

# Governance volunteers and board practice

## School and trust governance in 2022

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[www.nga.org.uk/governance2022](http://www.nga.org.uk/governance2022)

September 2022





# Foreword

An extraordinary quarter of a million people volunteer their time and skills to oversee state schools in England in the interests of pupils. It is an important thing which they do on behalf of the rest of us, ensuring the country's schools are as good as they possibly can be. They come together in governing boards that set the vision and ethos for schools and trusts: what children should leave school knowing, having done, and being. They make important decisions about staffing structures, what limited funding is spent on, as well as recruiting, supporting and challenging headteachers and executive leaders.

To make the best decisions these boards need to be diverse in background, skills, experience and perspectives. The survey shows that while more boards are successfully recruiting members from underrepresented groups, there is still much more work to be done to ensure that governing boards are representative of the UK and school communities.

Every year, we report that the data shows we have not yet been successful in increasing the overall percentage of Black, Asian and minority ethnic governors and trustees. And every year I make pledges for further action and hope that the following year will be the breakthrough year. Disappointingly, 2022 is no different. But there are green shoots for the future; those recruited in the last two years do have a significantly different ethnic profile. Also, Black, Asian and ethnic minority volunteers are very much under-represented in board leadership roles but are more likely than their white colleagues to consider putting themselves forward to chair in future.

At NGA's Annual Conference last November, the then Secretary of State for Nadhim Zahawi MP expressed an intention for the Department of Education (DfE) to do more to improve the diversity of volunteers on governing boards. This has not happened in the meantime, but we will be raising this with Kit Malthouse MP, the Secretary of State who at the time of writing has just taken up his post.

It is reasonable to expect some government support for the citizens who give their time to govern schools and trusts. However, alongside school governance becoming more challenging with the pandemic, the support from government has been diminishing over the past years to the point where it has almost disappeared: there now remains only a small contract for the Inspiring Governance recruitment service.

Despite the move toward smaller boards tracked by the survey over the years, we have vacancies at an all-time high. We also have long service increasing; this is more possible for volunteers who are retired. Where would the system be if all those who had served for 10 years or more just stopped in one fell swoop? Diverse boards require some more experienced members and some new ones with a fresh perspective, some older members and some younger. However, this year the number of volunteers under the age of forty fell even further to the lowest on record.

Over two thirds of respondents reported that the pandemic has made their governing role more challenging. Gradually over time the governing role is becoming less manageable alongside other commitments. I remain in awe of the hours given by volunteers to their schools and trust, but it is sobering that over one-quarter of respondents (28%) under the age of 60 say that the expectations are not manageable given their professional and personal commitments.

Schools and trusts in England are more and more reliant on older and experienced governors and trustees volunteering for longer. For the first time, more than half of volunteers (51%) are 60 years or over and more than half (53%) have been involved in school governance for more than eight years. In 2011, a quarter of governors and trustees surveyed said they governed for more than a decade, and this has now increased to 40%. We are truly grateful to these people without whose commitment the system could not function.

However, NGA estimates that there are at least 20,000 governors and trustees still needed each year to fill vacancies across the country. The public do not have much awareness of the opportunity to volunteer to govern schools and





trusts, and the the government needs to be more proactive in promoting this civic leadership opportunity. We have been trying to convince the DfE since the publication of our Increasing Participation report in June last year to run a national marketing campaign for school governors and trustees. The DfE funding of the governor recruitment service, although welcome, has been diminishing and is a small number of placements compared with the need. This is too important an issue for the DfE to postpone action further. NGA will be contributing through both the Everyone on Board campaign and our Visible Governance activities, but the need for a government push on recruitment has never been more pertinent than it is now.

Governance is a key part of the accountability system for schools and trusts, and for some years it has been recognised as part of school leadership. This has been recognised in words to an extent by the DfE over the years, but at a time when rightly significant funding is being pumped into leadership development, yet funding for governance development has been withdrawn. More care and recognition are needed of the volunteer workforce. That is not why they volunteer, but in recent years NGA has increasing felt that they are being taken for granted at a time when the business of governing is a growing challenge.

Respondents agreeing the role should be paid is still well under half (38%) but it is the biggest yearly jump in the 12 years of the survey, and it is also notable that this is the

first time ever the proportion disagreeing with payment has fallen below half (45%). Paying for oversight of this vital public service would be so much more expensive, would bring questions of motivation and could probably not provide the legitimacy that committed citizens do.

Governance determines who has the power, who makes the decisions, how other players make their voice heard and how account is rendered. Ensuring the voices of stakeholders are listened to is a core function of a governing board. Governors and trustees surveyed, reported that engaging with pupils was the biggest challenge out of the stakeholder groups with 44% of respondents reporting this compared to 32% of respondents regarding parental engagement and 29% of respondents on engagement with staff. This suggests some boards may be taking staff engagement for granted as on the other hand, respondents reported less engagement with staff than for parents. While those governing won't want to add unnecessarily to staff workload it is worth boards reviewing the channels used for staff engagement.

The good news is that for the first time over half (51%) of respondents said their board had conducted a governance review this year. The percentage of governing boards undertaking an internal self-review has nearly doubled to 41% and the most popular methodology was NGA's questions for board self-evaluation. The bad news was that the number of governing boards (8%) engaging in an externally facilitated review is considerably lower than in the period 2014-2016

when 13-14% was reported annually. Given it is good practice to undertake an external review every three years, one would expect this figure to be about one third. Trusts need to report a governance review annually to their members to enable them to fulfil their functions of guardians of trust governance, so we hope to see this figure substantially higher next year.

The publication of this 2022 data on who the hidden givers in our school system are provides me with an opportunity to say thank you to this amazing group of people.



**Emma Knights OBE**  
Chief Executive  
National Governance Association



# Introduction

Governing boards provide strategic leadership and accountability in schools and academy trusts, supporting and challenging executive leaders to ensure children and young people achieve to the best of their ability. The National Governance Association's (NGA) annual governance survey seeks to understand who is governing in schools and trusts and establish their challenges, views and experiences, providing an up-to-date picture of governing board practice across England.

## Terminology

### This report refers to:

- ▶ **MATs** – A multi academy trust which is two or more academies governed by one board of trustees
- ▶ **SATs** – A single academy trust
- ▶ **Academy committees** – to describe committees of a trust board for an individual school (also known as local governing boards)

This year, the annual governance survey gathered the views of over 4000 governors and trustees. This report explores who these governors and trustees are and seeks to understand what it is like to be involved in school and trust governance in 2022. It also draws on longitudinal data that NGA has collected in the previous 11 years of the survey and joins two other reports presenting findings from the 2022 survey data.

### The report covers:

**Part a:** Board composition

**Part b:** Governance volunteers

**Part c:** Governance recruitment

**Part d:** Board practice

**Part e:** Stakeholder engagement

## Methodology

This is the twelfth consecutive year that NGA has conducted this school and trust governance survey. It is the largest of its kind and provides an extensive overview of the governance of state funded schools in England. This longitudinal national data documents the evolution of governance which otherwise may have been overlooked.

The survey was open to everyone governing state funded schools, whether as trustees of academy trusts or governors of single schools between 25 April and 30 May 2022 via the online survey website SmartSurvey.

While not all respondents answered every question, 4,185 respondents in total engaged with the survey. Respondents cover all school phases, types and regions. Although self-selecting, the distribution of respondents and their school

## School and trust governance 2022

### In this series:

- Governing in a multi academy trust
- Governance volunteers and practice
- The priorities and challenges facing our schools

Find the full series of school and trust governance in 2022 reports at:

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setting broadly matches the national picture by phase, type, structure, and region. Respondents governing in nurseries and secondary schools are slightly overrepresented as are those in the South East while those governing in the East of England are slightly underrepresented. Respondents do not need to be members of NGA, but 87% are.

