

# The right people around the table

A guide to recruiting and retaining  
school governors and trustees



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### A note about terminology in this guide

- **Governor:** those appointed or elected to serve on a maintained school governing body.
- **Trustee:** those appointed or elected to serve on the trust board. In single academy trusts, these are often referred to as governors.
- **School:** also refers to academies, free schools, nurseries, pupil referral units and groups of schools.
- **Governing board or board:** an overarching term which includes both governing bodies and trust boards, as well as academy committees.

In partnership with:



# Introduction

This National Governance Association (NGA) guide is designed to support governing boards and clerks in their vital role of ensuring that the board has the right blend of knowledge and skills to enable it to govern effectively. It will take you through the journey from evaluating your current board to planning and carrying out the recruitment process. By highlighting useful resources along the way, we hope this guide will provide everything you need to find skilled and committed people to lead your school. There are currently 250,000 volunteer governors and trustees governing in state funded schools in England – we hope that the right people around the table will help to grow that number.

This guide covers:

- Evaluating: skills, composition and current practice
- Recruiting: attracting good candidates
- Appointing: interviewing and references
- Inducting: training and support
- Succession planning: moving on and ensuring leadership

The journey does not begin when your governing board finds itself with a vacancy. It is a cycle that begins with evaluating what knowledge and skills you already have and then making a decision about who you need now and in the future. Time spent getting the right person is time well spent.

Consider the role each member of the governing board should play in the leadership of your school. Building a successful team is about achieving balance and diversity in skills and experiences and then investing in the development of people. When you get the right person, it will not only have a positive impact on the rest of the board but also on the school and the wider community. Effective governance is vital to school improvement, so let's get started.

## Eight elements of effective governance

NGA has identified eight elements which research and practice tell us are essential for good governance.

- 1 the right people around the table
- 2 understanding their role and responsibilities
- 3 good chairing
- 4 professional clerking
- 5 good relationships based on trust
- 6 knowing the school – the data, the staff, the parents, the children, the community
- 7 committed to asking challenging questions
- 8 confident to have courageous conversations in the interests of children and young people

## About Inspiring Governance

Inspiring Governance is a free online recruitment service which connects volunteers interested in becoming governors and trustees with schools that need them. All governors and trustees recruited through Inspiring Governance receive 12 months free support from NGA.

Look out for tips throughout this guide which explain how Inspiring Governance can help you in the recruitment process. Inspiring Governance is funded by the Department for Education. It is run by the charity Education and Employers in partnership with NGA, with support from Academy Ambassadors, the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) and the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT).

[www.inspiringgovernance.org](http://www.inspiringgovernance.org)

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# Evaluating: skills, composition and current practice

**The chair (as leader of the governing board), with the support of the clerk (as constitutional and procedural adviser), is responsible for the capability of the whole governing board. This involves evaluating the range of knowledge and skills on the board; the structures; current practice; and whether everyone is being utilised in the best way.**

It also means recognising any training needs and whether new governors or trustees are needed now or as part of a succession plan for the future. If you are governing at academy level within a multi academy trust (MAT) then this may need to be conducted as part of a trust-wide exercise.

All governors and trustees should have relevant skills and experiences to contribute to the work of the governing board, which collectively needs to have a range of backgrounds and competences appropriate to its responsibilities.

## Three core functions of a governing board

1. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
2. Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the performance management of staff
3. Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent

As well as carrying out the three core functions, governors and trustees must be prepared to adopt the seven principles of public life – the Nolan principles.

1. **Selflessness** – Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.
2. **Integrity** – Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.
3. **Objectivity** – Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
4. **Accountability** – Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.
5. **Openness** – Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.
6. **Honesty** – Holders of public office should be truthful.
7. **Leadership** – Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

Source: Gov.uk, The 7 principles of public life

In addition, some essential attributes of good governors and trustees are:

- **Committed** – Devoting the required time and energy to the role and being ambitious to achieve the best possible outcomes for young people. Prepared to give time, skills and knowledge to developing themselves and others in order to create highly effective governance.
- **Confident** – Of an independent mind, able to lead and contribute to courageous conversations, to express opinions and to play an active role on the board.
- **Curious** – Possessing an enquiring mind and an analytical approach. Understanding the value of meaningful questioning.
- **Challenging** – Providing appropriate challenge to the status quo, not taking information or data at face value and always seeking to improve things.
- **Collaborative** – Prepared to listen to and work in partnership with others and understanding the importance of building strong working relationships within the board and with executive leaders, staff, parents and carers, pupils, the local community and employers.
- **Critical** – Understanding the value of critical friendship which enables challenge and support. Self-reflective, pursuing learning and development opportunities to improve their own and whole board effectiveness.
- **Creative** – Able to challenge conventional wisdom and be open-minded about new approaches to problem-solving. Recognising the value of innovation and creative thinking to organisational development and success.

Volunteers can bring many competencies that will be useful to a governing board. Some of these stem from education such as knowledge of the techniques and strategies used to measure teaching quality, pupil progress and attainment, and special needs. Business or professional skills are also of value to governing boards: financial management and accountancy; organisational change management; legal; human resources; property and estates management; procurement and contracting services; project management; equal opportunities; quality assurance and service improvement; risk management; health and safety; marketing and public relations; ICT; creativity.

