

# Succession breeds success

How to grow leaders in your governing body



*“Effective succession means having a plan and making plans to create positive and co-ordinated flows of leadership across many years and numerous people”*

*Sustainable Leadership (2006) , Andy Hargreaves and Dean Fink, Jossey-Bass, quoted in “Leadership succession – securing the next generation of school leaders” (2006) NCSL*

*“[The chair understands] the importance of succession planning to the ongoing effectiveness of both the board and the organisation”*

*A Competency Framework for Governance, DfE, 2017*

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## Foreword

Succession planning, whether in a maintained school governing board, a multi academy trust (MAT), or a standalone academy is important, as in any organisation, for the stability and progress of the enterprise. This third edition of the National Coordinators of Governor Services (NCOGS) document "Succession Breeds Success" is aimed at assisting governors and trustees in managing this process in a positive and constructive way so that governance and board leadership, including any more local arrangements in MATs and federations, is strong and effective in holding the school or schools in the organisation to account. It may be used in whole or part by governors, trustees and others, on the understanding NCOGS is acknowledged as the source.

NCOGS exists to give national voice and support to its members, with a view to promoting high-quality governance in schools, academies and free schools. Established in 1992 as a Local Authority (LA) national governor services network, NCOGS is a national committee that represents eight regional networks of governor services, with membership drawn from almost every Local Authority in England and many diocesan representatives and independent consultants too. NCOGS is represented on the Department for Education's Advisory Group on Governance (AGOG). You can find out more about NCOGS on our website, [www.ncocgs.org.uk](http://www.ncocgs.org.uk).

LAs retain significant responsibilities around school governance for over 17,000 maintained schools. They are collectively the largest providers and commissioners of governor training and development for schools and academies; many also provide clerking services and undertake external reviews of governance. Alongside this and as part of their statutory functions around monitoring and intervention, LAs have a range of powers of intervention in specified circumstances, including where there is a breakdown in leadership and management.

When governance works well, intervention powers are most unlikely to be required, and I hope the advice and suggestions in this publication will contribute to governance being strong and resilient so that our schools may flourish.

**Andy Kent**

*Chair of NCOGS, [chair@ncogs.org.uk](mailto:chair@ncogs.org.uk), December 2016*

## Note on terminology

A 'governing body' now means one of several different things. In its traditional sense it is the body accountable for the conduct of a maintained school, but in multi-academy trusts (MATs) this role has been split. Overall responsibility resides with the trust, but some of this is often delegated to local committees, sometimes called local governing bodies. In single academy trusts the responsible body is the trust, but its constitution is often modelled on that of a governing body and it is often called that.

Nevertheless, these bodies share much in common, not least in their structure, and when it comes to managing the responsible body and ensuring smooth succession from one chair to the next, the principles to be followed are much the same, irrespective of the level of governance. This guide uses the familiar and widely encompassing term 'governing body' throughout where no distinction need be made. In the few instances where identification of the specific kind of body is required, 'governing board' applies to local authority maintained schools, 'trust' to an academy trust (whether of a single academy or a MAT) and 'local committee' for the body in a school in a MAT with powers delegated by the trust.

Where the term "headteacher" is used it refers equally to the principal of an academy.

## Introduction

Has your governing body ever found itself in any of these situations?

- Nobody was prepared to stand as chair.
- The existing chair stayed on but didn't really want to.
- The vice chair has no clearly defined role.
- Committees are simply 'talking shops'.
- It's usually the same governor(s) who volunteer(s) to take on a task.
- It takes too long for new governors to feel they can contribute.
- There are too many vacancies or "we grab anyone willing to do the job".

If the answer's yes, join the club! If it's no, good planning now will avoid it happening in future. It's good practice anyway to ensure your governing body secures the legacy for the strategic leadership of your school, and that includes the leadership of the governing body itself.

Clearly, it's important for governing bodies to ensure continuity of leadership and to avoid crises within leadership in the governing body. So how can these situations be avoided in the first place?