Certain questions in the annual survey appear annually, others every other year, and some questions are specific to a particular year. This is so that we can explore these topics in detail, keeping the survey relevant to current affairs while also longitudinal.

For a full overview of the methodology used:

- ▶ Visit [www.nga.org.uk/governance2022](http://www.nga.org.uk/governance2022)





# Key findings

- 01 The number of governing board vacancies is at its highest since 2016.** 38% of respondents reported that their school or trust have two or more vacancies on their governing board – an increase of five percentage points from last year and an increase of seven percentage points from 2016.
- 02 The size of boards has reduced over time.** Nearly half of governing boards (47%) have 10 or fewer members, and one in five boards report eight or fewer members. This is compared to 17% of boards having 10 or fewer members on their board in 2013.
- 03 Recruiting to the governing board remains a significant challenge.** 63% of respondents support the view that recruitment to the board is difficult, an increase of eight percentage points from 2019.
- 04 The number of boards conducting interviews for new prospective governors and trustees is increasing.** Over two thirds of respondents (68%) that joined their board in the past two years were interviewed for their current role. When comparing this to respondents who have been on their board for longer, there is an evident trend of governing boards opting to undertake interviews for prospective governors and trustees.
- 05 A larger proportion of governors and trustees are volunteering for longer.** In 2011, a quarter of governors and trustees surveyed said they governed for more than a decade, this has now increased to 40%. Over half (53%) of governors and trustees surveyed in 2022 have been involved in school governance for more than eight years, this having risen by 10 percentage points since 2017, demonstrating a significant number of governors and trustees choosing to continue governing after two, four year terms.
- 06 The percentage of governors and trustees below the age of 40 is the lowest on record.** The percentage of respondents under 40 years old has halved over the past five years to 6%, and those under the age of 30 remains at 1%. For the first time, more than half (51%) of volunteers are 60 years or over.
- 07 While some boards are successfully recruiting members from underrepresented groups, there is still much work to be done to ensure that governing boards are representative of the UK and school communities.** In comparison to a year ago, there is an eight percentage point increase of respondents successfully recruiting individuals from a Black, Asian or ethnic minority group.
- 08 Only 4% of chairs are from an ethnic minority background, compared with an estimated 15% of the UK adult population from a minority ethnicity.** Although this shows a significant lack of diversity amongst those leading governing boards, 42% of other respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds said they would consider taking the role of a chair in the future.
- 09 The governing role is becoming less manageable alongside other personal and professional commitments.** Those aged between 18 years old and 59 years old were less likely to feel that their governance role is manageable compared 68% of those under the age of 60 think that their role is manageable compared to 83% of those over the age 60.
- 10 Over two thirds of respondents had reported that their governing role had become more challenging as a result of the pandemic.** The findings around governance practice and manageability, demonstrate the shift in the governance role and expectation that has been placed on governing boards as a result of the pandemic.
- 11 The pandemic has enabled governing boards to explore different approaches to meeting, from in-person meetings to full virtual meetings with over a third of full governing board meetings taking a hybrid approach.** Despite the benefits of governing virtually throughout the height of the pandemic, many respondents expressed the value that in-person governing board meetings have for board dynamics.
- 12 For the first time over half (51%) of respondents said their board had conducted a governance review this year.** 31% of boards have conducted internal self-reviews using NGA's 20 and 21 questions followed by 12% using a different methodology for self-evaluation. However, the number of boards undertaking an external review at 8% is considerably below the 2014 –15 period.
- 13 Overall, engagement with parents, pupils and staff has increased compared to 2021 but leaves much more still to be done.** Although engagement between schools and parents is moving in the right direction, boards continue to face challenges, particularly engaging with pupils. The number of respondents who felt that their MAT is effectively engaged with parents and the wider school community did reduce. There is less engagement with pupils than with other stakeholder groups.



# Part A

## Board composition

Board size

Routes onto boards

### Board size

Since its inception, the annual governance survey has recorded the size of governing boards and over time they have been reducing. In 2012, 39% of boards had more than 15 members, and now this is only 5%. At the other end, almost half of boards now have ten or fewer members whereas in 2013 they accounted for only 17% of boards. The number of boards with eight or fewer seats has increased sevenfold from 3% to 21% in 2022.

In 2014, 18% of boards reconstituted to reduce their size, and in 2015 it was a further 33%. Just over half of boards (56%) report having 9 to 12 places on their board: this has barely changed since 2017. However, there are now equal numbers smaller and larger, both at 21%.

By governing board type, a higher percentage of MAT trust boards (70%) and academy committees (69%) have smaller boards with ten or fewer members compared to 39% for maintained schools. LA federation governing boards and SAT boards continue to have larger boards compared to other governing board types, with 15% and 16% respectively having 16 or more places (a decrease of two percentage points since 2020). Federation governing bodies tend to be larger because of the regulations covering their composition. SATs have the choice to reduce their size, but they tend to be secondary schools which generally have larger boards than primaries.

As expected, figure three shows the strong link between the size of the governing board and the number of vacancies on that board. Boards with 16 or more members on their governing board at full capacity have more than two vacancies. A larger percentage of governing boards with 9 or 10 members on their governing board (when full) were likely to have no vacancies (35%) compared to those saying they had more than one vacancy. Despite this correlation, the issue around governance recruitment remains with a higher proportion of governing boards having vacancies than not, irrespective of board size.

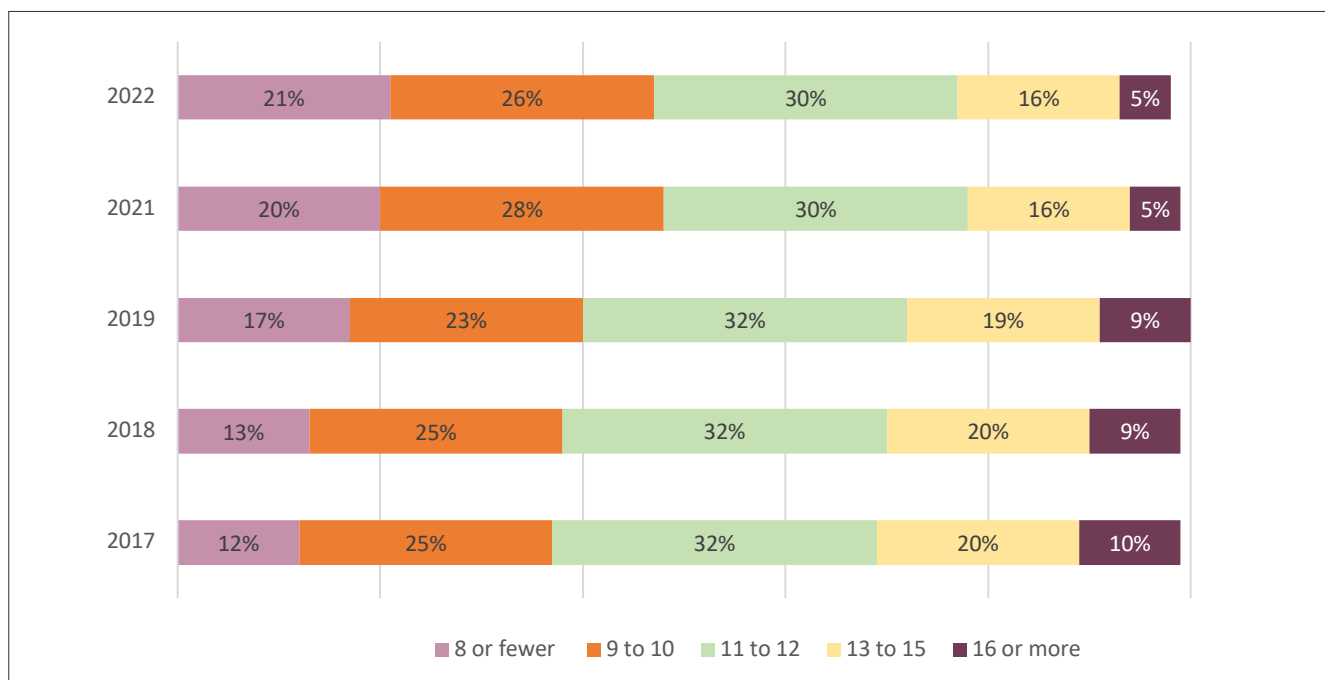


Figure one, size of governing boards when at full capacity according to respondents in annual surveys 2017 to 2022. The question was not asked in 2020.