## Looking at current skills

In January 2017, the Department for Education published a new competency framework for governance. This document categorises 200-plus competencies, knowledge, skills and behaviours needed for effective governance in schools, academies and MATs. It is intended to help with things like board performance reviews, identifying training needs, succession planning and induction. It may also help you prepare interview questions. It is not a checklist though and NGA advises that boards use friendlier documents like NGA's skills audit, which combines the core aspects of the framework with the priceless experience and feedback of our members to inform the knowledge, experiences, skills and behaviours.

“Boards should carry out regular audits of the skills they possess in the light of the skills and competences they need, taking account of the department's competency framework for governance.”

Department for Education  
Governance Handbook, January 2017

The board's clerk can carry out the audit for the board and we recommend that you do this annually. By using the competency framework, a skills audit and some analysis, you will get a good overview of the skills your governing board has. Many governors and trustees will have more than one of these skills but if there is a shortage in one area across the whole team, this may need to be rectified either by training or by recruiting someone to the board with the necessary skills, or both.

## Resources

To help you identify the skills of your current governing board, use NGA's skills audit and matrix. There are two models available, one for governors and trustees in single schools, and one for those governing in MATs.

- Skills audit – use this to identify the knowledge, experience, skills and behaviours of each governor or trustee
- Skills matrix – use this to view the overall picture based on your results, identify areas of strength and any gaps, and to consider questions based on the results

[www.nga.org.uk/skillsaudit](http://www.nga.org.uk/skillsaudit)

## Composition of the board

Our Annual School Governance Survey 2017 tells us that the most popular board size is between 11 and 15 governors/ trustees, which is the case for 52% of respondents. 37% of respondents stated that their governing board comprised 10 governors/ trustees or fewer whilst 10% stated their board has 15 or more governors/ trustees. If your board is larger than 15 governors/ trustees, you should consider whether the board could be more efficient with fewer.

If some governors or trustees do not attend often or do not participate actively when they do, think about whether their place on the board is surplus to requirements, that is, if you are functioning without them. Likewise, if you have a number of vacancies on paper but are running efficiently without filling them, you should consider formalising a reduction in size.

Part of the evaluation process is considering whether the composition of the board is still fit for purpose. Questions to ask as part of the evaluation of the composition are:

- Is the board the right size? Not too big or too small?
- Do you have good debates covering the relevant issues and angles, but not so many voices that the discussion gets unwieldy or regularly inconclusive?
- Do you have enough people to carry out the board's duties?
- Do you have the right committee structure and are the same people on every committee?
- How does the composition of the board, as set out on paper, reflect the way we really work as a group?

Maintained schools have an Instrument of Government which sets out the composition of the governing board. In maintained schools, governing boards must not be smaller than seven members and must include at least two elected parent governors, the headteacher (unless the headteacher chooses not to take up the position), one elected staff governor, one local authority (LA) governor and as many additional co-opted governors as necessary. The number of co-opted governors that would also qualify to be staff governors is limited to one third of the governing board, when you include the headteacher and staff governor. Once you have decided on a composition that works for you, arrange for your clerk to contact your LA to change the Instrument of Government.


An academy trust must have a minimum of two elected parent directors. In a MAT this requirement may be fulfilled at academy committee level. The constitution of an academy trust board, and any of its academy committees

(often called local governing bodies), is laid out in its Articles of Association and scheme of delegation. Once you have decided on a composition that works for you, if the Articles of Association need to be changed the trust will need to consult its lawyers.

## Current practice

Recruiting for new governors or trustees is a timely opportunity for the board to consider its current governance practice. How effective is it? What are its strengths and weaknesses? What opportunities and threats are on the horizon? This is known as a SWOT analysis. It will also help the board to identify other sorts of support it may need in addition to new governors or trustees.

Does every governor or trustee play their part? It is good practice for the chair or the vice chair to meet with each governor or trustee once a year to discuss how the board is working, their contribution and to look ahead to the future with an eye on succession.



Using Inspiring Governance, you can search for volunteers by their skills and experience; handy if you need to fill a skills gap or need certain knowledge to deliver your strategy.

## Resources



To review their work many governing boards use:

- 20 Key Questions for Governing Boards [www.nga.org.uk/20questions](http://www.nga.org.uk/20questions)
- 21 Key Questions for Multi Academy Trust Boards [www.nga.org.uk/21questions](http://www.nga.org.uk/21questions)

Published by the All Party Parliamentary Group for Education Governance and Leadership.

## Balance and diversity

Governing boards do not reflect the diversity of the population, especially in terms of ethnicity and age. Our Annual School Governance Survey 2017 found that 94% of respondents gave their ethnic group as white, whilst just 10% of respondents were aged under 40. Is your governing board as diverse as it should be? Does your governing board reflect the diversity of your school community?

Diverse and inclusive boards can bring fresh perspectives to the way a school is governed. Governing boards are critical in setting the culture for equality and diversity to thrive. Having a governing board that is reflective of (but not representatives of) the community it serves can help them make better decisions in the interest of all pupils. They help governing boards to understand the cultural and religious context of the community, set an example about inclusion 'from the top down' and demonstrate a commitment to their own diversity policy. New governors or trustees from under-represented groups also bring knowledge and a different perspective that can ensure the board does not succumb to 'group think'. It is important for governors and trustees to understand that they are not on the board to represent anyone or a particular group but to use their own judgement to act in the best interests of all pupils at the school.

