

# Preparing your board for the future

A guide to succession planning



# Getting the basics in place

## What is succession planning?

Succession planning is about ensuring continuity within an organisation, by having the right people in the right place at the right time. Looking at this in terms of a governing board, this means recruiting new governors/trustees and encouraging learning and development.

Identifying and developing individuals in order to equip them to step in to the chairing role or vice chair, when others step down from these roles, is a process commonly known as succession planning. Succession planning ensures the availability of capable individuals to take up the reigns when the time comes.

Succession planning in all organisations is widely accepted as a positive element of people management; it encourages talent development and ensures that leadership remains energised and forward looking.

Succession planning is not something that every governing board is proactive in addressing. Where the appointment of a new chair is the result of a last minute decision, this could lead to a situation where an appointment is made based on availability or the one who has served the longest. This might not secure the best person for the role. Many long-standing chairs tell us that they cannot stand down because there is no one on the board willing and able to take on the role. This guidance is to help those chairs and governing boards to solve this problem.

For many governing boards who do think about succession planning, the practice of conducting effective succession planning remains easier to talk about and much harder to achieve. The aim of this guidance is to help governing boards to start to turn policy into practice by ensuring that succession planning remains a key part of the board's long-term practice and self-evaluation.

## Why plan for chair succession?

A successful board should be constantly reviewing and refreshing to ensure that an effective balance of skills is maintained. Part of this is about creating a culture of governors and trustees moving on in a planned positive way; governorship is not necessarily permanent, and the needs of the organisation and needs of the board change over time.

The Governance Handbook is clear that effective governing boards should “use active succession planning to ensure the board, and the whole organisation, continues to have the people and leadership it needs to remain effective.”

### Eight elements of effective governance

NGA has identified eight elements which research and practice tell us are essential for good governance. These apply to whatever type of school you govern. These eight elements are needed to transform the team of diverse people with a range of skills, experience and knowledge into a highly effective governing board.

- 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

---

## The role of the chair

The chair leads the governing board and ensures that its focus is strategic and that it meets all its legal responsibilities. A good chair will build an effective team, ensuring that all governors/trustees participate fully in meetings and committees, and will develop the knowledge, confidence and skills of the governing board. The chair needs to be well informed about local and national education issues and share this information with the governing board. They need to have a close, supportive, but not exclusive, relationship with the head.

The standard term of office for all categories of governor and trustees is four years. The National Governance Association (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, with regular reappraisal and renewals being beneficial to all schools, helping to ensure boards do not become too cosy, while helping to maintain appropriate levels of challenge.

## The election of the chair and vice-chair

All governing boards must have a chair and vice chair. There are no set rules on how the election of the chair and vice chair should be carried out. In maintained schools, any governor standing for election must withdraw from the meeting when the vote is taken. The governing board must decide what the term of office for the chair and vice chair should be. Many governing boards choose to have annual elections. No one paid to work at the school can be elected chair or vice chair.

In academies, the term of office is usually one year, as stipulated in the academy trust articles of association, although they can stand for re-election. The election usually takes place at the first meeting of the autumn term. We have developed a model procedure for the election of the chair and vice chair, which NGA members can download at [www.nga.org.uk/guidance](http://www.nga.org.uk/guidance).



# Establishing a culture of succession

## It's never too early to talk about succession

Succession planning should not just be a concept; something that we all agree is a good idea, but that fails to feature in the boards practice.

This means that chairs and clerks have a role to play in ensuring that it is a topic that is discussed in meetings. Many boards have training and development as a standing agenda item; either on the full governing board or a committee agenda. The training and development discussion should include succession planning, identifying future training needs and development opportunities. If succession is only discussed when a serving chair announces their intention to step down, it becomes reactive, unexpected and people tend to shy away from committing.

In order to create a culture of succession planning on the board, it is important to ensure the foundations are in place. The discussion around training needs and agreeing who is best placed to take over which chairing role can only

happen once the team is established and the trust has developed amongst serving governors. An essential part of establishing trust includes addressing the realities of the governing board, developing the team and being able to have honest conversations about succession.

## Reality – delivering effective governance

Sufficient time to govern is a long-standing challenge for many governors and trustees. It may be the biggest factor that deters existing governors/ trustees from stepping forward to take on the role of chair.

