

# The right people around the table

A guide to recruiting and retaining  
school governors and trustees

Second edition



# Introduction

Informed by the National Governance Association's (NGA) extensive experience of supporting governing boards in recruiting new governors and trustees, this 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.

All types and phases of state-funded schools can use these principles, ideas and useful resources to further improve their governance recruitment practice and to find skilled and committed people to oversee their 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: people, practice and composition (page 1)
- Recruiting: attracting good candidates (page 5)
- Appointing: interviewing and checks (page 13)
- Inducting: training and support (page 17)
- Succession planning: moving on and ensuring leadership. (page 19)

The journey does not start when your governing board finds itself with a vacancy. It is an ongoing 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. 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.

## Eight elements of effective governance

NGA has identified eight elements that 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

## 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: people, practice and composition

## Governing boards have three core functions:

1. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
2. Holding the executive leader 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 money is well spent

## People

### Evaluating your board

Begin by evaluating your current governing board. All governors and trustees should have relevant skills and experiences to contribute to the work of the board along with the necessary commitment of time and energy. Collectively, the people governing need to have a range of backgrounds and competencies appropriate to the board's responsibilities.

There are resources available to support you in regularly evaluating your board. The Department for Education's competency framework for governance categorises 200-plus competencies, knowledge, skills and behaviours needed for effective governance in schools, academies and MATs. It is intended to help with board performance reviews, identifying training needs, succession planning and induction, but is not a checklist or a specification of everything a governor/trustee needs to do.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/governance-handbook>

NGA's free skills audit combines the core aspects of the framework with the experience and feedback of our members. The skills audit tool identifies the knowledge, experiences, skills and behaviours of each governor/trustee and the skills matrix then enables you to assess the strengths of your board based on the overall results and

highlights where your governing board needs to develop to deliver its functions effectively. Two models are available to account for the differences in governing a single school or a group of schools. [www.nga.org.uk/skillsaudit](http://www.nga.org.uk/skillsaudit)

“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

You should carry out a skills audit annually, and the clerk is well-placed to oversee this process. By using the competency framework, a skills audit and some analysis, you will get a good overview of the capabilities 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 experience, or both.

### Creating a diverse board

To fulfil its duties effectively, a governing board needs a balance and diversity of skills, experiences, characters, backgrounds, perspectives, attributes and abilities.

Without this diversity of thought, governing boards are at risk of suffering from groupthink. In other words, if the people around the table come from similar backgrounds and think similar things, there is a keenness to reach a consensus, and the discussions they have and the decisions they make are less likely to be robust.

Volunteers can bring many competencies that are useful to a governing board. Encouraging education professionals from different settings (i.e. other than staff governors) on to your board can bring external expertise and experience to many of the topics you deal with including safeguarding and special educational needs, and understanding and challenging school data.

All those involved in governance should demonstrate the following attributes:

Attribute	What this looks like on a governing board
<b>Committed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Devoting the required time and energy to the role and aiming to achieve the best outcomes for young people.</li> <li>■ Prepared to give time, skills and knowledge to developing themselves and others in order to create highly effective governance.</li> </ul>
<b>Confident</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Having an independent mind, able to lead and contribute to courageous conversations.</li> <li>■ Be willing to express opinions and to play an active role on the board.</li> </ul>
<b>Curious</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Possessing an enquiring mind and an analytical approach.</li> <li>■ Understanding the value of meaningful questioning.</li> </ul>
<b>Challenging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Providing appropriate challenge to the status quo and asking questions of leaders.</li> <li>■ Not taking information or data at face value and always seeking to improve things.</li> </ul>
<b>Collaborative</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Prepared to listen to and work in partnership with others.</li> <li>■ Understanding the importance of building strong working relationships within the board and with executive leaders, staff, parents and carers, pupils, the local community, the local authority and employers.</li> </ul>
<b>Critical</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Understanding the value of critical friendship which enables challenge and support.</li> <li>■ Self-reflective, pursuing learning and development opportunities to enable both themselves and the board to become as knowledgeable as possible.</li> </ul>
<b>Creative</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Able to challenge conventional ideas and be open-minded about new approaches to problem-solving.</li> <li>■ Recognising the value of innovation and creative thinking to organisational development and success.</li> </ul>

Governing boards bring together and utilise the skills and experiences of people from other sectors and industries. Professional skills which governing boards may find valuable depending on their priorities or upcoming projects include financial management and accountancy; organisational change management; legal; human resources; property and estates management; procurement and contracting services; project management; equal opportunities; risk management; health and safety; marketing and public relations; and ICT.