How to increase participation from under-represented groups:

- Be explicit that you are seeking candidates from ethnic minorities or from young adults, and explain why it is important for your school
- Use appropriate language and imagery when communicating the role
- Highlight the skills that young professionals can contribute but also gain
- Emphasise that all out of pocket expenses will be reimbursed
- Work with established community groups, specialist media and community figures
- Explain that training and support will be provided, and that knowledge of the education system is not a prerequisite
- Describe what governance is and why it is needed in schools, giving reassurance that it is a positive role
- Consider how your board can do things differently to appeal to a more diverse, busy audience
- Reflect on your recruitment process – what barriers are there and how may these be overcome? Perhaps a less formal chat before a formal interview may make people who are uncertain whether the role is for them feel more welcome

### Everyone On Board: join our campaign

From spring 2018, NGA is running a campaign which aims to increase the diversity of governing boards. To help us deliver a successful campaign, we need governors and trustees who represent the diverse cultures and age groups in our society to share their experiences with others, and for governing boards who are already diverse to share their advice with others. If you are interested in taking part, please email [inspiringgovernance@nga.org.uk](mailto:inspiringgovernance@nga.org.uk).

### Are you a governor or trustee aged under 40?

Our Young Governors' Network is here to help you connect with other young governors, to help you share your experiences and learn from others, and to assist you in accessing resources to improve your own practice.

[www.nga.org.uk/YGN](http://www.nga.org.uk/YGN)



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# Recruiting: attracting good candidates

Once you have evaluated the skills on your governing board you will have a good idea of any gaps in knowledge, experience, skills and behaviours that you need to plug. You can find skilled volunteers in your local community through Inspiring Governance and by using local communication channels. Making people aware of the opportunity to be a governor or trustee in your school and making the recruitment process as slick as possible are key to attracting volunteers. In our experience, people looking to join a governing board will consider more than one school so it is important to be flexible in accommodating their visits. When you do find a candidate you would like to join your governing board, move quickly in formally inviting them to join you.

## Setting up a panel

When the governing board has decided to recruit, they will also need to decide who will take the lead. This may depend on how many governors or trustees are needed – if you have more than one new governor or trustee to find, you may decide to set up a task group to plan and supervise the process on behalf of the board. The clerk should carry out the administrative work.

The panel can be made up of three or four governors or trustees, including the chair or vice chair. Its remit will depend on the scale of the recruitment but most will include:

- Agreeing the role description where one has not already been approved
- Deciding where, how and for what duration to advertise
- Informing applicants about what is involved, including key responsibilities, time commitment and the requirement to undertake an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check
- Keeping the chair informed of progress (if they are not part of the group)
- Shortlisting, interviewing and presenting their recommendations to the board
- Taking up references
- Compiling the induction pack

If the board does not have the power to appoint, its role is to liaise with the appointing body and decide how the board can help. For example, it may be that the board recommends candidates for appointment. The appointing body should welcome such cooperation from the board. It is also important to note that the formal decision on the appointment of new governors or trustees cannot be delegated.

For those vacancies which can be filled by the board, the panel will coordinate the process from beginning until end. The clerk should be the single point of contact for candidates looking to find out more information.

The school's reception will need to be informed that a board recruitment process has started. Leave the clerk's details for any enquiries to be redirected. The success of the recruitment process will depend on this journey being as smooth as possible for the volunteer.

### Resources

Use NGA's model role descriptions for governors and trustees to help volunteers understand the role – you can use these when advertising any vacancies.

[www.nga.org.uk/governor-role](http://www.nga.org.uk/governor-role)



## The recruitment process: different governor categories

The recruitment process is different to the co-opting or associate category for certain types of governors and trustees.

### Parent and staff governor elections

For elected staff and parent categories of governor there will need to be an election. Your school should have a procedure for how this is to be run, including who will oversee the process (normally the headteacher) and who will act as the returning officer (normally the clerk.)

When you call an election and seek candidates, be clear about the skills needed by the governing board which have been identified by your skills audit. Highlight the time commitment, training requirements, role and responsibilities and code of conduct. It is a good idea to arrange a meeting with interested candidates to explain the role in more detail.

### Local Authority

All maintained schools must have one LA governor. LA governors may be any person the LA chooses to nominate for the role, but often the LA is interested in volunteers that have approached the council to be a school governor, or candidates that the school itself suggests. Academies can still ask the LA to nominate possible trustees or academy committee members, but in both instances the LA nominates the candidate and the governing board chooses to appoint them following an interview, which means that the governing board decides whether the candidate has the skills necessary to contribute effectively or not.

When approaching the LA – usually the governor services unit – specify the skills that your board needs in a candidate and the time commitment. You should reject any LA nominated governor if they do not have the skills or are unable to make the commitment. If you need an

LA governor you can always take the initiative. Source the volunteer yourself and ask the LA to nominate them.

Some LA governors may also work for the LA but it is important to remember that they do not represent the council when sitting on the board, nor do they represent a political party.

### Foundation body

Foundation governors and trustees are either appointed to the governing board or they assume the role because they hold a certain position. Foundation governors and trustees are appointed by either the religious or foundation body to preserve the ethos and character of the school, including where the school has a religious character.