The answer is effective succession planning.

## Succession planning in the governing body – how you do it

Succession planning within the governing body is about:

- attracting and retaining good governors
- spotting leadership talent early
- supporting and developing leadership skills throughout the governing body
- creating opportunities to practise leadership skills
- giving and receiving feedback
- coaching and mentoring
- developing the governing body as a team
- delegating fairly and effectively
- encouraging others to take up opportunities.

For the individual, succession planning can make life much more interesting as it opens up a range of opportunities for personal development. For the governing body, succession planning ensures its future strength and effectiveness. It is easier to achieve smooth succession in a governing body with a fairly stable membership, so where turnover is high, it is even more important to plan succession.

This document aims to help you identify the steps you can take to create a culture in which leadership can thrive. There is the bonus that if you follow the recommendations here you will be encouraging good governance, quite apart from what you will be doing to secure future leadership.



## What does good governing body leadership look like?

The Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted regard governance as a key component of effective school leadership:

“Governing boards are the strategic decision makers and vision setters in every school and academy. They play a vital role in ensuring the best possible education for every child by creating robust accountability for school leaders.”

*Lord Nash, foreword to The Governance Handbook, DfE, 2015.*

“Leaders and governors have created a culture that enables pupils and staff to excel. They are committed unwaveringly to setting high expectations for the conduct of pupils and staff.”

*From the definition of outstanding leadership and governance in the Ofsted School Inspection Handbook, 2016*

Traditionally, we tend to think of the leadership of the governing body as being vested in the chair (and perhaps the vice chair). However, for a governing body to be truly effective and guard against the impact of rapid change, it needs to distribute leadership. Distributed leadership is, in fact, common among staff in many schools; in practice it means that many members of the school are seen as leaders and tasks are delegated far and wide. For this to work, too, among governors, we need to grow leaders within the governing body.

In response to a potential long-term shortage of headteachers the National College for



Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) encouraged schools to become more proactive in growing the next generation of leaders by:

- expanding opportunities – providing more openings for teachers to practise leadership skills
- widening the talent pool – encouraging more women and ethnic minorities to take on leadership roles
- talent spotting – actively identifying and encouraging leadership talent within the school
- leading beyond the school – encouraging opportunities in other schools and industries for leadership practice
- promoting new models of leadership – federation, co-headship and executive headship.

These strategies are equally applicable to the governing body. Significantly, the NCTL also took on responsibility for developing the skills of new and potential chairs, and created a leadership development programme for chairs that is now delivered across the country.

Effective leadership of the governing body involves working towards a shared vision for school improvement which all governors help to achieve, and working together to share responsibility and workload. According to the DfE's *A Competency Framework for Governance*, everyone on the governing body must think strategically and work as a team for its leadership of the school to be robust. Good leadership entails the adoption of effective working practices that enable everyone to participate and develop leadership skills.

## What deters people from taking on school leadership?

The NCTL identified various factors that deter people from taking up headship. Similar factors may deter governors from taking on the role of chair. The following table identifies some common themes:

<b>Headteacher</b>	<b>Chair of governing body</b>
<i>Overwhelming demands of the job</i>	<i>Overwhelming demands of the job – and the time to do it</i>
<i>It takes 20 years to reach headship</i>	<i>It can take at least two years to feel confident enough to take it on</i>
<i>Shortage of suitable candidates</i>	<i>Governors are not effectively prepared for the role</i>
<i>Schools wait for talent to emerge – they don't seek out leaders</i>	<i>Governors hope someone else will volunteer and governing bodies don't develop potential leaders</i>
<i>Behaviour and attitude of chair or governing body</i>	<i>Behaviour and attitude of head or governing body</i>
<i>Previous or existing head impossible act to follow</i>	<i>Previous or existing chair impossible act to follow</i>
<i>Level of responsibility – but at least it's well paid</i>	<i>Level of responsibility – and it's unpaid</i>

The NCTL website ([www.nationalcollege.org.uk](http://www.nationalcollege.org.uk)) contains various forms of guidance on headteacher and staff succession planning that governors will find useful. The need for this document was stimulated by the absence of equivalent guidance on the leadership of the governing body. It has been developed to provide guidance for governing bodies on how they should approach their own succession planning.