“Governing and trust boards should reflect the communities they serve. I want to urge people from different backgrounds, different professions, to come forward – to offer up their time, energy, skills, and expertise. I’d like to see more young people get involved, more people from black and ethnic minority communities, more people from right across society with the ability and experience to lead. Because so many people want to give something back to their community, this is truly one of the most valuable and far reaching ways you can do that.”

Damian Hinds, Secretary of State for Education, June 2018

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



## Everyone on Board

Governing boards should reflect the diversity of their school community and wider society. In particular, data shows that younger people (aged under 40) and those from ethnic minorities, are underrepresented in school governance.

Evidence from other sectors shows that diverse boards improve performance and decision-making; by having a greater range of perspectives and lived experience involved in governing board discussions, all pupils will benefit from better, more robust decision-making.

Embracing the value of what younger volunteers can offer to school governance is important – they are much closer in age to the pupils you serve, have a unique insight into the world in which children and young people live, and can bring a refreshing new perspective and ideas.

It is important to remember that any volunteer is not there to champion or represent a particular cause or group (all issues should be the responsibility of the entire governing board) but to use their own judgement, understanding and insights to act in the best interests of all pupils at the school.

As the governing board is responsible for setting the vision and ethos of the school, taking this matter seriously will set the culture for equality and diversity to thrive and will set an example about inclusion ‘from the top down’, giving pupils, staff and the wider community confidence in the school’s commitment.

“ Our identities and experiences — our gender, race, nationality, class, and any number of other factors — shape the way we see the world. And when the mix of people in a group changes, so do the decisions that group makes. ”

Sarah O’Connor, *Financial Times*, August 2018

For more information and resources visit [www.nga.org.uk/everyone-on-board](http://www.nga.org.uk/everyone-on-board)

## Practice

Recruiting for new governors or trustees is a timely opportunity for the board to consider its governance practice.

Undertaking a SWOT analysis of the governing board’s strengths and weaknesses and the opportunities and threats which are on the horizon can 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/trustee once a year to discuss their experience of governing, their interests and aspirations in their governance role and to check that they are still fulfilled by serving on the governing board.

It is also an opportunity to explore how your board works, and in particular factors which may influence whether a new volunteer decides to join your board (or a current governor/trustee to continue in their role). Being thoughtful about how you could adapt to be inclusive, accessible and best enable busy people to participate in school governance will widen your choice of volunteers. You should consider:

- the timing of your meetings to make them convenient for the majority;
- if you can innovate in how people participate in meetings such as by dial-in or video call;
- whether a meeting is necessary or the business can be conducted via another means;
- the amount and timing of information that governors/trustees receive and the format;
- the roles and expectations of governors/trustees e.g. committee structures and link roles.

Together, your governing board should regularly evaluate what works well and what practices to keep, but also identify where practices can evolve.

## Composition of the board

This is also a good time to evaluate the size of your board, and whether it is fit for purpose. If some governors/trustees often do not attend or do not participate actively when they do, think about whether their place on the board is surplus to requirements i.e. 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.

Most governing boards have between 11 and 15 volunteers, with an increasing number opting for ten or fewer governors/trustees. If your board has more than 15 people, you should consider whether it could run more efficiently with fewer people.

Some points to consider in reviewing the composition of your board 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 and its priorities?
- Do you have the right committee structure and are the same people on every committee?
- Does the composition of the board, as set out on paper, reflect the way you really work as a group?

Maintained schools have an Instrument of Government that 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.

Maintained schools have the option to appoint an associate member(s) to a committee (this should not be confused with members in an academy trust). They can be useful if a governing board has identified a skills gap that it is unable to fill with a serving volunteer; to benefit from the expertise of someone who wants to contribute to the governing board but cannot fully commit to a governance role; and to introduce individuals to the work of the governing board. The term 'associate member' is not used in academy Articles of Association, but a provision usually exists to appoint to a similar role, so consult your clerk. There are a few technicalities around the appointment and remit of associate members, so seek guidance on this before going ahead.

### 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)
- 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.

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# Recruiting: attracting good candidates

## The recruitment process

Now you know more about what you are looking for in a volunteer, it is time to connect with people who are interested in being a school governor/trustee. Before you promote your vacancy, there are a few things to consider about the recruitment process itself. The success of the recruitment process will depend on this journey being as smooth as possible for the volunteer.

Looking for a role description to help potential volunteers to understand what being a governor/trustee entails? NGA have model role descriptions for governors and trustees which you can use when advertising.