The school's Instrument of Government will set out how many foundation governors you should have. In academies, the number of trustees will be set out in the Articles of Association.

The clerk to the governing board of a school with a religious character will inform the founding body that there is a vacancy and ask that they make an appointment to join their board. Such a nominee, once appointed, is tasked with upholding the religious character of the school in addition to their other responsibilities as a governor. It is the responsibility of the person entitled to make the appointment to ensure that their nominee has the skills needed to contribute to the effective governance and success of the school.

If the vacancy is for a foundation governor or trustee appointed by the diocese, parish or other type of foundation, your skills audit will be invaluable in informing them about the type of governor or trustee that you are looking for.

Type of school	Power to appoint governors or trustees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Foundation</li> <li>■ Voluntary Aided</li> <li>■ Voluntary Controlled</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Governing board and/ or founding body</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Governing board</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Academy, Multi Academy Trust and Free School</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Members or trustee board, founding body or sponsor</li> </ul>

## Finding good candidates: where to look

**Inspiring Governance** is a free online recruitment service which connects volunteers interested in becoming governors and trustees with state funded schools in England.

Recruiters (that is chairs, clerks and others) register on the platform to access the database of thousands of volunteers who have signed up to become a governor or trustee. There is even a handy option to sign up as a multi-recruiter user for MATs, LAs, federations, dioceses, national leaders of governance and others who may be searching for volunteers on behalf of a number of schools.

Once registered, recruiters can either browse for volunteers or post a vacancy. Volunteers can be searched by their locality and skills using Inspiring Governance's innovative mapping feature. Alternatively, recruiters with a specific requirement can create a vacancy on the platform, searchable by volunteers. When you find a volunteer of interest, you can make contact through the platform and invite them to discuss the opportunity with you. If there are no available volunteers that meet your criteria at the moment, we recommend that you check back regularly as new volunteers are signing up daily.

If you find your perfect candidate through Inspiring Governance, NGA will provide them with free support and expert guidance for 12 months. This will help them feel confident and capable in their new role, and give them the essential knowledge and skills to govern effectively.

The support includes:

- a complimentary copy of an NGA induction guide – Welcome to Governance or Welcome to a Multi Academy Trust (dependent on type of school)
- access to NGA's extensive online guidance centre containing a wealth of governance resources
- dedicated telephone and email support – staffed by professional advisers – to walk you through your first year
- NGA's weekly e-newsletter featuring the latest education news and policy updates
- a monthly 'Hot Topics' email designed especially for new governors and trustees

- access to eight high-quality, in-depth induction modules on NGA Learning Link to support their governance development with flexible e-learning at a time and pace that suits them
- if aged under 40, membership of the Young Governors' Network

If your school has a complex recruitment need, contact Inspiring Governance's central support team, who will then put you in touch with your nearest regional manager.

Inspiring Governance is run by the charity Education and Employers in partnership with NGA. It works with Academy Ambassadors, ASCL, NAHT and others. Inspiring Governance is funded by the Department for Education and is completely free for all users.

e [enquiries@inspiringgovernance.org](mailto:enquiries@inspiringgovernance.org)  
t 0207 566 4880  
[www.inspiringgovernance.org](http://www.inspiringgovernance.org)

“ We have now found governors with skills that can help to raise specific standards. There is absolutely no question – we couldn't have done this without Inspiring Governance. ”

Chair of Governors, maintained secondary school, Birmingham

There are other national programmes working to place volunteers in schools as governors and trustees:

**Academy Ambassadors** is a free, bespoke recruitment service matching senior, director-level candidates from the business sectors to the boards of MATs across England. MATs register with Academy Ambassadors to access the services of an expert adviser who will help the trust to compile a role description to advertise the specific skills required to enhance the board. Desired skill sets typically include finance, law, audit, risk, HR, change and growth management.

The trust is provided with a list of shortlisted candidates and the trust leads the recruitment process. Those appointed through Academy Ambassadors receive an induction pack and access to an annual Board Development conference. Please note that the service is only available to MAT boards with three or more schools, and not to LA schools or academy committees within MATs. Find out more about the free service at [www.academyambassadors.org](http://www.academyambassadors.org).

**Do-it** is a national database of volunteering opportunities and potential volunteers. It covers a wide range of roles and sectors but does include school governance. You can create a volunteering opportunity for a school governor or trustee online at [www.do-it.org](http://www.do-it.org).

Most towns and cities in England have well-established volunteer centres, placing volunteers where they are needed around the community. Volunteer centres are often a good place to start looking for volunteers. Find your local volunteer centre at [www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering/find-a-volunteer-centre](http://www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering/find-a-volunteer-centre).

## Finding good candidates: promoting your vacancy

For some categories of governor or trustee, such as elected parent or staff, the recruitment process will need to be local because the pool of candidates needs to come from the school's community. However for other categories, to attract candidates it is important to promote your vacancy well.

“ With Inspiring Governance, you get access to people you just don't realise are part of your community. ”

Chair of Governors, secondary academy, Poole

## School communications

Schools usually have a website and this is a great place to include information about the vacancy and how to apply. Speak to your school to see if they can put this in a prominent place, perhaps on the homepage. Channels that are more traditional include writing a letter home to parents and guardians, placing adverts around the school for example the reception area or outdoor noticeboard, and including information in the school newsletter.