## Routes onto boards

Almost half of respondents (49%) shared that they were appointed to their board after recruitment and nomination by the governing board itself, rather than nomination or appointment by another body. In addition, 12% said they were appointed by a foundation body and 10% were elected by the parent body. 14% of respondents in LA maintained schools are nominated by the local authority, but the overall percentage of local authority nominations has reduced as maintained schools have joined trusts which have far fewer local authority nominations.

Over the past five years, there has been a significant reduction in the number of elected posts. The proportion of parent governors has reduced from 18% in 2016 to 10% in 2022. The percentage of respondents as staff governors has halved from 7% in 2016 to 3% in 2022. This decrease is attributed to a reduction of elected places in the maintained sector, as well as the transfer to MATs which tend to have fewer elected posts. The results in figure four are somewhat surprising as they show as many parents and staff elections happening within MATs as in other structures, whereas our experience is that very few MAT trustee boards have elected places. Indeed, although 4% of MAT trustees said that they joined the board through staff election, the DfE stipulate their preference that employees should not serve as trustees on a MAT board to ensure that there are clear lines of accountability. On the other hand, given that MATs are expected to have two elected parents on academy committees (unless they have elections to the trustee board) we would expect to see the percentage of parent governors nearer 20%. Therefore, the figures surrounding the routes onto boards suggest there may be some confusion from some respondents about their route onto the board, especially within MATs.

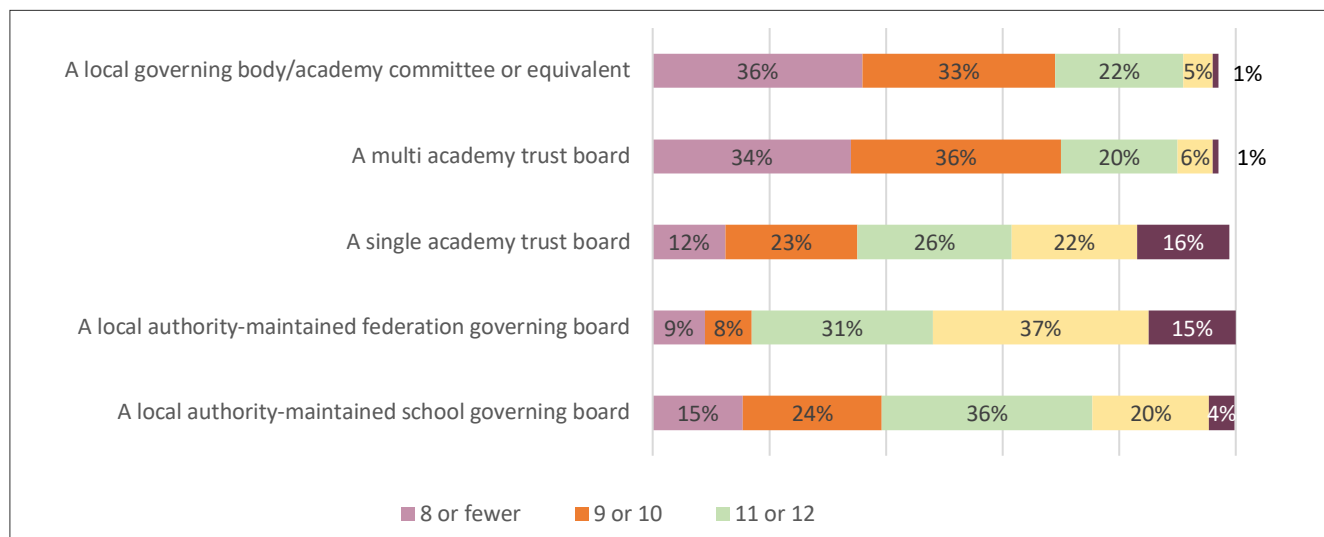


Figure two, the size of boards across different governing board types.

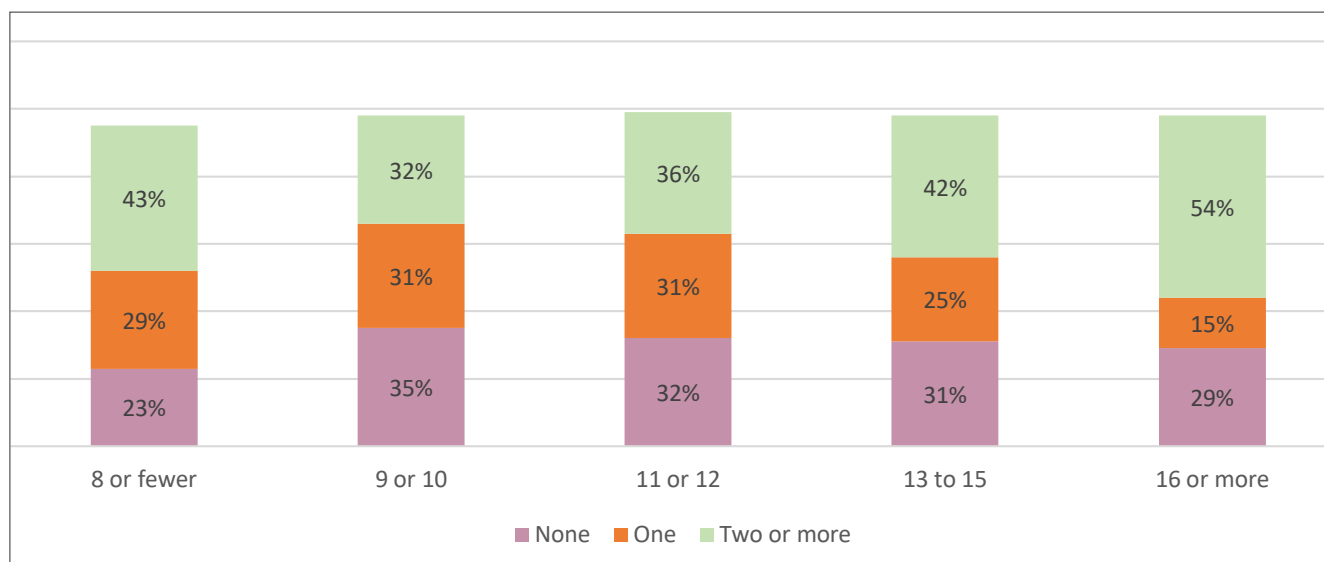


Figure three, number of vacancies compared to the governing board size at full capacity.



## Parent governors

When asking those surveyed if their first position on a governing board was as a parent governor, 41% said it was, compared with 10% who are currently an elected parent governor/trustee. This reinforces that the parent body is an important source of volunteers as often individuals remain governing after their child has left the school.

A quarter of governors and trustees (25%) responding to the survey said that they are related to or care for a pupil at the school or trust in which they currently govern and this is higher in primary schools. Analysis shows that those who care for or are related to a pupil are more likely to have governed for less time than others and more likely to be aged under 40. Half of respondents (50%) aged under 40 are related to or care for a pupil in the school in which they govern.