For more information visit [www.nga.org.uk/volunteer](http://www.nga.org.uk/volunteer)

You should designate who on the board (including the clerk) will be responsible for all the elements of the recruitment process, and other factors, including:

- Writing and promoting information about the vacancy
- Making the school administration staff aware of who to direct enquiries to
- How long you will advertise the position (i.e. a cut off point for applicants)
- Responding to questions from applicants and speaking to them about what is involved
- Reviewing the applications, contacting and interviewing volunteers
- Presenting recommendations to the board
- Arranging and conducting the induction
- The timescale of the process, giving regard to the meeting schedule

## 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/trustee 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/ trustee. 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.

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 co-operation 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 co-ordinate the process from beginning until end.

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</li> <li>■ Multi Academy Trust</li> <li>■ Free School</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Members or trustee board, founding body or sponsor</li> </ul>

### Finding new volunteers

To achieve a diversity of volunteers on the governing board, NGA recommend that as best practice, boards must promote any governor/trustee vacancy publicly and externally of the school/trust. When boards recruit exclusively from their networks, this can lead to candidates coming from a narrow pool that is likely to be similar to the existing governors/trustees.

“ It’s really important to have people external of our schools involved in governance, because they bring fresh perspectives. With no personal connection to the school, they can ask different questions, be objective and take a new look at what we are doing. So long as they have synergy with our values and we are confident that they have the potential to be a good governor, we’re happy to have them. ”

CEO, Nexus MAT

There are two approaches to finding governors and trustees which governing boards should combine to find the widest range of suitable candidates: utilising services that recruit volunteers on behalf of governing boards or where people that are interested in volunteering have actively expressed their interest, and promoting vacancies using a range of communication channels.

## Finding good candidates: where to look



“ My first port of call was Inspiring Governance and I decided to sign up just to see what was in the pot. If Inspiring Governance is finding people for us, why would I go out and do it myself? Where was I going to go? I needed the job done and the governing board strengthened as soon as possible. ”

Chair of Governors, Ridgeway High School, Wirral

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.

Whether you have a current vacancy to fill or you just want to browse, Inspiring Governance gives you access to volunteers from your community that want to become a governor or trustee.

“ When you are dealing with lots of vacancies, all your schools are listed and it's so easy to click and see the volunteers that are available in the local area. It's not difficult to learn how to use the platform; the software is easy to use and it has really good features. ”

Director of Education, The Kemnal Academies Trust

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 you appoint a 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 high-quality, in-depth 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.

Chairs and clerks should encourage their new recruits to utilise this support.

If your school, trust or organisation 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.

[enquiries@inspiringgovernance.org](mailto:enquiries@inspiringgovernance.org)  
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, King's Norton Boys' School, Birmingham

Based on feedback from our Inspiring Governance recruiters, here are our top tips to help you get the best out of the service:

- Check back regularly for volunteers as new people sign up daily
- Widen the radius of your search – we find that volunteers are willing to travel for their ideal role, and you never know what might be convenient for people
- Leave your opportunity open for longer – you can always progress applicants as they get in touch
- In the opportunity details, be specific about what you are looking for from potential volunteers
- Take advantage of the support available from Inspiring Governance's central team and regional managers – they want to help you recruit successfully
- When you have connected with a volunteer, invite them to visit the school to really capture their interest
- You can filter volunteers by their skills, but consider opening up your search – by exploring more profiles, you may uncover useful skills that the volunteer has not themselves recognised
- Remember to let Inspiring Governance know about volunteers you appoint to unlock the free support from NGA

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

**Academy Ambassadors** is a free, bespoke recruitment service, matching director-level candidates from the business sectors to the boards of MATs across England. Typical skills of candidates include finance, law, risk, property and more. Since 2013, Academy Ambassadors has appointed over 1,200 non-executive directors. 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. Academy Ambassadors finds candidates from large employers who are screened and matched by a team of governance experts across England. Find out more and download free resources on recruitment and induction here 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).

“ Though they have not been governors before, our new volunteers are engaging. We wouldn't have got such good quality without Inspiring Governance. It has been absolutely great – easy to contact volunteers and we got a really swift response. ”

Headteacher, Broomfield Primary School, Leicestershire

## Finding good candidates: promoting your vacancy

For some categories of governor or trustee, such as elected parents 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 and widely, using a range of communications channels. This is a list of ideas about what you could do and how to do it – choose what works for your circumstances, and if one approach does not work for you, try another.

The parent body is likely to have a wide range of people with relevant skills and there is scope for the board to co-opt new governors or trustees whom are parents, but you should be mindful that there is not an imbalance of parents compared to other volunteers.