The main audience of these communications will be the parent body, the extended family of pupils and their social circle. However, the parent body is likely to have a wide range of people with relevant skills and there is also scope for the board to co-opt new governors or trustees whom are parents.

## Social media

Does your school have a social media account? Twitter and Facebook have active communities and are likely to be the most useful places to post the vacancy. Provide a clear link to further information on your website, and remember to monitor and respond to any comments. If you or any of your governing board use LinkedIn, you may also want to share the link and some information with your professional network. Pages, groups and hashtags connecting local communities tend to get a lot of interest, so take advantage of this by sharing your post in these groups, or ask popular local pages to share the post for you.

On these channels visual imagery works well, so try to attract attention to your post by using photographs from your school, information graphics (there are plenty of free online tools to create these) or even a short video.

## Local media

Getting your vacancy in to the local media will give it the widest reach. You could submit an article to your local or community newspaper, or parish or lifestyle magazine (either print or online) and ask them to include it, or you could place an advert. Try contacting local radio stations as they are often willing to report community stories and appeals.

For a different approach, why not make your governor or trustee vacancy in to a story. You could send a press release to your local publication about an achievement at the school, finishing off with an appeal for governors or trustees to join your governing board, or you could announce an upcoming project and make a call for new governors or trustees to join your board to help you deliver it.

## Community spaces

Community spaces like places of worship, shops, the post office, supermarkets, libraries, pubs, and sports and social clubs often have notice boards. You may be able to place a notice here for a small fee or free of charge.

## Write a letter

Contact potential governors and trustees directly by writing a letter and dropping it through their letterbox. This will involve a little bit of legwork and a small cost of printing the letters but may be well worth the investment, especially in rural communities. You could test this by starting with an initial run of a few hundred letters, widening your search until you find some volunteers.

## Headhunting

Sometimes the best way to net the ideal candidate is by drawing up a list of people you think would fit the bill and targeting them yourself. Picking up the phone and asking outright is quick and effective. It is, however, important to be clear that at this point you are just seeking their interest; they will still need to apply and be interviewed formally. The board needs to ensure that it conducts this sort of recruitment transparently. The board must not become a clique or be perceived to be so.

## Employers

Local employers are a great source of new governors and trustees because their employees often have many transferable skills to bring from their professional life. Get in touch directly by sending an email or giving them a call, and emphasise the useful skills that volunteers will gain too. Another route to local professionals could be through your local chambers of commerce.

## Local universities

If your school has a university nearby, you could get in touch with them to see if they will share your vacancy with their staff, students and alumni. Some university alumni will settle locally, whilst postgraduate students, who are also more settled, may have plenty to offer your governing board.

## Finding good candidates: what to say

Remember, people want experiences that are interesting, challenging, worthwhile and rewarding. They also want to make a difference to others.

Consider the motivations of the people you are talking to. For channels such as local newsletters and community places, messages about giving something back to the community and making a difference to young people may be most effective. Alternatively, if getting in touch with employers or universities, emphasise the opportunity for volunteers to use their professional skills in a different context and to gain board level experience.

Highlight the positive and rewarding contribution that governors and trustees make to the community and the continuing professional development on offer for those who volunteer. Emphasise that volunteers' skills will help the governing board to be more effective which leads to school improvement. In turn this produces improved outcomes for pupils and therefore extends the opportunities available to them.

A lack of awareness amongst potential volunteers about the opportunity to govern and a lack of understanding about what school governance is – and who can do it – is one of the biggest barriers to finding volunteers. Ensure that you make it clear that anyone who is over 18 can be a school governor or trustee (unless they are disqualified) and that they do not need to be a parent.

Explain what governors and trustees do in practical terms – there are the three core responsibilities but what will volunteers actually be doing in your school? People like to see how they can make an impact and translating this in to practical actions is one way to make this clear.

According to the National Council of Voluntary Organisations, time is the biggest barrier to volunteering. Respondents to the Community Life survey 2015-16 mostly cited work commitments or childcare commitments as the reasons why they do not volunteer. Therefore it is important to set realistic expectations about how much time a volunteer will need to be able to give – we estimate that this is between five and eight hours per month.

Some people may perceive that experience in, or an understanding of, education is required to be a governor or trustee. Make clear that training is provided and that support is available. Knowledge of the education system is not a prerequisite: what is needed is someone with the necessary skills, attitude and time to contribute.

It is good practice to inform potential volunteers that governors or trustees will receive out of pocket expenses incurred as a result of fulfilling their role. To know that caring for elderly dependents or children will not be a barrier to joining the board is an important piece of information for those with such responsibilities.

As well as providing information about being a governor or a trustee, and the benefits it can bring, why not add a quote from someone on your governing board, sharing their experiences and what they love about being a governor or trustee in your school.

Finally, remember to give a clear call to action – what you want anybody who is interested to do next. This may be to get in touch by email or phone for an initial chat, to complete an application form, or even pass the information on to someone they know who may be interested. The simpler, the better – reducing the barriers to participation is key to attracting volunteers.

Before sending your communication out, it could be useful to get someone from outside the education sector to read it and give you feedback. This will help to ensure it is clear and interesting to someone who is not familiar with the world of school governance.