	LA maintained school	LA maintained federation	SAT trustee board	MAT trustee board	Academy committee (within MAT)
Nominated and co-opted by the governing board	57%	51%	47%	31%	45%
Appointed by the governing board after being nominated by the local authority	14%	14%	3%	2%	3%
Appointed as a trustee by the members of the trust	0%	2%	20%	31%	3%
Appointed as an academy committee member by the trust	0%	0%	3%	9%	19%
Elected by the parent body	11%	5%	11%	10%	9%
Elected by staff	2%	3%	4%	4%	3%
Appointed by a foundation body	14%	21%	8%	7%	15%
Ex-officio member (by virtue of another position e.g. head, CEO)	2%	5%	2%	3%	1%
Don't know	0%	0%	2%	3%	1%
N=	1577	126	384	576	498

Figure four, how respondents obtained their current role on their governing board.







# Part B Governance volunteers

Who governs

Board leadership

Governance service



YGN supports and encourages young governors and trustees by allowing them to:

- share their experiences through informal networking events
- address challenges and opportunities
- create relevant and sustainable connections

YGN is member-led: created and run by those governing with support from the NGA.

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## Age

People aged between 18-39 are underrepresented in school governance. Only 6% of governors and trustees reported that they are aged under 40 years old, this is half of the percentage since we began recording the age of respondents in 2015. This reduction may be related to the decline in the number of parent governors.

An even smaller percentage of 1% reported being under 30 which compares to 2% aged 80 years or older. This means that the vast majority of the volunteers who are contributing to the decisions made by boards do not have recent experience of the education system or of what it is like to be a young person in today's world. Newer governors and trustees tend

to be younger, with almost a third of volunteers (31%) joining the governing board within the past year aged under 40. On the other hand, findings show that for the first time more than half (51%) of respondents are 60 years old and over and we are very grateful for their service too.

## Ethnicity

Governing boards have far less ethnic diversity than the school communities they serve. Only 6% of governors and trustees surveyed reported they were from an ethnic minority background. The governance community does not reflect national data for pupil, staff or general population, teacher and headteacher ethnic diversity, nor is it reflective of 2019 Office for National Statistics (ONS) ethnicity estimates.

The percentage of respondents that disclosed they were from an ethnic minority background increased by less than one percent from last year, demonstrating that there is very little movement towards boards becoming more ethnically diverse and truly reflecting their schools and local communities. The issue of ethnic diversity is made more difficult by the fact that volunteers tend to be older, but those aged over sixty are more likely to be of white ethnicity.

It is however, positive that new volunteers (governors and trustees who joined a board in the past 12 months) are much more likely to be representative of the adult population: 83% identify as white, 4% from mixed/multiple groups, 7% as Asian and 4% as Black. This is a slight improvement on findings from 2020.

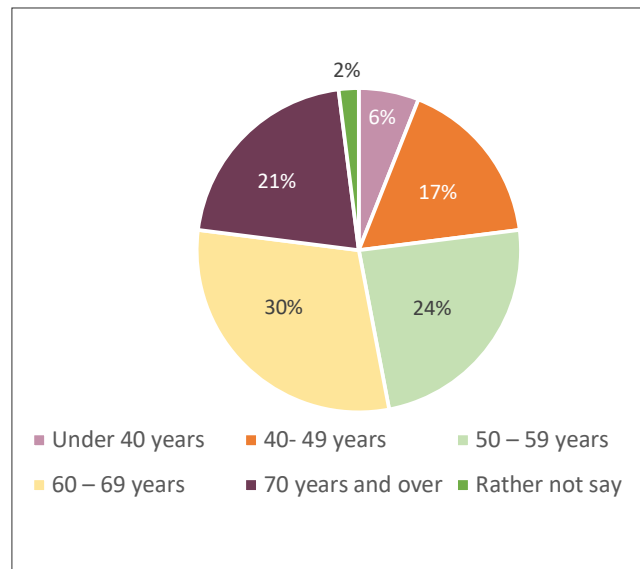


Figure five, the age demographic of 2168 respondents.





The demographic make up of governors and trustees also vary by region, most significantly in London where overall 20% of governors and trustees are Black, Asian and other ethnicities, a 3-percentage point increase from NGA's 2020 findings. Overall in other regions, governors and trustees from Black, Asian and other minority ethnicities are underrepresented, particularly in the South West (2%), South East (3%), West Midlands (3%), North West (3%) and the North East (3%). This sits in line with 2019 ONS ethnicity estimates which breaks down ethnicity by region. The percentage of governors and trustees that are white and govern are overrepresented in all regions and those of an ethnic minority are underrepresented in all regions. The largest disparity between 2019 ONS ethnicity estimates and those who govern is in the West Midlands with 17% of the population being an ethnic minority and only 3% governing. Additionally, the population of white individuals in the West Midlands sits at 83% and 95% govern.

## Gender

Roughly three in five governance volunteers are women: a similar result every year since we began asking this question. This year's findings show that there is a higher proportion of males aged under 40 (57%) compared to the number of females under the age of 40 (43%).

Historically, women have governed at slightly lower rates in secondaries than in primaries and nurseries, and this year's findings continue to reinforce this with 20% of those governing in secondaries and 4% in special schools being women, compared with 63% in primaries.

	ONS ethnicity estimates 2019	Pupils in England	Teachers in England	Heads in England	Governance volunteers surveyed*	Chairs of governing boards surveyed *
White	84%	71%	90%	92%	94%	96%
Black, African, Caribbean or Black British	4%	6%	2%	8%	1%	1%
Asian	8%	12%	5%		3%	2%
Mixed/multiple	2%	7%	2%		1%	1%
Other	1%	2%	1%		0%	0%

Figure six, a table showing ethnicity of pupils, teachers, headteachers those surveyed in school governance survey in 2022 and the general population.

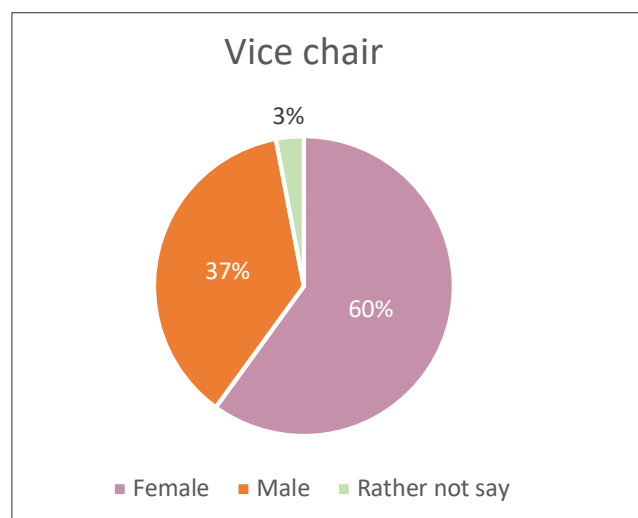


Figure seven, the percentage of vice chairs separated by gender.

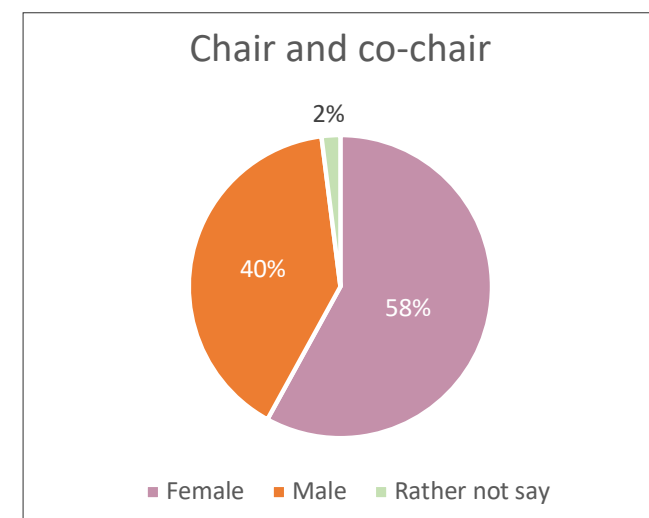


Figure eight, the percentage of chairs and co-chairs separated by gender.