Consider practical steps which will allow governors/ trustees to contribute when they cannot attend a particular meeting. Ensure that governors/ trustees understand that the role does not require a significant amount of time in school and that the clerk is circulating papers with adequate time to allow them time to read, comment and contribute.

Supporting governors and trustees to fulfil their current role is the first step to helping them believe that they could take

## 1 Reality

- time
- support
- professionalism
- understanding the role
- leadership
- feeling valued

## 2 Building the team

- self evaluate
- building trust
- horizon scanning
- get to know each other
- team build
- confidence building

## 3 A culture of succession

- time for discussion
- long lead in time
- offer opportunities that are not too daunting
- role model

on a chairing role. Ensure governors and trustees attend local face-to-face training and have access to other forms of training like eLearning to help them to manage the role effectively.

Demonstrating commitment, an ability to build strong relationships, having the skills to challenge constructively and having a thorough understanding of the role are the foundations for governors and trustees to develop. By setting out the expectations and commitment required from those governing, the governing board will then be better equipped to carry out its work within the school or trust and the community. NGA offers a model code of conduct and role description to help governing boards work towards effective governance: [www.nga.org.uk](http://www.nga.org.uk)

Leadership of the governing board is critical and existing chairs need to ensure that they model good practice and lead the board in a way that ensures it achieves the balance of delivering the strategic role and accountability over the operational delivery by the senior leadership team.

### Building the team

If the governing board needs to have honest discussions about succession planning, then first you have to build the team, build the trust; then you will find it much easier to have that conversation.

Getting to know each other and individual's skills and background is vitally important. Existing chairs need to ensure all governors/ trustees contribute and feel confident enough to ask questions and check understanding. It can be helpful to meet socially, outside of meetings to welcome new volunteers in a more informal setting.

All governing boards should horizon scan and avoid becoming too inward looking; setting aside time for a vision and strategy day can really help to build relationships and focus the governing board on its strategic role.

Undertaking a board self-evaluation is also critical for the board to reflect on their strengths and focus on their areas for development.

Build the team's confidence with support, training and encouragement. Acknowledge their commitment and celebrate the success of the school or trust – people need to feel that they are achieving something and that their effort is appreciated. Thanking governors/ trustees for a job well done is so important; it builds confidence and goodwill for the future.

### Top tips

- Individuals should have a one-to-one with the chair to review their contributions and development needs at least once a year.
- Get to know each other outside of a formal setting. Volunteers have skills and experience, which may not be obvious in the meetings.
- Talk about development in meetings.
- Consider completing a 360-degree feedback questionnaire for the chair.
- Undertake a board self-evaluation exercise to highlight strengths and areas for development.

