim. The survey yielded the following results: only a third of respondents even had a policy and fewer than 10% claimed expenses.

This is one area of governor practice that has barely moved in that 11 year period.

While it is likely that many more governing boards now have policy in place, the NGA suspects that the number claiming has risen only slightly, if at all.

A variation of the following comments was made at all the regional meetings – but the quotes were in fact taken from the survey carried out in 2004.

“The governors are very aware that any expenses would come from the revenue budget and effectively result in reduced provision.”

“Governors considered that paying expenses may lead to volunteers becoming governors for the wrong reasons and payments would be difficult to monitor.”

School governors are akin to charity trustees (indeed in an academy you may well be one) and the Charity Commission makes it abundantly clear that the claiming of expenses is not just acceptable, but a good idea:

“Paying reasonable expenses is a good way of ensuring that the whole trustee board participates in running the charity...Unless by personal choice, no trustee should be 'out of pocket' as a result of carrying out their normal duties and responsibilities.”

The total amount of governor expenses over the course of the year for: travel, child or relative care, postage and printing should not be enormous. It is false economy to say that expenses for governors takes money away for the children – if discouraging claims discourages people from becoming governors, then we limit the pool of people available and potentially the effectiveness of governing boards. More importantly, if we want governors to have regard for their own development needs it is unreasonable to expect them to meet the cost of getting to training.

Chairs have an important role to play here in setting the ethos of the governing body. The chair should make a point of claiming and telling everyone they have claimed – and make sure the claim form is circulated with GB papers so that it becomes unexceptional.

Governors influencing the education debate

There are approximately 300,000 school governors across England but as a group we don't raise our voices in public debate as much as we might. If in the last week of the General Election campaign, you come across your Parliamentary Candidates, or afterward with your MP, you could take the opportunity to raise issues of concern to your school.

The NGA is calling for:

1. The issue of school governance to be given greater prominence in central and local government policy making.
2. Induction training to be provided free for all new school governors and trustees.
3. The government to provide financial incentives both to encourage effective collaboration and to schools wishing to join together in LA maintained federations as well as multi academy trusts.
4. Funding to be distributed in an equitable, objective and transparent manner. Three-year indicative budgets should be introduced for both capital and revenue funding and the level of school funding increased.
5. The supply of high-quality headteachers and teachers to be given more consideration centrally and for the government to take affirmative action to prevent a serious staffing shortage.
6. The promotion of professional governing board clerks.
7. A reduction in the number of new initiatives from central government and a period of relative stability to allow schools to continue to improve.
8. More flexibility from employers for governing duties.

What should school leaders and governors expect from each other?

The widely used resource outlining the respective roles and responsibilities of governors and school leaders has been published by the National Governors' Association (NGA), the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) and the Local Government Association (LGA).

This is the third edition of the jointly developed resource which addresses the changing role of school governance and the challenges this presents.

Some of the expectations the document makes clear are that while governors must have the confidence to have courageous conversations, in turn, school leaders must be willing to be challenged. And while governors must be knowledgeable about the school, including its

pupils, staff and community, in turn, school leaders must provide information in the appropriate way.

Emma Knights, Chief Executive of the NGA, said: "This excellent document, now in its third edition, is the most important resource we have on the topic of roles and responsibilities. This is about clarifying what the expectations are for governors and school leaders in the pursuit of academic excellence."

You can access the document through the NGA website:



<http://www.nga.org.uk/News/NGA-News/What-governors-and-school-leaders-should-expect.aspx>

Are we effective? Questions to ask ourselves

Strong governance is essential for all types of schools – but how can we measure how strong our governing board is? A number of organisations, including the NGA, have developed questions to help governing boards and multi academy trust evaluate their performance.

The second edition of the *Twenty key questions every governing board should ask itself* launched in January. Since their launch in 2012, the questions have been used extensively by many

governing boards across England when reviewing their governance practice.

In March, the APPG published a new set of *Twenty-one Questions for Multi Academy Trusts: Key questions a MAT board should ask itself*, designed to help ensure that governance structures in MATs are fit for purpose.

You can find copies of both sets of questions on the NGA website: <http://www.nga.org.uk/About-Us/APPG/Home.aspx>

School funding: share your experiences

Earlier this month, NGA Chief Executive Emma Knights wrote to the Guardian calling for fundamental school funding reforms (<http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/apr/13/school-funding-needs-fundamental-reforms>). With the general election just a week away, the NGA is committed to continuing to make the case to politicians, policy makers and journalists.

You can help us by sharing your stories about how you've had to manage difficult budgets and the challenges this has presented to you, senior leaders and the school. Send your stories in to mark.gardner@nga.org.uk.