Roles of those governing in the annual governance survey were:

- 33% chairs or co-chairs
- 13% vice chairs
- 9% committee chair
- 42% other governors and trustees
- 1% CEO of a multi academy trust and head teacher of a maintained school.

We have already seen that the school governance population as a whole lacks sufficient diversity, and this is even more true of those leading the board. Those in a chairing role were more likely to be aged over 50 with 81% of chairs reporting that they were aged 50 or over.

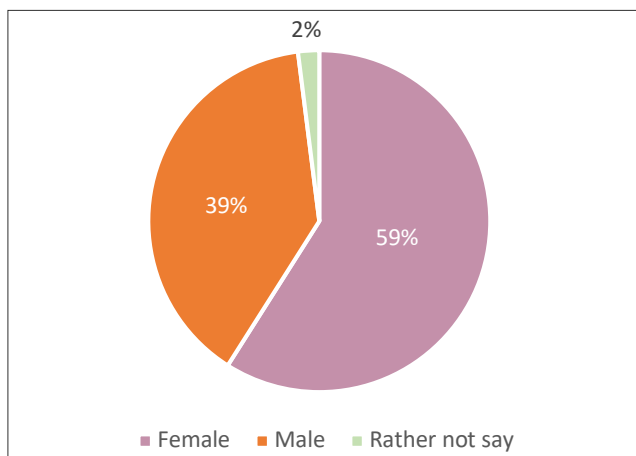


Figure nine, the percentage of respondents describing their gender.

## Sexuality

The percentage of respondents identifying as LGBTQ+ remains low at 3% compared to those that do not identify this way (91%), while 6% preferred not to say. These figures remain broadly in line with findings in previous years and aligns with data from the Office for National Statistics in 2020 at 3.1%. When analysing this further, findings show that those aged under 40 are more likely to identify as LGBTQ+ compared to those aged over 40 years old.

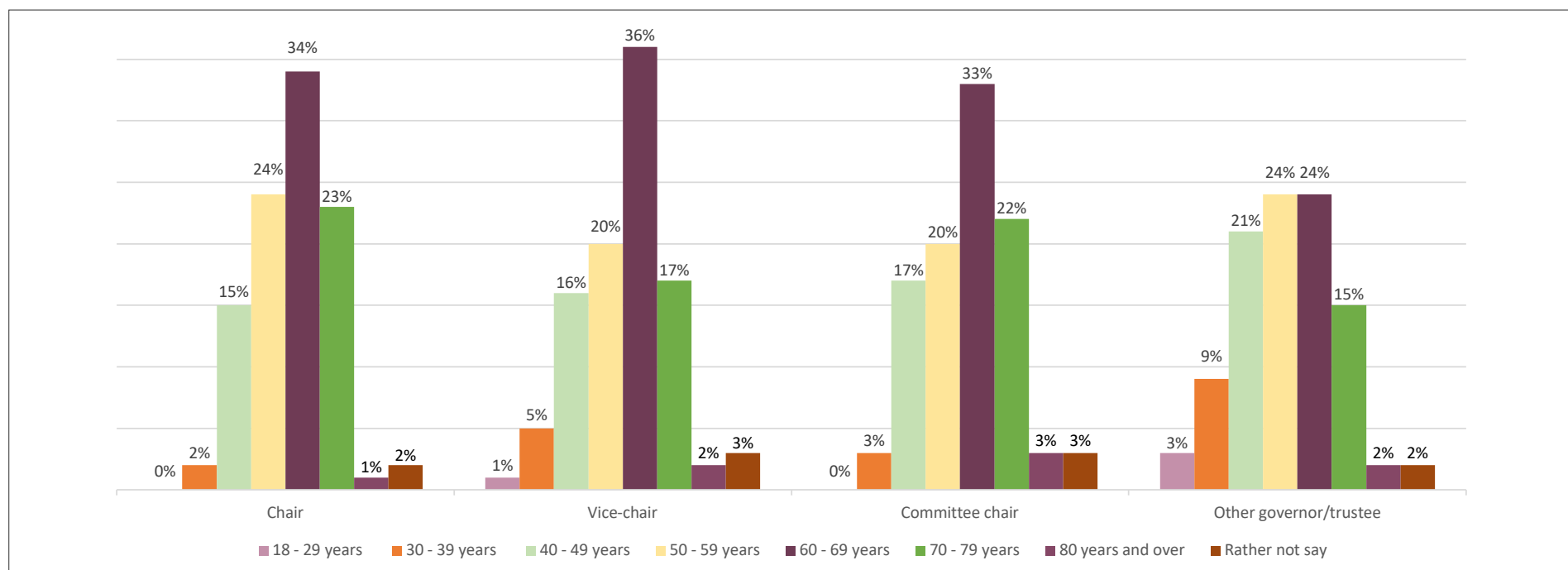


Figure ten, percentage of respondents in different roles on the board and their age.



## Chairing

Overall, 59% of chairs and co-chairs are female and 41% of chairs and co-chairs are male. The proportion of female chairs to male chairs differs across governing board types. The findings show that chairs are more likely to be female at LA maintained schools (62%), LA maintained federations (68%) and at academy committee level (60%). Despite fewer men governing, chairs are more likely to be male on a SAT board (54%) and on a MAT (53%).

Only 4% of chairs were of an ethnic minority background compared to 96% of chairs from a white ethnic background. Respondents from an ethnic minority background are more likely to be on the governing board as a governor or trustee, with 11% of those in non-leadership roles on the board from an ethnic minority background. However, this year's findings show that respondents from an ethnic minority background are more likely to consider chairing their board in the future (42%). Meanwhile, only 4% of respondents from an ethnic minority background are due to chair soon.