### A culture of succession

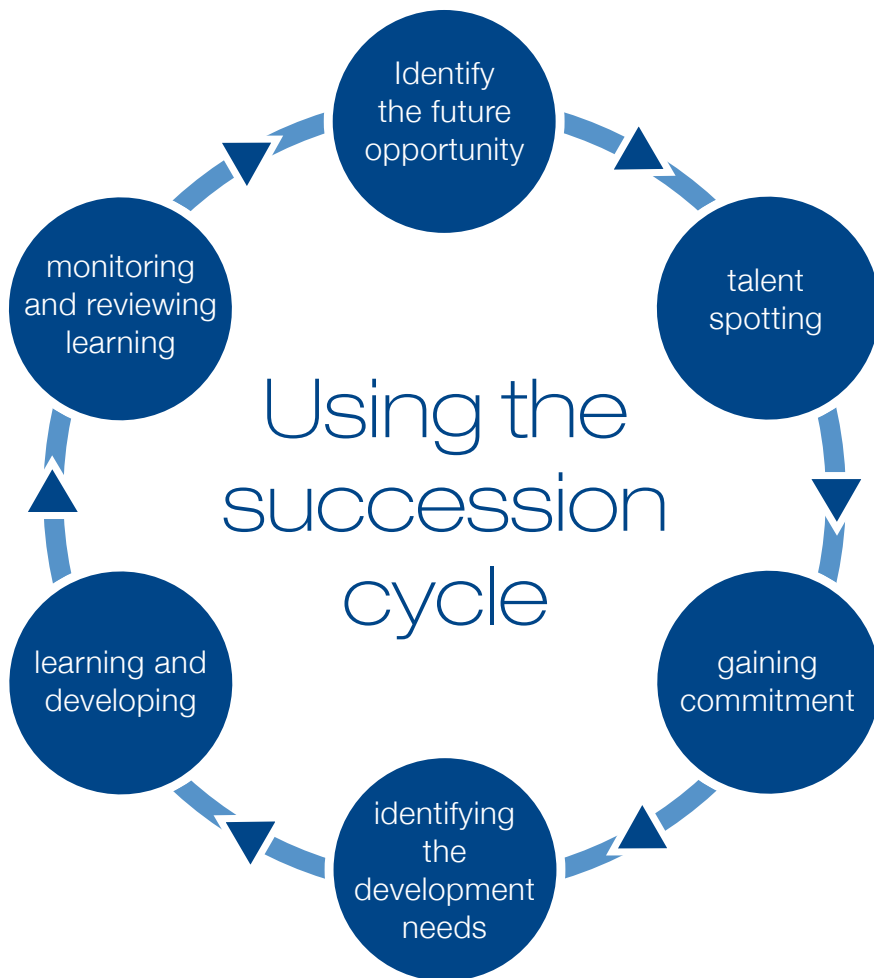
We know that some governors and trustees are fearful of taking on a chairing role and perceive it to be daunting and unachievable when put alongside their other commitments.

Breaking the role down and talking about what is actually involved can help to alleviate those concerns, but the timing of those conversations is so important; they have to be seen as honest assessments of the role and not a "sales job" because the existing chair, vice-chair or committee chair has announced that this will be their last year. The incumbent needs to model good practice and demonstrate that the role is achievable within a manageable time commitment.

Offer development opportunities which are not too daunting; work with the clerk to agree actions from the skills audit analysis, visiting the school to represent the governing board with external stakeholders and sitting on the Headteacher performance panel are all great opportunities to develop skills and build confidence and in doing so, create a culture of succession.

### Top tips

- Existing chairs should be open and transparent about what the role involves.
- Role model an achievable role, not an impossible act to follow.
- Use skills audits as a basis for a discussion about training needs – not just a once a year exercise.
- Ensure chairs delegate responsibility as well as tasks – all governors/ trustees need to feel as though they are making a contribution.
- Value all contributions, celebrate success and thank everyone for all their efforts.



Stages	What does it look like?
Identify the future opportunity	When the succession culture is right, people will feel they can be honest about their plans to step down and others can be open about their ambitions; once this discussion happens, you are able to agree the future opportunities.
Talent spotting	Existing governors/ trustees may feel able or confident enough to offer to take on a chairing role or a new volunteer may join and have future potential. Talent spot amongst parents and encourage them to join the governing board.
Gaining commitment	It is a honest conversation, which will hopefully gain the governors/ trustees commitment to take on a chairing role.
Identifying the development needs	This is where the regular agenda item about training and development becomes essential; an opportunity to focus the board's mind on development and succession.
Learning and development	As a governor or trustee you are always learning; access local training, eLearning and apply for the Department for Education funded governance development courses.
Monitor and review learning	Either as a sharing of learning in a board or committee meeting or as a one to one with the chair of governors.

# Developing governors and trustees

## Developing current volunteers

When considering how best to support the development of existing governors and trustees, a good place to start is with a skills audit, which can be used as the basis of a discussion about current and future training needs. In some cases, this will lead naturally into an individual expressing interest in taking on a chairing role, in other cases it will not.

However, for all governors and trustees, keeping up to date, attending training and becoming as knowledgeable as possible is a requirement of the role.

It is important to remember that development is a self-led process; you cannot develop your governors and trustees, only they can do that, but you can offer them development opportunities. For many, development may include attending local cluster meetings to enable them to meet other local governance volunteers or simply reading updated guidance; for example, clerks can circulate the latest Keeping Children Safe in Education and ask that all governor/ trustees read and be prepared to discuss at the next board meeting.

