

Notes to agenda item 8

NGA Clerks' Advisory Group meeting on 1 December 2016, Birmingham

Points discussed:

- Clerking Matters campaign - feedback on the clerking pages on the NGA website was sought (varied opinions); not everyone is using the Twitter feed and apparently Clerk to Governors feed hasn't been very active; other options of keeping clerks informed were explored
- Update from AGM - the NGA Executive Board agreed amendments to their articles that are now with the Charity Commission - change of name for NGA (to National Governance Association) to include Clerks; change to the trustees board structure - Clerk will be able to sit on the Board (next election round); change to the election process for the Chair.
- Clerks' Competency Framework - table discussion on the proposed framework; two representative from DfE were present. We have been told that this was a very first draft and shouldn't be shared widely.
- Discussion on MATs - again table discussion - feedback/comments were collected by NGA (all in all - one size doesn't fit all)
- DBS checks - interesting discussion around different policy/practices depending on the LA and area you are in. Gill is going to look into the DBS a little bit further and seek further clarification around DBS checks for Clerks - article will be published in their magazine
- Clerking Matters - different suggestions for future articles were discussed - i.e. clerking of specialist meetings: exclusions, disciplinary etc.
- Clerks' Conference - ready for booking

NCOGS response to "The Governance Professionals' Competency Framework" draft December 2016

(We were part of this feedback and the initial conversation with DfE representatives on 1 December 2016)

This is the response submitted to the DfE. Thank you to those colleagues who sent me feedback. The DfE response to the consultation is expected in January.

"NCOGS welcomes the document as evidence of the DfE's ongoing commitment to the importance of the role of the clerk to effective governance of schools, whatever their structural arrangements. We agree that the guidance is appropriately targeted and is supportive of both individual professional development and focus, and should also assist boards and managers of governor clerking services with recruitment, CPD and appraisal. Indeed, it may be helpful to be explicit about this in the introduction to the document, not least to better encourage an absolute expectation of appraisal as entitlement for the individual clerk and of benefit to the board too. However, whilst the renaming of the clerk as "governance professional" may well be intended to signal a higher status and function, it is in our view much more likely to lead to confusion and NCOGS strongly urges the retention of the job title "clerk", or "professional clerk".

NCOGS is concerned that to a degree the expectations of the clerk are not appropriate, and are also unrealistic, perhaps because of the attempt to have common competencies with those for governors/ trustees. Examples of this are in the strategic leadership section and accountabilities sections, where the role of the clerk is more to influence the behaviours of others, whilst working collaboratively with them, and offering advice as the "governance specialist". The clerk can and should be tenacious and in the case of any noncompliance

around governance requirements be ready to be insistent, but it is difficult to see how they can “ensure” actions agreed are implemented, since the clerk does not exercise power as such. The section on compliance also contains some arguably unreasonably high expectations on a clerk’s knowledge, rather than simply awareness that these are areas where policy should be in place and its impact reviewed, calling upon specialist knowledge in so doing. The clerk should be expected and able to support the chair in evaluating the overall effectiveness of the board, but the wording in the evaluation section reads as if this is a shared responsibility; surely it is one for the chair (and the board itself, collectively).

The reference to working with “external” stakeholders (“people” section) needs to be clarified. Clerks should only be doing this if it is part of transparent, agreed by the board requests or processes.

Given the range of job descriptions clerks currently operate under, some of which are outdated (and never appropriate), it would be useful to include a model role description and person specification as this might influence improved consistency nationally. The NGA model would be a good starting point. The document should also be used to reference the current national clerk’s programme and how to access it.

Finally, there are several typographical errors in the draft; no doubt they will be remedied in the revised draft following this consultation.”