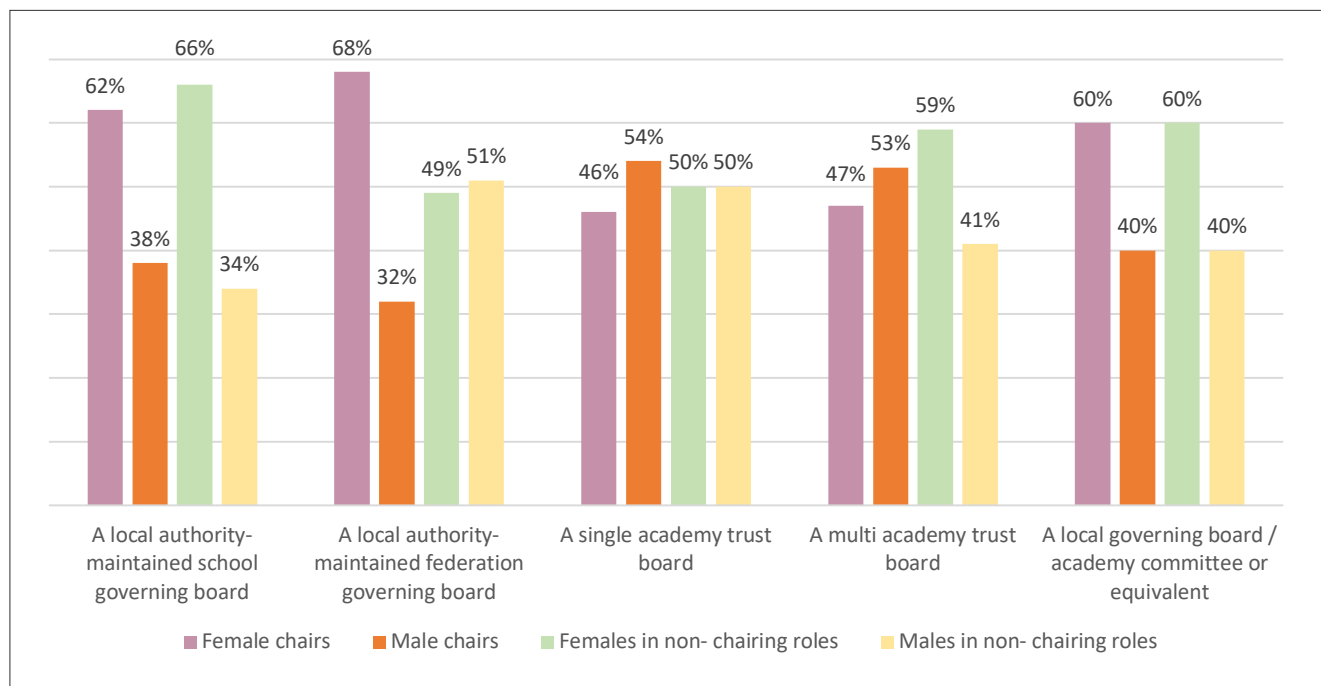


Figure 11, percentage of male and females in chairing and non-chairing positions across board types.

## Leadership demographics: a snapshot

- 58% of chairs (and co-chairs) are aged 60 and over.
- only 4% of chairs and co-chairs are of a Black, Asian, or other minority ethnicity.
- 72% of chairs and 64% of co-chairs have been governing in their role.
- 2% of vice chairs are from a minority ethnicity.
- 44% of vice chairs are aged under 60.

## Governance service

Volunteers are tending to govern for longer. 40% of respondents have been governing for over a decade, an increase from 25% in 2011. Over half of respondents (52%) have been governing for more than 8 years, the equivalent of two terms of office. Chairs were most likely to report to have been on their governing board for 5 years or longer.

Rather than remaining on the same board for longer than eight years, those governing are seeking new opportunities to govern elsewhere. Moving to a different board shares knowledge and experience across schools and keeps views and perspectives on the board dynamic and challenging.

However, of the 261 individuals who had served for more than ten years, all but one person has remained on the same board for that whole length of time.

Unsurprisingly, older volunteers are more likely to be longer serving, with 75% of those aged 40 and over reporting being involved in school governance for at least five years which applied to only 22% of those aged under 40. More than a third of those aged 40 and over had been a member of their current board for over 8 years (35%), compared to 4% of those under 40, exceeding the maximum recommended good practice of two four-year terms on a single board. This is higher when considering the percentage of respondents over





60 and governing for longer than five years (84%) compared to 58% of respondents aged under 60 and governing for more than five years.

## Chairing in the future

The percentage of respondents reporting that they plan on or are considering becoming a chair on their board is returning to pre-pandemic levels. 36% of governors and trustees surveyed said in both 2022 and 2018 that they would consider becoming a chair compared to 30% in 2020 saying they would. However, this is still lower than 43% of respondents in 2017 and 41% in 2016 saying that they would consider chairing, demonstrating that a lower proportion of those already governing are less likely to consider moving onto a chairing role.

Over half (58%) of respondents are not considering taking on the role and 6% do not know.

When looking to understand the motivation behind current chairs taking on the role, 42% of chairs said that they attained their role as a result of no one else wanting to take it on, a six- percentage point increase from 2020. This suggests a significant proportion of boards are not engaging in succession planning of board leadership.

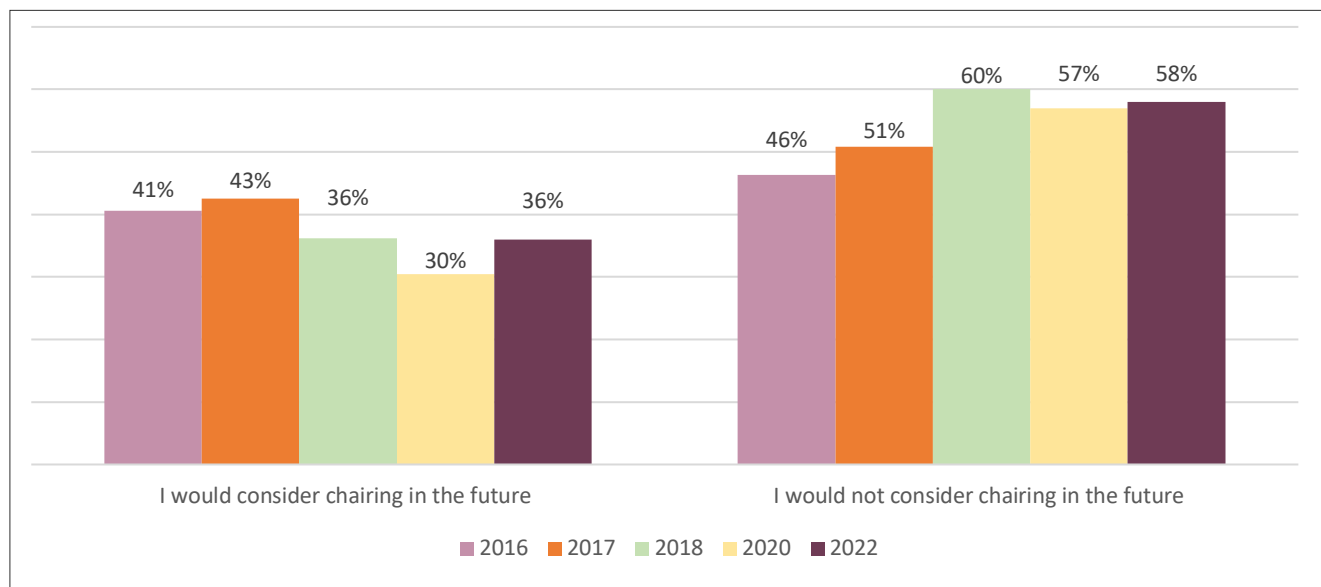


Figure 12, the percentage of respondents considering chairing.

	Involved in school governance		On current governing board	
	2018	2022	2018	2022
Less than 12 months	11%	8%	14%	12%
1-4 years	25%	24%	38%	36%
5-8 years	19%	16%	21%	21%
Over 8 years	45%	52%	27%	31%

Figure 13, the length of time respondents have been governing overall and the length of time they have been on their current board in 2018 and 2022.



# Part C Recruitment

Governing board vacancies

Advertising

Interviewing

Addressing diversity



The Visible Governance campaign, run by NGA, aims to raise the profile of school and trust governance, and its key role in helping to ensure all children and young people are provided with a high-quality education.

► Visit [www.nga.org.uk/visible-governance](http://www.nga.org.uk/visible-governance)

The findings from this year's survey highlights the consistent message that recruitment to governing boards continues to be challenging with 63% of respondents reporting that it is difficult and only 28% that it is not. When first asking the question in this format in 2015, exactly half of respondents said that it was difficult to recruit to the governing board.

Findings also indicate that recruiting to the board remains a difficulty for most boards regardless of their type; however local authority federation governing boards and academy committees are more likely to say that recruiting to the board is a challenge, while SAT boards were less likely to have challenges.

COVID-19 has impacted many aspects of the way governing boards operate and carry out their functions. The survey looked at whether the pandemic has affected the recruitment of members to the governing board and the answers were fairly evenly split: 37% of governors and trustees said difficulties recruiting to the governing board had been exacerbated by the pandemic, 30% had not seen the pandemic as having an impact on recruitment and a 33% did not have a view.