A blended approach to learning and development works well with a board of governors and trustees who are all volunteers and who will have varying amounts of time available to access learning opportunities. A combination of face-to-face formal training, discussion, networking, self-evaluation, conferences, reading and eLearning will hopefully offer opportunities to suit everyone's learning style and areas of interest.

If succession is only discussed when a serving chair announces their intention to step down, it becomes reactive, unexpected and people tend to shy away from committing.

In order to create a culture of succession planning on the board, it is important to ensure the foundations are in place. The discussion around training needs and agreeing who is best placed to take over which chairing role can only

## Top tips

- Ensure that all governors/trustees access governance information on a regular basis.
- Ask your clerk to circulate essential guidance for all governors/trustees to read and discuss.
- Consider subscribing to an eLearning package to supplement face-to-face training.
- Arrange at least one in-house training session per year; focusing on issues specific to your school.
- Encourage governors/trustees to attend local face-to-face training, delivered by a quality provider.
- Remind governors/trustees that they are entitled to ask their employer for time off to attend to governance duties; including training.
- Buddy-up current governors/trustees up to conduct monitoring visits together; the benefits out weigh any logistical challenges.
- Encourage a governor/trustee to attend a local cluster group, where they exist, for networking and updating knowledge.
- Offer additional responsibilities, attendance at external meetings and tasks to those who express an interest.
- Ensure that all training is recorded and reviewed termly to assess who is attending training and how that learning is being shared with the board.

## Developing new governors and trustees

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 fill. You may then decide to recruit new governors or trustees to complete your board and bring in fresh ideas and specific skills.

You can find skilled volunteers in your local community, through Inspiring Governance and by using local communication channels. For more information about how to recruit governors and trustees, please download NGA's Guidance on recruiting governors and trustees, The Right People Around The Table at [bit.ly/RPATT](https://bit.ly/RPATT)



Inspiring Governance is a free online recruitment service which connects volunteers interested in becoming governors and trustees with state funded schools in England. [www.inspiringgovernance.org](http://www.inspiringgovernance.org)

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 them through their 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 eLearning at a time and pace that suits them
- if aged under 40, membership of the Young Governors' Network

However you find new governors or trustees, once you have interview and appointed candidates, you should consider how you will induct and train them.

## Welcoming and inducting new volunteers

The governing board needs to ensure that it is welcoming to newly appointed governors and trustees, and that they feel supported as they take on their new role. Governing boards should have an induction policy and ensure that a named individual is responsible for making the arrangements for a new governor/ trustee to attend a formal induction – usually available from the Local Authority or Multi-Academy Trust. It is important that a new volunteer has the chance to meet and network with other local governors and trustees and does not simply have an internal induction – governors/ trustees need to horizon scan and develop knowledge by sharing good practice across all local schools.

### Top tips

- Create a welcome pack for new governors and trustees with key documents, links to websites, names and contact details of the whole governing board as well as a list of all the training courses available and how to book a place.
- Ensure they have an email address and logins for any platforms and services they will need to use.
- The first meeting and first term – ensure that they have everything they need, have had access to data and past minutes and feel supported.
- Welcome any questions and ideas – being new gives people a unique perspective which can be really helpful to a governing board.
- Arrange an in-house induction with the opportunity for questions and discussion.
- Allocate a mentor – preferably not the chair – and ensure that introductions are made.
- Talent spot – a governor/ trustee may be new but they may have leadership potential.
- Provide opportunities to make an impact quickly – they joined to contribute.
- Keep in touch – build relationships with new governors and trustees, and ensure you stay in touch in between meetings and training.



# Ensuring leadership

## Leadership of the governing board

The chair has no individual power but plays a central part in determining the culture and conduct of the governing board. In a healthy board others, particularly the vice chairs and committee chairs, will play a leadership role.

Chairing well involves operating a distributed leadership model, where responsibilities are given to the most appropriate governor/ trustee and the governing board works as a team to challenge, support and contribute to the leadership of the school. This has the added benefit of ensuring the relationship between the Head and the chair of governors does not become exclusive.

Developing committee chairs and vice-chairs can be incredibly rewarding; both for the chair of governors and other chairs.

This will help to ensure the governing board is operating as a corporate body, with collective responsibility.