Stories from members are crucial to informing our policy work and ensuring we provide a platform for governors to share practice on all issues. If you want to share your experience about any other topic concerning governors, write to us or call 0121 237 3780 and ask to speak to Mark.

Governing Board Peer Review

Many governing boards already carry out self-reviews or commission externally facilitated reviews, such as those carried out by NGA's team of governance consultants. With increasing emphasis on school-to-school support, there is a growing interest among governing boards in exploring different ways of working together. NGA is offering Governing Board Peer Review for groups of three or more governing boards. One of the key assumptions of our model is that all participants agree to review each other's practice

in a positive, professional and confidential manner.



NGA Peer Reviews are facilitated by an experienced governance consultant. Whether you are currently working with a group of schools or have never previously compared your practice to others, we would be happy to discuss how the process can help your governing board.

Email clare.collins@nga.org.uk for more details.

Guidance: Ofsted's Local Authorities School Improvement Inspections

The NGA, commissioned by the National Coordinators of Governor Services (NCOGS), has produced guidance for governor service staff on what they should consider when preparing for an Ofsted local authority school improvement (LASI) inspection and how other local authorities have been successful. This includes information on governor support, training, recruitment and

challenge to governors and is based on a research paper, *The Move Beyond Effective*, which was also commissioned by NCOGS.

Both the guidance and research papers are available on the NGA website:

<http://www.nga.org.uk/Guidance/Research/LASI.aspx>

7th edition of Welcome to Governance available now

Welcome to Governance is the leading induction guide for governors and trustees in England. As before, the new 7th edition is aimed at governors and trustees in both maintained schools and academies, and covers changes introduced last year including those regarding SEND, staffing, curriculum and assessment and premiums.



Welcome to Governance costs £10 for non-members, but if your school is a member you get a 50% discount so the guide will cost you only £5. You will be able to purchase your copy on the NGA website:

www.nga.org.uk/Publications/Welcome-to-Governance.aspx

For bulk discounts (over 15 copies) please call the office on 0121 237 3780, or email Ravinder on admin@nga.org.uk

NGA Governance Leadership 360 Diagnostic

In March's edition of *Governing Matters*, Clare Collins wrote about how a 360 degree appraisal can help chairs become more effective in their role. A 360 appraisal aims to provide comprehensive information regarding areas of strength and areas where improvement may be required. The questionnaire is completed by the chair and an array of respondents such as the headteacher, clerk, and other governors and therefore the feedback generated provides a comprehensive overview of the chair's performance. The NGA is now offering a Governance Leadership 360 Diagnostic in

partnership with the Eastern Leadership Centre (ELC). This package includes access to the ELC360 tool, a workbook to help chairs reflect on the report, and telephone consultation with an expert mentor.

The NGA Governance Leadership 360 is available to purchase on our website:

<http://www.nga.org.uk/Services/Governance-Leadership-360.aspx>



National Conference for Special School Governors... a few last minute places

The NGA is holding our biennial conference for governors of Special Schools on Saturday 16 May in Birmingham City Centre. This event is a great opportunity to hear about the latest developments in SEND policy and share best practice with fellow Special School governors.

We are pleased to welcome Jane Friswell the CEO of nasen as our keynote speaker. Nasen is the leading organisation in the UK which aims to promote the education, training, advancement and development of all those with special and additional support needs.

One free place at the Special School Governors Conference is included, along with a whole range of other benefits, in Governing Board Standard membership at £77 per year. To find out more email Victoria.Stokoe@nga.org.uk or call 0121 237 3780.

Summer Conference, Saturday 27 June

NGA's annual Summer Conference is taking place in Manchester City Centre.

At the conference we will be talking about:

- School finance
- Governance framework
- Committee structures
- Governors' role with the curriculum
- Data dashboards

Free places are available to members. Book places at either event here:

<http://myaccount.nga.org.uk/public/event/events.aspx>

Membership of NGA

If you have found this bulletin useful, please consider joining the NGA. We have two levels of membership for schools: Standard (£77 per year) or GOLD (£260 per year). Both memberships will cover the school for up to 25 governors/trustees, giving them access to a wealth of resources online.

Standard membership benefits

- Access to all of the Guidance Centre online for up to 25 governors/trustees
- Two copies of *Governing Matters* to the school, and three to the home address of named governors
- One free place at regional meetings
- One free place at national conferences
- A weekly newsletter for all governors
- NGA guides at 50% off

GOLD membership benefits

- Access to all of the Guidance Centre online for up to 25 governors/trustees
- Two copies of *Governing Matters* to the school, and one to the home address every governor
- Three free places at all the NGA events
- A weekly newsletter for all governors
- Access to the NGA legal advice service *GOLDline*
- Free copies of *Welcome to Governance* for every new governor
- One free copy of *The Chair's Handbook*