If a route yields a brilliant volunteer, remember to thank whoever helps you (e.g. a journalist, or contact at an employer) and explain the difference it will make to your governing board and school, to build a valuable relationship for the future.

Channel	Description
<b>School communications</b>	<p>The school's website is a great place to include information about the vacancy and how to apply. Ask the school to put a link from the homepage to the information.</p> <p>A letter home to parents and guardians, placing adverts around the school e.g. the reception area or outdoor noticeboard, and including information in the school newsletter are all traditional channels. Ask the parent and staff body to pass the information on to their extended family and social circle.</p> <p>Having a governing board presence at school events is a helpful opportunity to speak to parents and the wider community about the role of the governing board – encouraging them to apply if there is a vacancy or give information so that they are primed when there is a vacancy.</p>
<b>Social media</b>	<p>Many schools now have a social media presence, and this is a route to reaching a wide audience. Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn are all 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.</p> <p>Pages, groups and hashtags connecting local communities tend to get a lot of interest, so share your post in these groups, or ask popular pages to share the post for you.</p> <p>Visual images work well on social media so using photographs from the school, information graphics (there are plenty of free online tools to create these) or even a short video – perhaps featuring pupils speaking about the impact of governance in their school and what they want from new volunteers – will draw attention to your advert.</p>
<b>Local media</b>	<p>Getting your vacancy in to the local media will give it a wide 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 a paid-for advert. Use the contact page on the paper's website to find out who to send it to, or if there are no details available, you could try to identify which journalist covers education stories and send it to them.</p> <p>Try contacting local radio stations as they are often willing to report community stories and appeals.</p> <p>For a different approach, you could present your governor or trustee vacancy as a story by sending 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 announcing an upcoming project and make a call for new governors or trustees to join your board to help you deliver it.</p> <p>Nearby industrial or business parks/ districts may have a newsletter that is sent around tenants.</p>

### Refer a friend

If you know someone that would make a great governor/trustee, tell them why and encourage them to sign up to Inspiring Governance so that schools looking for volunteers can contact them.



[www.inspiringgovernance.org/refer-a-friend](http://www.inspiringgovernance.org/refer-a-friend)

Channel	Description
<b>Neighbouring schools</b>	Contact your local schools to ask if any of their teaching staff or leaders would be interested in joining your governing board. Remember to emphasise how this will benefit their school, as well as provide a great CPD opportunity for the volunteer, by getting an insight and understanding of how different schools – phases or types – operate.
<b>Community spaces and events</b>	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. An eye-catching and professional design will help your advert stand out.  Similarly if there are community events (outside the school) this is a good opportunity to meet and speak to local people.
<b>Door drop a letter/ leaflet</b>	Contact potential governors and trustees directly by creating a leaflet or writing a letter and dropping it through their letterbox. This will involve a little bit of endeavour and a small cost of printing the letters but may be well worth the investment. You could test this by starting with an initial run of a few hundred letters, widening your search until you find some volunteers.
<b>Headhunting</b>	Drawing up a list of people you think would fit the bill and targeting them directly can help you access people with relevant skills. 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.
<b>Alumni</b>	Former pupils are a useful network to tap in to – they are often keen to give back to the school and make a difference for current pupils. They also provide a valuable insight of the challenges and opportunities of growing up in the local area.
<b>Employers</b>	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 by sending an email or giving them a call, and emphasise the useful skills that volunteers will gain to take back to their workplace too.  Professional associations for all sorts of careers have local or regional groups: if you are looking for certain skills, find out the nearest branch of the association and make contact with a specific request for skilled volunteers. Another route to professionals could be through your local chambers of commerce.
<b>Local universities</b>	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.

Be clear and try to be specific about what you are looking for in a volunteer – the more distinct you are, the more potential volunteers can draw parallels between what they can offer and the role, and think they have something valuable to contribute.

Consider the motivations of the people you are talking to in each channel. 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. It is our experience however that people perceive the time commitment for being a governor/trustee to be greater than it actually is, so setting realistic expectations about what being on your board involves could be an attracting factor. Telling people approximately how many hours a month the commitment will be – meetings, reading, training etc – will help them to conceptualise whether they have the time available.

Some people may think 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.

With the desire to recruit diverse applicants, ensure that the language and imagery that you use in your communications reflects this. Is it necessary to request a certain number of years' professional experience? This will automatically become a barrier to younger people and to people that may have taken a career break. Consider how the language you use could be perceived, and whether the people you are trying to reach will associate themselves with the wording.