The Inspiring Governance website contains lots of case studies and reports about the experiences of school governors and trustees, and the benefits that volunteering brings, which you can refer to in your communications.

[www.inspiringgovernance.org](http://www.inspiringgovernance.org)



# Appointing: interviewing and references

Having promoted your vacancy, you now have some candidates and are ready for the interview process, taking up references and making a co-opted appointment.

The panel should review all the applicants against the set criteria (this is where you compare what you have with what you asked for) and reject any unsuitable candidates. After the closing date, the panel should reduce the candidates to a shortlist depending on how many applications are received. The shortlisted candidates will be those whose knowledge, experience and skills best match the requested criteria and add the most value. These candidates can now be invited to interview.

## Interview

Before recommending a candidate to the full governing board for approval, the panel should interview the candidate(s) to make sure that they are suitable to join the board. This also gives the candidate an opportunity to ask questions and make an informed decision about whether governing at your school is right for them.

During the interview you should take time to explain the ethos and values of the school. You should also outline the strategic priorities. Be sure to highlight the distinction between the roles of the governing board (strategic) and the school's leadership (operational) to ensure that the potential appointee understands their remit.

Explain why you have shortlisted them and be upfront about your journey as a governing board and as a school. Invite the candidate to ask you any questions they may have.

Now is the time to be clear about the role and responsibilities, training requirements, time commitment and requirement for an enhanced DBS check. If your school is maintained by the LA, you might want to point out that if the candidate is employed, under Section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996, they are entitled to 'reasonable time off' to undertake public duties; this

## Interview questions



Interview questions should be relevant to the role and to the skills you are looking for. Here are some suggestions:

1. Why are you looking to be a governor/trustee?
2. What attracted you to this school/trust/role?
3. What experience, knowledge or skills would you bring to the role?
4. Our school is dedicated to improving educational provision for children and young people. In what ways would you hope to be able to support us in meeting our goals?
5. What experience (if any) do you have of developing an organisation?
6. What opportunities or challenges does the current political, social and economic environment present?
7. Which professional/voluntary role have you enjoyed the most and why?
8. What do you consider to be your strengths and weaknesses?
9. How would colleagues or peers describe you?
10. What do you understand the role of a governor/trustee to be?
11. What is your understanding of conflict of interests?
12. If you felt uncomfortable with a decision that has been made by the governing board, how would you raise and discuss the matter?
13. Will you be happy to abide by the Nolan principles of public life and code of conduct this governing board operates under?
14. What do you consider to be your greatest achievement to date?



includes school governance. Reasonable time off is not defined in law and individuals need to negotiate with their employer how much time will be allowed. Prospective governors or trustees might approach their employer about time off work prior to their appointment to ensure that they can fulfil their role.

It might be prudent during the interview to call attention to your expenses policy. NGA supports proper payment of expenses, and recommends that governing boards should have an expenses policy. Payments can cover incidental expenses, such as travel to training events and childcare, but not loss of earnings.

After the interview you should inform the candidate(s) of the next steps in the process and the timeframe in which they can expect to hear the outcome. You should aim to make a decision as soon as is practicably possible after the last interview.

After the interview, but prior to appointment, it may be worthwhile inviting the volunteer to observe a governing board or committee meeting. This will allow them to see how the governing board works in practice, what their fellow governors or trustees are like and to decide whether it is for them before they make a commitment.

## References and other checks

Take up references before making the recommendation to the full governing board. It gives you someone else's view on the candidate's character, reputation and trustworthiness. Open references should not be accepted but if the referee's details are recorded with notes of the call it is fine to accept a reference obtained by phone. If the candidate has governed at another school, make sure to get a reference from that school. Governors and trustees should not serve on more than two governing boards at the same time. This is to prevent individuals having undue influence over a number of schools.

A declaration of interests form should be completed by the individual to declare conflicts of interest. All governing boards are required to publish on their website a register of relevant business and financial interests, including governance roles in other educational institutions.

Conflicts of interest are not limited to financial interests – they also apply to conflicts of loyalty. The guiding rule is to avoid all conflicts of interest if possible before they become

a problem, thus avoiding having to manage them later. If in doubt, a rule of thumb is to avoid appointing close friends and relations of current governors and trustees. The Nolan principles incorporate this and any new board member must be willing to abide by them.

## Making the appointment

All schools must carry out DBS checks on governors and trustees. Volunteers should know that they will be required to undergo an enhanced DBS check and that their appointment is subject to this.

In maintained schools there must be a formal proposal to the full governing board, and the outcome of the decision on whether to appoint the candidate for the co-opted governor category must be recorded in the minutes. In academies, the process will be outlined in the Articles of Association.

It is best practice not to invite the candidate to a full governing board meeting at which the vote on their appointment will take place. Afterwards you can inform the candidate(s) of the outcome. Do remember to inform the unsuccessful as well as the successful candidates. Depending on the cycle of your meetings you can then arrange for new governors or trustees to attend the next appropriate meeting, which may be a committee meeting.

Academy trusts are required to inform the Department for Education when certain positions are vacated or appointed to. These include members, trustees and members of academy committees.

After any appointment the clerk must arrange for the school's website to be updated with certain information including the register of interests. They will also need to update the government's register of schools and colleges in England – visit [www.get-information-schools.service.gov.uk](http://www.get-information-schools.service.gov.uk) to do this.