## How can we use this document?

The rest of this document contains tables that identify the different phases of leadership development through which a governor may pass, from recruitment through to becoming an effective chair:

- attracting new governors
- developing the new governor
- taking additional responsibility
- growing as a team leader
- developing the role of vice chair(s)
- being an effective chair of governors.

Each table defines the expectations and actions and strategies that will enable the growth of leaders within the governing body.

The 'Expectations' column in the tables makes it clear for each entry whether the advice is intended for an individual or for the governing body as a whole. In the case of the latter (the majority of the tables), the table can be used by the governing body in reviewing its own practice or by a single governor on behalf of the governing body. This may be the chair, but could equally well be another governor entrusted with the task. If used by a single governor, share what you identify from the tables with the other governors and evaluate your governing body's practice against what the tables say.

If you would like help in exploring the recommended actions and strategies, your local Governor Services Co-ordinator can help.

## Attracting new governors

An effective governing body is, in itself, the best recruitment tool of all. Don't wait for vacancies to arise before developing effective recruitment strategies such as engaging parents and carers with the work of the governing body and actively encouraging community and business links. The *Governance Handbook* stresses the need to have governors with the right skills, while *Twenty Questions Every Governing Board Should Ask Itself*, drawn up by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Governance, asks if we have completed a skills audit of the governing body and whether it informs the process of appointing governors. Follow this advice and when you have a vacancy it will be an opportunity to strengthen the governing body. Even if your vacancies are for parent or staff governors and therefore subject to election, you should still indicate in advance what skills you hope candidates will bring.

### Expectations

The governing body knows that its collective effectiveness is the best recruitment tool and encourages governors to stay and develop leadership skills

The governing body reaches out to its community and ensures that potential recruits are clear about the purpose, work and expectations of the governing body

The governing body makes use of available recruitment resources

### Actions and strategies

- Agree and publish a shared vision between the senior leadership team and governors of how the school's leadership will look in five years' time (staff and governors)
- Sign up to a code of practice that underpins effective, transparent team working, shares the workload and encourages all to get involved and gain leadership experience
- Build relationships between governors and between governors and school staff, including the clerk, based upon mutual trust and respect
- Encourage all governors to participate in all aspects of the work
- Change roles within the governing body regularly to ensure maximum numbers gain experience across a wide range of work
- Audit governing body skills and development needs
- Ensure that collective responsibility is understood and observed
- Review structures regularly to ensure the governing body meets statutory requirements and that workload and experience are shared
- Publicise the work of the governing body, e.g. newsletter, informal presence at parents' evenings
- Organise open evenings/sessions for interested parents
- Approach and build relationships with local companies and community groups
- Invite potential governors as observers or appoint them as associate members
- Be honest about the commitment needed to be an effective governor
- Agree and publicise an expenses policy
- Ensure that the timing of meetings is no disincentive to recruitment, and allows for a satisfactory work-life balance for both school staff and governors
- Use local authority (LA) material or DfE-published recruitment materials
- Contact Inspiring Governance ([www.inspiringgovernance.org](http://www.inspiringgovernance.org)) or SGOSS ([www.sgoos.org.uk](http://www.sgoos.org.uk)) – organisations that recruit people interested in becoming school governors or trustees.

## Developing the new governor

Effective induction of new governors is crucial to ensure their retention on the governing body. If they engage through induction they will be more able to contribute effectively and feel part of the governor team early on. Remember that induction has two strands: initially by the governing body and then formal training, usually from the local authority.