## Top tips

- Agree all the delegated tasks and responsibilities; to committees and for working parties.
- Share with the wider governing board the dates of all one-to-ones with members of the senior leadership team and school business manager.
- Encourage all chairs to access local chairs courses as well as governance development programmes funded by the Department for Education.
- Network with other governors fulfilling a similar role on other local governing boards – sharing good practice can help develop knowledge and keep the board moving forward.
- All chairs should seek feedback from their board on how effectively they have fulfilled the role and ideas for the future.

## Leading and developing the relationships





## Future Chairs

For some governing boards, despite their best efforts, it can sometimes be difficult to find a person with the experience, time and commitment to take on a chairing role.

Future Chairs is a free recruitment service designed to help governing boards that will need a chair, vice-chair or committee chair within a year to connect with volunteers with the right skills and willingness to take on a leadership role.

Recruiting a skilled volunteer who joins the board with the clear understanding that they will be part of the board's succession planning, is a considerable shift in the culture which currently exists regarding how chairs are elected. However, many governing boards have successfully recruited using Future Chairs since the service began in March 2017. This may be an opportunity for school governing boards to learn from other sectors, where the external recruitment of a chair is far more common.

Simply register for Inspiring Governance and select the future chair option when posting a vacancy. In some areas of the country, a bespoke recruitment service is provided. Check to see which areas are included at [www.nga.org.uk/futurechairs](http://www.nga.org.uk/futurechairs)

Each Future Chair receives free support from the NGA for one year to help them become confident and effective in their role, including mentoring from an experienced chair and the opportunity to join a Department for Education funded leadership development course.

For further information, email [inspiringgovernance@nga.org.uk](mailto:inspiringgovernance@nga.org.uk)

“ Becoming a school governor was recommended to me by colleagues, and I was really keen to support a school which is part of my community so I volunteered through Inspiring Governance. With a professional background in business consultancy and supporting organisations with strategy, I am comfortable with numbers and able to get up to speed on topics quickly. When I was approached by Future Chairs about supporting a school that needed a chair, there was no question for me – I was happy to do the role and was comfortable in my ability to do it. I have found the breadth of the role and the difference in engaging in a role that doesn't get involved day-to-day the most challenging aspects, but the support from my governing board and clerk, and training from the local authority and NGA is very helpful. Being a Future Chair is a fantastic way to bring greater support to a school and an exciting way to be part of school life. Ensuring that the rest of the board and the head understand the Future Chair programme and accept the different perspective I bring are critical to making it work. ”

Katrina Beechey is chair of governors at Donnington Primary School in Brent, and joined the governing board as a Future Chair in March 2018, before becoming chair of the board in July 2018.

## Further reading and resources

- NGA Guidance Centre – governor and trustee role descriptions, and code of conduct
- The Chair's Handbook – a valuable and comprehensive guide for current and new chairs (National Governance Association)
- The Governance Handbook (Department for Education)
- The Governance competency framework (Department for Education)

# Succession planning is one of the five steps to getting the right people around the table.

The cycle for recruiting and retaining school governors and trustees also includes:

- Evaluating: people, practice and composition
- Recruiting: attracting good candidates
- Appointing: interviewing and checks
- Inducting: training and support

Informed by the National Governance Association's extensive experience of supporting governing boards in recruiting new governors and trustees, the 'right people around the table' guide covers each step of the recruitment process and provides plenty of practical tips to help governing boards and clerks to ensure that their board has the right blend of knowledge and skills to enable it to govern effectively.



Get your free guide at [www.nga.org.uk/RPATT](http://www.nga.org.uk/RPATT)



# inspiring governance

The school governance  
recruitment and support service

Inspiring Governance is a free online recruitment service which connects volunteers interested in becoming governors and trustees with state-funded schools in England. Whether you have a current vacancy to fill or you just want to browse, Inspiring Governance gives you access to volunteers from your community.

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

In partnership with:



National Governance Association  
36 Great Charles Street  
Birmingham B3 3JY  
0121 237 3780  
[governorhq@nga.org.uk](mailto:governorhq@nga.org.uk)  
[www.nga.org.uk](http://www.nga.org.uk)

© National Governance Association 2019