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. Modelling the role as enjoyable, manageable and rewarding will be powerful in persuading potential volunteers who speak to you about the role.

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 and making it easy to get involved is key to attracting volunteers.

When you do receive interest in the vacancy, you should capitalise on it and reply as soon as possible – whether that is answering questions or acknowledging receipt of an application. We are often told by people that want to become school governors/trustees that they are frustrated by the slow pace of the process, which puts them off progressing their application. In our experience, people are interested in being a school governor/trustee rather than volunteering at a particular school, and therefore are actively looking at multiple positions. Being responsive to contacts will give your board the chance to secure great volunteers before they choose to look elsewhere.

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.

To see 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.

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

### Tips for increasing participation from under-represented groups:

- Be explicit that you are seeking applicants with particular characteristics (e.g. from an ethnic minority, the LGBT community, of a particular gender, with a disability, from young people) and explain honestly why you are doing so
- Tap on the shoulder people from under-represented groups that you think would be a good governor/trustee – it is not enough to have an open door, you need to invite people through
- Give people from underrepresented groups less formal opportunities to be involved in governance (such as coming to speak to the board about their community or culture and how this impacts pupils) before asking them to apply

- Approach people who already volunteer in other aspects of school life for example the PTA or reading with children
- 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
- Accept that younger people in particular may be more transient and that having their contribution for a couple of years will be better than rejecting them completely because you do not think they could serve a full term
- A useful mantra is to recruit for potential rather than perfection – if a volunteer shows all the right signs that they could be a great governor or trustee, investing in them with training could help you to grow valuable new additions to your board
- Let younger volunteers know about the support available to them through the Young Governors' Network ([www.nga.org.uk/YGN](http://www.nga.org.uk/YGN))

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

Chair of Governors, Carter Community School, Poole

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# Appointing: interviewing and checks

## Reviewing applications

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

Those responsible for the recruitment of governors and trustees should review all the applicants against the set criteria (i.e. compare what you have with what you asked for) and reject any unsuitable candidates. It may seem choosy to reject a potential volunteer, but ensuring you have the right skills, attributes and motivations in potential governors/trustees is vital.

After the closing date, you should finalise the shortlist (if you are in the fortunate position of having more candidates than you need to interview). 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 for an interview with the chair (or vice-chair) and at least one other governor/trustee.

“ Getting volunteers is not just about filling seats. Before appointing volunteers, governing boards need to understand people’s motivation and what they can offer. While it is a big ask and is a voluntary position, there are direct benefits professionally and in terms of social capital for people that do sit on governing boards, so I feel taking the process seriously as you would any recruitment process, is important. ”

Chair of Governors, West Green Primary School, Tottenham

## Interviewing – why it is important

Before recommending a candidate to the full governing board for approval, the candidate should be interviewed 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.

Although the interview process can take time and the temptation is to not bother with individual interviews, it is essential that all potential volunteers are interviewed because:

- Interviewing ensures that the role is seen as a professional one to which the volunteer must commit time and energy.
- An interview allows you to understand the candidate’s motivations as well as their knowledge and skills.
- Some candidates will be in contact with other governing boards who are also recruiting, so an effective interview process will make a positive impression with a committed volunteer.
- It is an opportunity for candidates to, where possible, meet members of the SLT and other staff.
- Seeing the school ‘in action’ will really enforce that governance is about improving outcomes for pupils and will serve as a useful insight for potential volunteers.
- Safer Recruitment legislation states that all those working or volunteering in schools must be interviewed and suitable checks carried out.
- Interviewing helps the candidate to experience the ethos of the school to decide whether it is a good fit for them.

## Planning and conducting the interview

All candidates should be informed in writing of the details of the interview including; the address of the school, the time and date, who will be conducting the interview and instructions upon arrival.

Once the interview begins, explain why you have shortlisted the potential volunteer and be up front about your journey as a governing board and as a school. During the interview you should take time to explain the ethos, values and strategic priorities of the school.

You can send interview invites and exchange messages through the Inspiring Governance platform, keeping correspondence usefully in one place.

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

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.

Consider having a copy of NGA's governor or trustee role profile to hand to the candidates.

Now is the time to be clear about the role and responsibilities (if you are recruiting for a local academy committee, the delegated responsibilities), training requirements, time commitment and requirement for an enhanced DBS check.

Showing candidates a list of the upcoming engagements of the governing board (e.g. board meetings, committee meetings, project meetings, school visits) can give potential volunteers a tangible idea of what the commitment looks like and whether it is something they can realistically commit to.