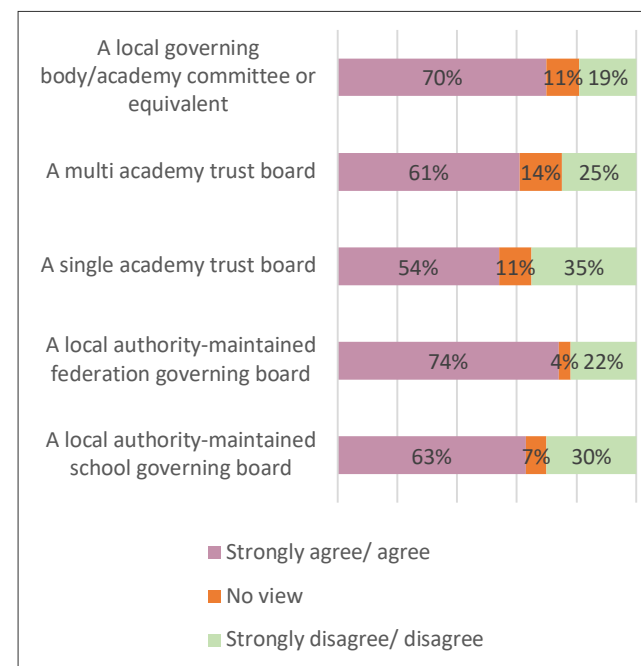


Figure 14, respondents governing in different governing board types sharing their views on difficulties recruiting to the board.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
It is difficult to recruit to the governing board	50%	53%	56%	58%	55%	63%	64%	63%
No view	10%	13%	13%	12%	10%	9%	7%	9%
It is not difficult to recruit to the governing board	40%	34%	31%	30%	35%	28%	29%	28%

Figure 15, percentage of governors/ trustees reporting the extent to which it is difficult to recruit to the board from 2015-2022.





The pandemic has also undoubtedly changed the way that governing boards have operated and brought in the practice of virtual and hybrid meetings. While 43% of full governing board meetings are taking place in person, 38% are adopting a hybrid approach to meeting and 17% are conducting meetings virtually. Almost equal numbers said that volunteer recruitment was easier with the prospect of governing virtually (29%) as said it made no difference (28%); 43% had no view.

## Vacancies

The number of vacancies on governing boards is at its highest since NGA started recording them in this way in 2016, with 38% of respondents reporting that their governing board has two or more vacancies. Special schools are seen to be the most affected with 42% have two or more vacancies.

Longitudinal data shows that the number of governing boards with more than two vacancies has risen by five percentage points from 2021 and seven percentage points from 2016. There has also been a shift in the number of boards reporting that they have no vacancies, a reduction of six percentage points from 36% last year and of 13 percentage points from 42% in 2016. There are now more governing boards with two or more vacancies than no vacancies at all.

The recruitment challenge varies a little across the regions with two or more vacancies most likely to be reported in the South West, followed by the East Midlands and the East of England. It is unsurprising that London is the region with the lowest proportion of boards affected as the capital has the highest number of volunteers registered with the recruitment agencies. There is a slight correlation which shows that regions with two or more vacancies on their governing board are also more likely to report that recruiting to the board is a challenge.

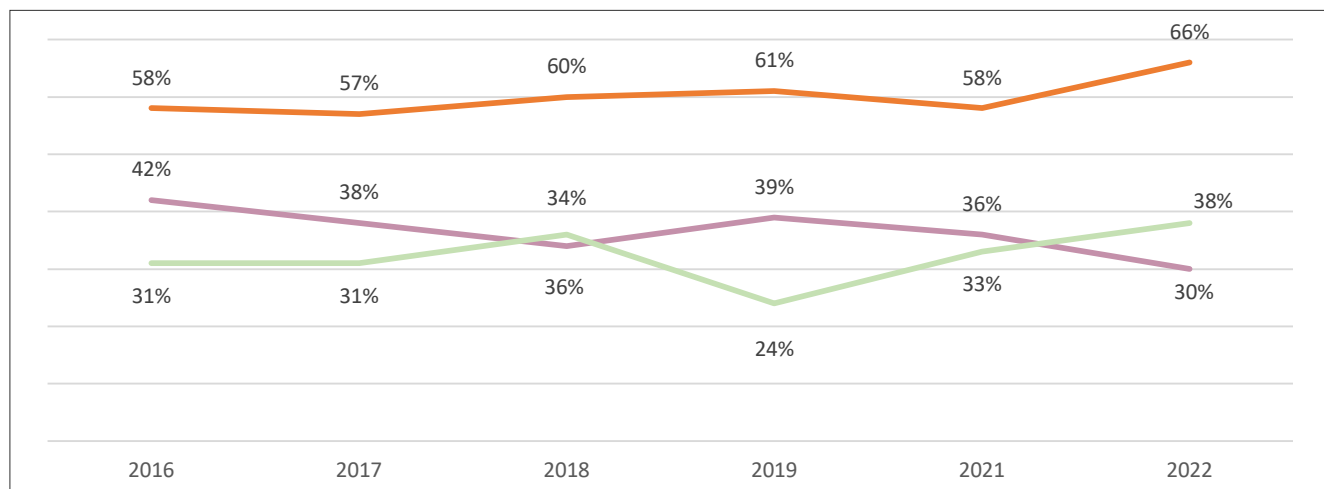


Figure 16, board vacancies from 2016 to 2022.

Region	% of boards with two or more vacancies within each region	% of regions reporting difficulties recruiting to the board
East Midlands	42%	69%
East of England	43%	68%
London	32%	50%
North East	40%	58%
North West	33%	58%
South East	38%	65%
South West	46%	69%
West Midlands	35%	63%
Yorkshire and Humber	37%	65%

Figure 17, percentage of governing boards with two or more vacancies across the nine regions in England.



## Advertising for volunteers

The findings from the survey demonstrate the various methods that governing boards use to advertise their vacancies. Although governing boards are using multiple channels to advertise vacancies, the two most prevalent routes are identifying people that are already known to them and utilising the school's communication channels e.g. social media and newsletters. As seen in figure 18, there are many ways in which governing boards have advertised vacancies on the governing board with individuals with a personal or professional connection to those on the governing board being the most popular route onto the board. A small proportion of governing boards advertised vacancies through methods such as: contacting school alumni (3%), asking neighbouring schools if governors would take on an extra governing role or swap (7%) and using paid for job boards (5%).

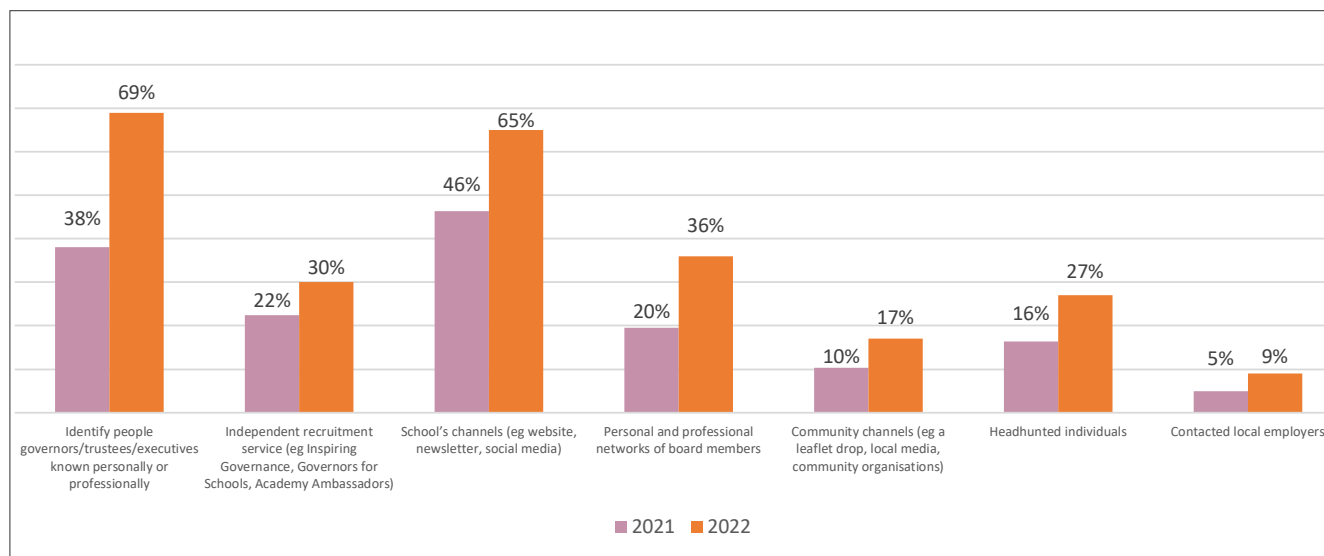


Figure 18, the more common methods that governing boards have engaged with to advertise vacancies in 2021 and 2022.