### Reminder

If you are an NGA member, remember to add new governors or trustees to your membership so that they can access all the benefits.

t **0121 237 3780**

e **membership@nga.org.uk**

**[www.nga.org.uk/membership](http://www.nga.org.uk/membership)**



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# Inducting: training and support

**It is essential that governing boards are committed to training new governors and trustees. In our Annual School Governance Survey 2017, 95% of respondents agreed that induction training for new governors and trustees should be mandatory. High-quality training for governors and trustees is crucial in raising the effectiveness of governance, so new recruits should be in no doubt about what their powers and responsibilities are and how to carry them out.**

When joining the board the level of information can feel daunting even if the volunteer has prior experience of governance. To help make sense of it, every new governor or trustee should be given the following basic information:

- A copy of the school's Instrument of Government or Articles of Association and scheme of delegation
- The school's current prospectus (if it has one) or a link to information on the school's website
- Information about the performance standards in the school including login details for Analyse School Performance, Fischer Family Trust (FFT) Data Dashboard or other data sources
- The school and governing board's most recent self-evaluation or facilitated review
- In academies, a copy of the funding agreement
- The code of conduct (NGA recommends that all governing boards adopt a code of conduct)
- A calendar of meetings for the year, both for the full governing board and its committees
- The current strategy document including key priorities
- The most recent Ofsted inspection report
- Access to the policies adopted by the governing board
- A copy of or link to the Department for Education's Governance Handbook
- A list of the governing board's committees and terms of reference
- A list of the members of the governing board (and trust board where applicable)

## Training

Induction training should be tailored to the individual. For example, governors or trustees who have served on boards in other walks of life may understand the principles of good governance but will not necessarily understand education jargon, school funding or the curriculum offer. New governors and trustees should feel able to ask questions about these issues and their experience in other fields should be respected.

Ongoing training for governors and trustees is crucial and the role of the clerk in organising and facilitating that training should be made clear to new recruits. The clerk will hold a record of all training undertaken by members of the governing board and should, along with the chair, plan training in keeping with the individual's strengths and weaknesses and account for any committees they sit on.

It is beneficial for new governors and trustees to go on external training courses. Many LAs provide packages of training, but there are national programmes too and you should shop around for the best price and quality package. E-learning is also a useful way for new recruits to access convenient training; again you should shop around for the best package as price and quality varies.

For training in data, many providers such as FFT either host demonstrations online or provide detailed guidance on their websites. Governing boards can also obtain information directly where schools use a specific provider or detailed tracking system to collect their own data in order to monitor pupil attainment and progress.

## Support

Many chairs allocate an experienced board member as a mentor for new governors or trustees. This can be extremely beneficial to new recruits and provides a way for them to ask questions outside the formality of a meeting.

Be deliberate about who you choose to be a mentor and ensure they know what is expected of them. Mentors set an example for how board members should behave. They should be able to ask good questions, have the time to listen and meet with their mentees, provide motivation and encourage reflection. You may want to share this role around the board, or it may be useful to assign this to the vice chair.

The clerk to the governing board is also an invaluable source of help and support and their responsibilities should be made clear so that new governors and trustees feel comfortable asking them for information and advice.

Every new governor or trustee appointed through Inspiring Governance receives a free copy of NGA's guide:

- Welcome to Governance (for maintained or single academy schools)
- or Welcome to a Multi Academy Trust

Just one of the benefits of NGA's free support service.

## Resources

### NGA guides

These essential guides will introduce new governors and trustees to their roles and responsibilities and are a useful reference for those with more experience.

- Welcome to Governance (for maintained or single academy schools)
- Welcome to a Multi Academy Trust

If your schools is a GOLD member of NGA, every new governor or trustee receives a complimentary copy – remember to get in touch to add new recruits to your membership.

[www.nga.org.uk/guides](http://www.nga.org.uk/guides)

## n|g|a learninglink

GOVERNORS | TRUSTEES | CLERKS

NGA Learning Link provides flexible high-quality e-learning training for new governors and trustees. Accessible anywhere, anytime and from any device, governors and trustees can undertake learning at a pace convenient to them.

There are eight in-depth induction modules and over 40 bitesize modules. The induction modules are:

- **Governance:** your role, your responsibilities, your organisation
- **Your organisation:** understanding school structures and what children should learn
- **Strategy:** living your values, reaching your vision, managing the risk
- **Progress and attainment:** using data to improve educational outcomes
- **Resources:** making the most of what you've got
- **Working together:** building the team and improving the organisation
- **Compliance:** assuring your organisation, keeping it safe, secure and solvent
- **Effectiveness:** governance making an impact, changing lives

For more information and pricing, visit [www.nga.org.uk/learninglink](http://www.nga.org.uk/learninglink)

All governors and trustees recruited through Inspiring Governance receive complimentary access to eight in-depth e-learning induction modules on NGA Learning Link to support their governance development. Chairs and clerks should encourage their new recruits to utilise this resource.