If your school is maintained by the local authority, 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 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/trustees might want to 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.

Remember not to do all the talking – the purpose is for you to understand the candidate's motivation and commitment – the more they talk and you listen, the better you will begin to understand them, their skills, knowledge and motivation. Try to aim for a 70% / 30% split with the candidate talking for about 70% of the interview.

Invite candidates to ask you any questions they may have.

### Nolan Principles of Public Life

As with all holders of public office, school governors and trustees should be prepared to adopt the seven principles of public life. The interview is a good time to explain this, and check their understanding of the 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](#)

## Interview questions

Interview questions should be relevant to the role and to the skills and attributes you are looking for. For each question you choose, consider what you are trying to find out by asking it and what you expect to hear in a strong answer.

Here are some suggestions:

- Why are you looking to be a governor/trustee?
- What do you know about this school/what have you found out about this school?
- What do you think are the challenges of the role?
- School governance is a collective responsibility – can you tell me about a time when you have worked in a team to achieve a goal?
- What attracted you to this particular school/trust/role?
- What experience, knowledge or skills would you bring to the role?
- 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?
- What experience (if any) do you have of developing an organisation?
- What opportunities or challenges for schools does the current political, social and economic environment present?
- Which professional/voluntary role have you enjoyed the most and why?
- What do you consider to be your strengths and weakness?
- How would colleagues or peers describe you?
- What do you understand the role of a governor/trustee to be?
- What is your understanding of conflict of interests?
- If you felt uncomfortable with a decision that has been made by the governing board, how would you raise and discuss the matter?
- Will you be happy to abide by the Nolan principles of public life and code of conduct this governing board operates under?
- What do you consider to be your greatest achievement to date?
- How do you think the strategic role of the governing board differs from the operations of the school?
- What is your understanding of ethical leadership in the context of education?

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/trustees are like and to decide whether it is for them before they make a commitment. It also gives other board members, who may not have been involved in the recruitment process so far, a chance to assess the candidate.

The process can be slower than volunteers expect and it is therefore important that you maintain contact and 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.

## References and other checks

Before completing the appointment, there are a few checks you should make on prospective volunteers, and the clerk can support you with this.

Some governing boards choose to 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. If you do choose to seek references, 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.

There is however an argument that references are unnecessary because candidates will select people that will give supportive comments, or that they do not add anything new to your knowledge of the candidate. It may also present another barrier for encouraging people from under-represented groups and different backgrounds in to the role.

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 websites 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 have a statutory responsibility to carry out a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check on governors and trustees. Prospective governors and trustees should know that they will be required to undergo an enhanced DBS check and that their appointment is subject to this.

They must also be aged 18 or over and cannot have been declared bankrupt.

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 appointments 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. Get information about schools, the government's central register for education institutions, must also be updated.

### Reminder

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

Email us: [membership@nga.org.uk](mailto:membership@nga.org.uk)

If you have recruited through Inspiring Governance, remember to log back into your account and click on the green button to confirm the appointment(s). By doing so, you will unlock the 12 months free support and training from NGA for your new volunteers.

# Inducting: training and support

## Induction

High-quality training for governors and trustees is crucial in raising the effectiveness of governance and giving volunteers a confident start to their role.

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 an induction – tailored for them – which balances providing essential information and insights with not overwhelming them.

It might be useful to create a schedule or checklist for the induction, which could be ordered based on the school's priorities and upcoming work. This will let the volunteer know what they can expect to learn and what is available for them should they want to find out about a certain aspect of the board or school.

An induction should also include a meeting with the chair, an introduction to the clerk, meeting the headteacher and a tour of the school, with an opportunity to meet pupils.

An induction pack could include a selection of the following:		
<b>Administration</b>	A copy of the code of conduct for them to sign	Forms to be completed
	DBS check to be completed	Declaration of interests form
<b>About the school</b>	The school's current prospectus or a link to information on the school's website	Information about pupil performance including login details for Analyse School Performance, and other data sources
	Calendar of school events and holidays	Staffing structure and list
	The most recent Ofsted inspection report	The school's vision and values
<b>About governance</b>	A copy of the school's Instrument of Government or Articles of Association and scheme of delegation	The school and governing board's most recent self-evaluation or facilitated review
	A calendar of meetings for the year, both for the full governing board and its committees	In academies, a copy of the funding agreement
	The current strategy document including key priorities	Policies surrounding governor/trustee visits
	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 members of the governing board (and trust board where applicable) and contact details	A list of the governing board's committees and terms of reference
	Explanation of the different governor roles in maintained schools e.g. parent and staff	Minutes from the previous meeting
	Explanation of the difference between strategic and operational	Copy of the Nolan principles of public life
<b>Essential training</b>	A list of acronyms (see NGA's glossary)	Training opportunities and dates
	Safeguarding	

Depending on the cycle of your meetings, there could be some gap between the appointment and their first formal meeting, so checking in with your new volunteers will reassure them that they have not been forgotten.