<b>Expectations</b>	<b>Actions and strategies</b>
The governing body ensures that all new governors are made welcome and supports them in their development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find out whether the newest governors felt they were welcomed and given sufficient support so that they could make a contribution from the start</li> <li>• Develop and implement an induction policy for your governing body, identifying what information new governors need to be given, taking account of most recent recruits' views</li> <li>• Identify an individual to oversee the induction of new governors (this may be the clerk)</li> <li>• Provide new governors with a mentor</li> <li>• Encourage new governors to attend LA induction and other relevant training</li> <li>• Ensure that all contributions are recognised and valued</li> <li>• Review the induction process</li> </ul>
The governing body identifies those with potential leadership capability early on and nurtures leadership skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree and publish a clear description of who is responsible and accountable for what, including terms of reference for committees</li> <li>• Audit the skills, knowledge and experience of new governors to establish their interests and development needs</li> <li>• Identify those with leadership potential and interest in developing it</li> <li>• Explain the future leadership opportunities available within the governing body</li> <li>• Encourage the early adoption of additional responsibilities by those with the relevant potential</li> </ul>
The new governor contributes to the effectiveness of the governing body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss with your mentor what skills, interests and experience you bring</li> <li>• Be realistic and clear about the level of commitment you can give</li> <li>• Seek opportunities and offer to take on additional responsibility if and when appropriate</li> <li>• Offer feedback on the effectiveness or otherwise of your induction</li> <li>• Seek feedback on your own contribution to the work of the governing body</li> <li>• Attend relevant training and development opportunities</li> <li>• Familiarise yourself with the DfE's <i>A Competency Framework for Governance</i></li> </ul>
The new governor has a positive impact on the effectiveness of the governing body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through discussions with one or more other governors, identify what has gone well and what could be improved</li> </ul>

## Taking additional responsibility

An effective governing body motivates and enables all its members to play an active part in its school improvement and strategic development work. This could include:

- joining a committee
- linking with a School Development Plan or self evaluation priority
- leading a school improvement task or working group
- leading on an agenda item
- taking on a specific area of responsibility such as Special Educational Needs, child protection, health and safety, headteacher appraisal
- becoming a Link/Development governor.

### **Expectations**

The governing body knows and deploys the skills, experience and interests of all the governors

The governing body creates opportunities for governors to take on additional responsibilities and develop leadership skills

The governing body encourages and supports governors taking on additional responsibilities and developing leadership skills

Governor taking on additional responsibilities carries out responsibilities to the best of his/her ability and reflects on learning

Governor taking on additional responsibilities has a positive impact on the effectiveness of the governing body

### **Actions and strategies**

- Create opportunities for governors to get to know each other socially
- Conduct a skills, experience and interests audit
- Match governors' skills, experience and interests to known and anticipated roles and tasks – but enable new challenges by swapping roles as experience grows
- Include a brief pen-portrait or mini-biography of each governor in relevant documents
- Review structures and ways of working to create opportunities for governors to take on additional responsibilities (e.g. working parties, task groups)
- Give one or more governors the task of finding out from other governing bodies how they structure and manage their workload
- Encourage governors with a moderate amount of experience to mentor new governors
- Encourage, value and facilitate feedback from governors on their additional responsibilities
- Offer mentoring
- Make sure the governors know the boundaries of the additional responsibility and what is expected
- Facilitate meetings with relevant members of staff
- Promote appropriate training and development
- Develop policies and protocols with staff and governors to facilitate visits to school
- Provide opportunities to network with governors from other governing bodies with similar responsibilities
- Make use of all available support and guidance
- Keep to timescale
- Deliver what has been agreed
- Report as appropriate
- Liaise and network with governors fulfilling a similar role on other governing bodies
- Reflect on any new leadership skills you have developed

Through discussions with one or more other governors, identify what has gone well and what could be improved

## Growing as a team leader

Leading a team in the governing body can mean chairing a committee or leading a task group or working party. An effective committee chair doesn't simply run a meeting. He/she ensures that all governors have an opportunity to contribute, especially those reporting back on their additional responsibilities, and he/she forges positive relationships with other players involved, such as key school staff and external advisers.