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# Succession planning: moving on and ensuring leadership

## Retention

If your governing board is seeing a high turnover of governors or trustees, consider these points to check your governing board is attractive to volunteers:

- Take the governance of your school seriously. Seriously enough to have a role description, person specification and code of conduct to demonstrate who you are looking for and what is expected of them.
- Look at your track record. Do new governors or trustees come for the first meeting or two and then quietly disappear? This could be an induction issue. Make sure each new governor or trustee is mentored by a more experienced board member, has access to appropriate training and has a clear and useful induction programme.
- Look at the commitment required. Are meetings sensibly timed with board papers circulated in advance? Are there briefing notes on topical matters written for the governor or trustee audience? Are visits to the school appropriate with a strategic purpose?
- All governors and trustees should have an annual development conversation with the chair or vice chair of the board. This can help with identifying training needs and succession planning and gives the board member a chance to reflect on their own contribution.
- For chairs especially, respect and cultivate the knowledge and experience that people bring to the role. Give newer members the opportunity to speak. Reassure them that what may feel like a 'stupid question' is usually an intelligently naïve one, illuminating issues that others may assume are well understood. Encourage them to ask about unfamiliar jargon and never dismiss someone's view because education is somehow 'different.'

Retaining good governors and trustees is important. But what is also important is having a healthy cycle of new recruits. There is plenty of precedent for this in other sectors as well as in schools.

## Exit interviews

If governors or trustees do decide to leave, exit interviews are an opportunity for the departing governor or trustee to reflect on their own work and the work of the board. They also give the interviewer (normally the chair) an opportunity to provide feedback to the individual about their contribution and iron out any issues raised by their departure.

Most importantly, an exit interview is designed to enable the transfer of knowledge and experience from the departing governor or trustee to the rest of the board. Make sure you thank them for their efforts and take the time to reflect on their answers in order to make changes for the future. See examples of questions overleaf.

## Succession planning

Once a successful board mix has been achieved, it should be constantly reviewed and refreshed to ensure that the balance is maintained. Part of this is about creating a culture of governors and trustees moving on: governorship is not necessarily permanent, and the needs of the organisation and needs of the board change over time.

The standard term of office for all categories of governor or trustee is four years. NGA recommends that governors and trustees serve no more than two terms of office at any one school, that is eight years and plenty of time to make a difference. Chairs should be limited to six years in post as chair at the same school, except for exceptional circumstances.

As well as the need to move on ineffective governors or trustees, that is, those who do not meet the required competencies and behaviours, another reason to uphold the idea of a limited term of office is that good governors and trustees can be spread around the local schools system. Individual boards should avoid becoming too reliant on one person or just a few and relationships on the board should be prevented from becoming too cosy.

All leaders should give serious thought to matters of succession. With effective succession planning in place, it can be beneficial for strong governors or trustees and in particular chairs to move on to another school after a reasonable time (eg two terms of office). This can help to share expertise across the system and prevent governing bodies stagnating or individual governors/ trustees gaining too much power and influence solely through their length of service.

### Future Chairs

It can sometimes be difficult to find a person with the time and willingness to become chair of your governing board.

That is why we have created the Future Chairs recruitment service. Brought to you by Inspiring Governance and NGA, the free service helps connect high calibre individuals who have the potential to become future chairs or vice chairs with governing boards.

Simply register for Inspiring Governance and select the future chair option when posting your vacancy. In some opportunity areas, we offer a bespoke matching service – check NGA's website to see if your area is included.

Each Future Chair receives a year's free support from NGA, mentorship from an experienced chair (including national leaders of governance) and the opportunity to join an NGA Leading Governance development programme.

[www.nga.org.uk/futurechairs](http://www.nga.org.uk/futurechairs)

### Resources

For details on succession planning, as well as how to develop your team of governors or trustees, how to work effectively with the headteacher and lead the school towards improvement, see NGA's guide *The Chair's Handbook*.

[www.nga.org.uk/chairshandbook](http://www.nga.org.uk/chairshandbook)

### Exit interview questions

#### Expectations and experience

1. What caused you to think about stepping down? (If leaving before end of office)
2. Were your responsibilities characterised correctly during the interview process and induction?
3. Did you have clear goals and know what was expected of you as a governor/ trustee?
4. How did the role match your initial expectations?

#### Training and development

5. Could the way you were inducted be improved?
6. What training and development did you find most helpful and enjoyable?

#### Relationships and ways of working

7. What could you say about communication to and between governor/ trustee, and could this be improved?
8. Did you always feel welcome and encouraged to share your thoughts, concerns and questions with me or anyone on the board?

#### Leadership of the board

9. Did you receive adequate feedback about your performance during your term of office?
10. What could we do to improve the management of the board?
11. Do you feel that you had the support necessary to be a governor/ trustee? If not, what was missing?

#### Impact and making a difference

12. Did you clearly understand and feel a part of the accomplishment of the school's vision and strategy?
13. What did you like most and like least about being a governor/ trustee?
14. Would you change anything about the role?
15. What extra responsibility would you have welcomed that you were not given?

“ Firstly, it is important that we are able to recruit and train the right people with the right skill set, knowledge and experience to ensure that there is effective and confident leadership. ”

Sir David Carter, National Schools Commissioner

“ Having the right people around the table is essential for effective governance. The two competency frameworks we published for governance and clerking in 2017, together with the new governance and clerking training programmes we are funding, support boards in achieving this by identifying and building specific skills that are needed. I would encourage all boards to use the frameworks when looking to enhance and strengthen their governance. ”

Lord Agnew Kt DL, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the School System