Ahead of the first meeting, ask new members of the governing board if they have everything they need and understand what will happen. For some volunteers, this may be the first formal meeting they have ever attended so be conscious that it may not be a familiar or comfortable environment. Encourage them to contribute, and clarify acronyms and assumptions of knowledge.

It might appear obvious, but taking the time to introduce new governors/trustees to the rest of the board, explaining the roles they hold and providing a little information about the skills and experience their board colleagues bring can be really useful.

For any new volunteer that happens to be employed, once they join the board, you might consider writing to their employer (or asking them to pass on a letter) explaining their role on the board, highlighting the skills they will gain, and thanking them for the support they provide including why it is important to do so.

## Training and support

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.

People have different learning styles and preferences. By taking a blended approach to training and development, your governors/trustees will have plenty of options and opportunities to engage with and undertake professional development in their governance role.

- It is beneficial for new volunteers to go on external training courses. Many local authorities provide packages of training for induction and on bespoke topics, but there are national programmes too and you should shop around for the best price and quality package. This also gives governors/trustees an opportunity to network with other local governance volunteers and professionals.
- E-learning allows users to continue their development at a time and pace which suits them, and can usually be done using any device, from anywhere. Encouraging your board to undertake e-learning – which covers a range of topics pertinent to governance – can be a very cost-effective method of training. Again, you should shop around for the best package as price and quality varies.
- For training in specialist subject areas or for systems which the governing board buys in to, many providers host demonstrations online or provide detailed guidance on their websites – examples include FFT on data.
- With clear expectations in place, it can be useful to offer that good and experienced governors/trustees mentor (or buddy-up with) newer volunteers. This can be a beneficial way for them to ask questions and learn the lay of the land. Mentors should set a positive example for how board members should behave, have the time to listen and meet with their mentees, provide motivation and encourage reflection.
- The clerk to the governing board is also an invaluable source of help and support: their responsibilities should be made clear so that new governors and trustees feel comfortable asking them for information and advice.
- Comprehensive induction guides are available for governors, trustees and chairs – an essential source of the need-to-know information for new volunteers and a useful reference point for serving volunteers.
- Keeping up to date with education news, ideas and developments is vital in both being effective and in planning the governing board's work – encourage your board to visit education news sites, and subscribe to newsletters and magazines.
- Finally, social media communities offer a great source of peer support for governors and trustees to ask questions and share experiences and resources. Use #UKgovchat to connect on Twitter or search Facebook for school governance groups.

# Succession planning: moving on and ensuring leadership

## Developing your board for the future

Once a successful board mix has been achieved, it should be constantly reviewed and refreshed to ensure that a balance and diversity 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 the board change over time.

The standard term of office for all categories of governor/trustee is four years. NGA recommends that governors/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 at the same school, except for in exceptional circumstances.

As well as the need to move on ineffective governors or trustees, that is, those who no longer meet the required competencies and behaviours, another reason to uphold the idea of a limited term of office is that experienced volunteers can be spread around the local school system. It can be beneficial for good governors/trustees to move on to another school to help to share expertise across the system and prevent governing bodies stagnating, becoming too reliant on a few people, and relationships on the board from becoming too cosy.

## Keeping volunteers engaged

Foremost, all governors and trustees are volunteers, so keeping them engaged and satisfied in the role is key to both retaining and getting the best out of them. Here are some principles to help you in doing so:

- People want to be utilised in the most effective way, so if they have joined the governing board with specific skills to offer, give them opportunities to use these in a meaningful way



All board leaders should give serious thought to ensuring talent development and succession for your governing board.

Succession planning is about ensuring continuity within an organisation by having the right people in the right place at the right time. To support governing boards in proactively planning their future leadership – including chairs and vice-chairs of the governing board and its committees – NGA have produced practical guidance on succession planning.

The guide covers five steps to support understanding and implementation:

1. Getting the basics in place – the concept of succession planning and a recap of the role of the chair and the election process.
2. Establishing a culture of succession – with ongoing, honest discussions about succession planning and modelling of good practice by current chairs.
3. Using the succession cycle – a systematic overview of each stage of the succession cycle and how it should look in practice.
4. Developing governors and trustees – how to prepare suitable governors/trustees for leadership by enabling them to grow in their role.
5. Ensuring leadership of the board – by continuing and evolving the cycle and operating a distributed leadership model.