### **Expectations**

The governing body defines and agrees the role of the team leader

The governing body identifies and nurtures the governor's leadership skills

Team leader leads group effectively and reflects on learning

Team leader has a positive impact on the effectiveness of the governing body

### **Actions and strategies**

- Agree and publish the job description
- Ensure clear parameters of delegation of authority and reporting-back procedures (formally in terms of reference for committees with delegated powers and less formally for task groups and working parties)

- Identify governors with the potential to become team leaders
- Encourage them to take on these roles
- Enable shadowing of more experienced team leaders either on own or other governing body
- Offer mentoring
- Offer support at initial meetings
- Encourage attendance at effective chairing or other relevant training
- Encourage provision of feedback on leadership skills

Take advantage of support, guidance and training offered

- Fulfil expectations of role
- Liaise and network with governors fulfilling a similar role on other governing bodies
- Seek feedback on how well you have fulfilled the role
- Reflect on the new leadership skills you have learned

Through discussions with one or more other governors, identify what has gone well and what could be improved



## Developing the role of the vice chair(s)

The role of vice chair offers plenty of scope for the development of leadership skills. For example, you could be:

- a champion of distributed leadership among the governing body
- an active role model to new governors
- co-vice chair.

In any case, developing a close working relationship with the chair is essential.

<b>Expectations</b>	<b>Actions and strategies</b>
The governing body defines the role of vice chair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree and publish the role description</li> <li>• Include the definition in relevant documents</li> <li>• Agree the term of office of the vice chair prior to an election and record it</li> </ul>
The vice chair actively develops knowledge, skills and understanding to share the workload with the chair and governing body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the chair's workload to establish which tasks you could take on</li> <li>• Attend relevant briefings</li> <li>• Attend training on chairing skills, especially the Chairs of Governors' Leadership Development Programme</li> <li>• Join meetings with chair/head</li> <li>• Link with vice chairs of other governing bodies</li> <li>• Ensure you keep abreast of school issues</li> </ul>
The vice chair shares some of the chair's workload	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximise the effectiveness of communication between you and the chair</li> <li>• Take on specific responsibility, e.g. mentor for new governors, committee chair or development of governors</li> <li>• Chair particular agenda items</li> <li>• Chair some full governing body meetings</li> <li>• Hand over role to well-prepared successor(s)</li> <li>• If still a governor after handover, serve as mentor to other governors</li> </ul>
The vice chair has a positive impact on the effectiveness of the governing body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through discussions with one or more other governors, including the chair, identify what has gone well and what could be improved</li> </ul>

## Being an effective chair of governors

An effective chair of governors

:

- gives a clear lead in organising and evaluating the governing body's work, valuing the contribution of all members and staff
- delegates roles and ensures all governors are fully involved
- works in partnership with the headteacher through regular meetings, providing appropriate support and challenge
- co-operates with other agencies to support school improvement
- operates as the first among equals but actively models and promotes the development of leadership skills
- encourages the development of the vice chair role.

### **Expectations**

The governing body defines the role of chair

The chair actively develops knowledge, skills and understanding to share the workload with the vice chair(s) and governing body

The chair shares workload with vice chair(s) and delegates tasks and responsibilities to the governing body