- Provide training and development opportunities equally to keep volunteers motivated with a new challenge
- Get to know your volunteers – their interests inside and outside of education, their ambitions in their governance role
- Let volunteers have the opportunity to participate in school life – like awards evenings, having lunch with pupils and community events – all useful ways of seeing the impact of their contribution and getting to know the school too
- Set clear expectations through a code of conduct including what you expect from volunteers and also how volunteers can expect to be treated
- Make sure the role remains strategic and within the bounds of governance
- Most of all, say thank you and recognise everyone's contribution equally – ultimately people just want to feel appreciated and that their time and effort is worthwhile.

## Retention

If your governing board is experiencing a high turnover of people, consider these points:

- Governance should be seen as a professional role. Do volunteers understand their role; what governance is (and is not), and what is expected of them?
- Step back and view your governing board with a fresh pair of eyes. Do new volunteers come for the first meeting or two and then quietly disappear? This could be an induction issue. Make sure each new volunteer 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 intelligent 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; knowing when to let go is important too. Having a cycle of new recruits is healthy for governing boards. There is plenty of precedent for this in other sectors as well as in schools.

## Exit interviews

If a volunteer does decide to leave, it is good practice for the chair or vice-chair to conduct an exit interview with them. This gives the departing governor or trustee an opportunity to reflect on their own work and the work of the board, and to provide valuable insight about the board's strengths and areas for development. It is also a useful way to capture and transfer knowledge and information from the departing governor/trustee to the rest of the board. The volunteer should take the opportunity to provide constructive feedback about their experience generally. You should make sure to thank them for their contribution and take the time to reflect on their answers in order to make changes for the future – whether that is a change to your practice or a cultural issue that needs addressing.

You should consider what information you want from an exit interview, and how the board will put the information to use.

Here are some example questions:

- What caused you to think about stepping down? (If leaving before end of office)
- Were your responsibilities characterised correctly during the interview process and induction?
- Did you have clear priorities and know what was expected of you as a governor/trustee?
- How did the role match your initial expectations?
- Could the way you were inducted be improved?
- What training and development did you find most helpful and enjoyable?
- What could you say about communication to and between governors/trustees, and could this be improved?

- Did you always feel welcome and encouraged to share your thoughts, concerns and questions with me or anyone on the board?
- Did you receive adequate feedback about your performance during your term of office?
- What could we do to improve the management of the board?
- Do you feel that you had the support necessary to be a governor/trustee? If not, what was missing?
- Did you clearly understand and feel a part of the accomplishment of the school's vision and goals?
- What did you like most and like least about being involved in school governance?
- Would you change anything about the role?
- What extra responsibility would you have welcomed that you were not given?

## 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/chaishandbook](http://www.nga.org.uk/chaishandbook)

### 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 school 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)



future  
chairs

The succession  
solution for  
school boards

Governing boards can develop future leaders by nurturing talent, sharing responsibility and undertaking training but where they have a gap in their succession, they should not hesitate to recruit externally to fill positions.

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 who want to take on a leadership role.

Utilising the technology behind Inspiring Governance, Future Chairs helps governing boards to connect with volunteers who have the right blend of skills, attributes and willingness to become chair. In our experience, candidates are motivated by a role where their leadership skills and experience can benefit young people and want to contribute to their local community. These individuals are not new to chairing and strategic roles, but may not have experience in education or of governing a school.

The service is freely available to any state-funded school in England: simply register for Inspiring Governance and select the future chair option when posting your vacancy. In some areas, a bespoke recruitment service is provided.

Each Future Chair receives free support from the NGA for one year to help them become confident and effective in their role. The support includes mentoring from an experienced Chair (including National Leaders of Governance); the opportunity to join a Department for Education funded leadership development course; and a complimentary copy of *The Chair's Handbook*.

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

# n|g|a| learninglink

NGA Learning Link provides high-quality e-learning for new governors and trustees to become confident and effective in their role. Accessible anywhere, anytime and from any device, governors and trustees can undertake learning at a pace convenient to them.

#### Comprehensive modules include:

- Safeguarding
- Arts and cultural education: improving your school and its curriculum (funded by Arts Council England)
- MAT governance to support trustees in understanding and applying effective practice (coming soon)

There are also 50 bitesize modules with content for a range of roles and responsibilities.

#### There are eight CPD-accredited induction modules:

- 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)

# 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)

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