The chair has a positive impact on the effectiveness of the governing body

### **Actions and strategies**

- Agree and publish the role description
- Include the definition in relevant documents
- Agree the term of office of the chair prior to an election and record it
- Attend relevant training, especially, if not undertaken before assuming the role, the Chairs of Governors' Leadership Development Programme
- Keep up to date
- Seek a mentor
- Mentor vice chair(s)
- Share workload with vice chair(s) and other governors
- Network with other chairs
- Contribute, where appropriate, to governance beyond the school (e.g. in localities, federations or clusters; as mentor to chairs in other governing bodies)
- Seek feedback from vice chair(s), headteacher and governors on own performance
- Encourage regular review of the effectiveness of governing body structures and working practices
- Create opportunities for governors to take responsibility and provide/arrange support where necessary/possible
- Encourage governors to contribute at meetings
- Ensure that governors' contributions are recognised and valued
- Develop effective working relationship with clerk and headteacher
- Develop the governing body as a team
- Develop sustainable processes for sharing knowledge and information
- Hand over role to well-prepared successor(s)
- If still a governor after handover, serve as mentor to other governors
- Through discussions with one or more other governors, identify what has gone well and what could be improved

## Working with two chairs

It is only recently that maintained school governing boards have been allowed to have two chairs. In a trust this is only possible if allowed for in the articles of association, and the DfE's model articles only talk about a single chair. The trust decides on whether local committees may have joint chairs. Electing joint chairs can be a good fixed-term solution in certain circumstances:

- when no-one is able to fully take on the role of chair
- when the outgoing chair is prepared to overlap with an inexperienced new chair
- where an experienced chair is drafted in from outside to help an inexperienced new chair.

Co-chairing can also work as a permanent arrangement, providing that the responsibilities of each are understood by all the governors, the clerk and the headteacher.

<b>Expectations</b>	<b>Actions and strategies</b>
The governing body defines the roles of joint chairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree the reasons for having joint chairs</li> <li>• Determine the broad parameters of the joint chair arrangement</li> <li>• Agree the terms of office of the joint chairs prior to an election and record it</li> </ul>
The joint chairs agree how they will work together, share the workload with vice chair(s) and delegate tasks and responsibilities to the governing body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree and share with governing body and headteacher how they will share responsibilities, including who chairs which meeting</li> <li>• Develop effective working relationships with clerk and headteacher</li> <li>• Mentor vice chair(s)</li> <li>• Share workload with vice chair(s) and other governors</li> <li>• Network with other chairs</li> <li>• Contribute, where appropriate, to governance beyond the school (e.g. in localities, federations or clusters; as advisers to other governing bodies considering joint chair arrangements)</li> <li>• Seek feedback from each other, vice chair(s), headteacher and governors on own performance</li> <li>• Encourage regular review of the effectiveness of governing body structures and working practices</li> </ul>
The joint chairs actively develop knowledge, skill and understanding to prepare for handover and to share the workload with the vice chair(s) and governing body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attend relevant training, especially, if not undertaken before assuming the role, the Chairs of Governors' Leadership Development Programme</li> <li>• Create opportunities for governors to take responsibility and provide/arrange support where necessary/possible</li> <li>• Jointly and separately follow good practice as recommended for chairs of governing bodies</li> <li>• The more experienced partner shares knowledge with less experienced partner</li> <li>• The experienced partners hands over to the less experienced partner or another well-prepared governor at the end of their term of office, or earlier if they are ready and it is in the best interests of the governing body.</li> </ul>
The joint chairs have a positive impact on the effectiveness of the governing body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through discussions with one or more other governors, identify what has gone well and what could be improved</li> </ul>

### ***Further support***

For help in finding new governors, go to your local governor service department, to Inspiring Governance or to SGOSS.

Both Inspiring Governance and SGOSS work with employers in business, the professions and the public sector to encourage staff to become governors. They register those who consequently wish to become school governors. Each has a website ([www.inspiringgovernance.org](http://www.inspiringgovernance.org) and [www.sgooss.org.uk](http://www.sgooss.org.uk)) through which you can be put in touch with skilled people in your area who are looking for governing bodies to join.

Advice for new governors is in the National Governors' Association publication *Welcome to Governance*, see [www.nga.org.uk](http://www.nga.org.uk).

*A Competency Framework for Governance*, DfE, 2017, describes the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed from those on a governing body if it is to perform effectively.

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