## Addressing diversity on the governing board

Boards need to ensure that the people participating in decision-making and oversight understand the experiences of the community served, offer a healthy difference of perspectives and demonstrate a commitment to training, awareness and actively think beyond their own interests and experiences to include and understand the people they serve. This should not be left only to those from underrepresented groups. Two crucial elements of increasing participation and perspectives in school and trust governance are recruitment and retention of volunteers.

Enabling an open opportunity for boards to recruit from a diverse range of individuals can enhance the strategic decision-making role of the governing board. This route can easily be adopted for the half of posts which are co-opted directly (see figure four) by the governing board (49%), Along with the 9% appointed by members of trust and the 5% of academy committees members appointed by trusts.

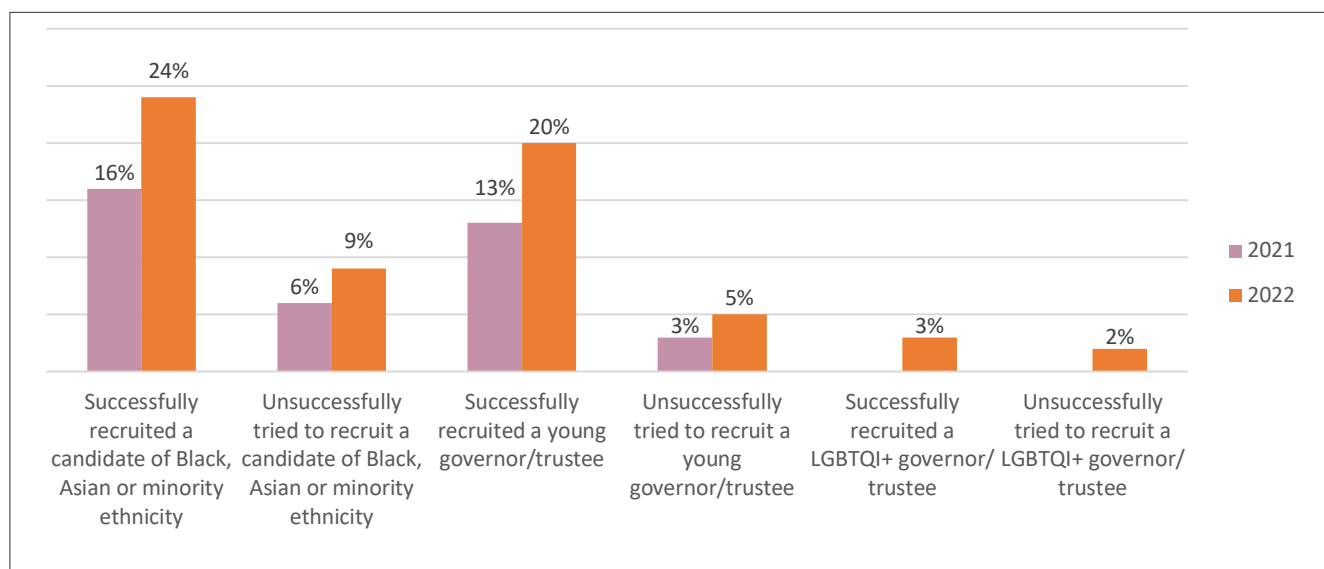


Figure 19, percentage of governing boards successfully and unsuccessfully recruiting from underrepresented groups.







In comparison to 2021, there has been an overall increase in boards in governing boards considering recruiting individuals from underrepresented groups and successfully recruiting them. When segmenting findings across school types, all-through and special schools report less success in recruiting from underrepresented groups, but special schools also find it hardest to recruit volunteers at all. There is no direct correlation between the methods that boards engaged with to advertise vacancies and whether the board successfully recruited from underrepresented groups.

NGA's report, [increasing participation in school and trust governance](#) found a number of barriers to boards diversifying such as:

- Closed recruitment practices
- Lack of visibility of governance
- A lack of priority given to the issue.

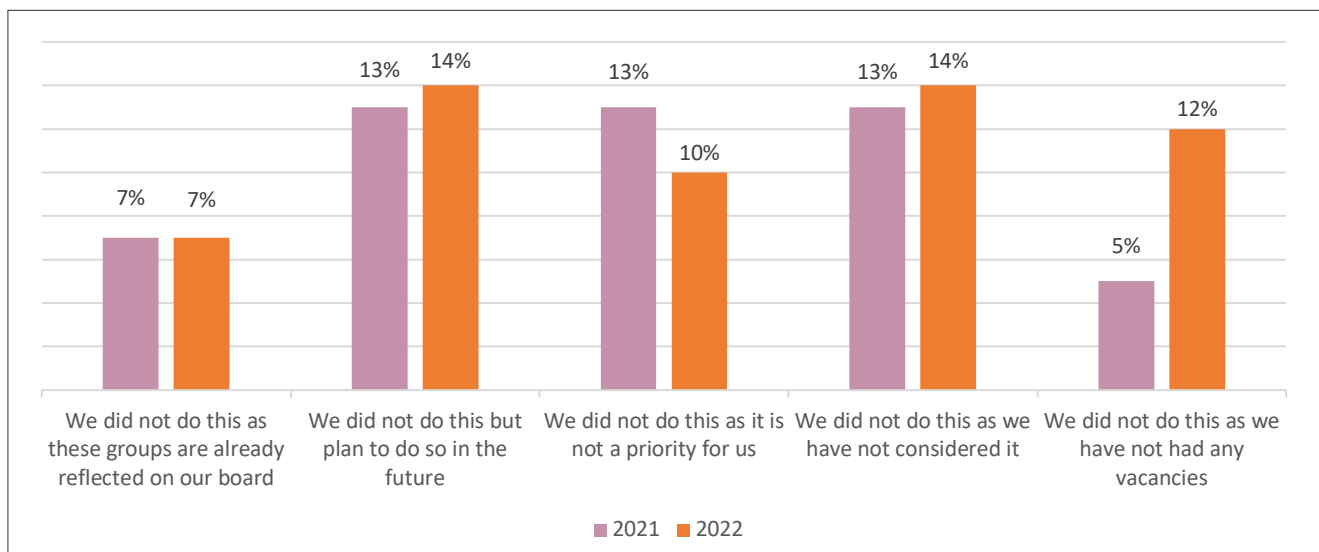


Figure 20, comparative data between 2021 and 2020 of respondents reporting that their board had not recruited from underrepresented groups.

## Your voice



When exploring why boards may not have been successful in recruiting underrepresented groups onto the board some respondents shared that:

'Meeting diversity targets is difficult when willing volunteers are hard enough to find already!'

'Currently under discussion; our main focus is recruiting skills.'

'As we were seeking parent governors and we had a sufficient number of candidates, we did not do any of the above'

'We have not specifically tried to recruit from underrepresented groups, but we are mindful of our culture, recruitment practices, meeting times etc to ensure we are not inadvertently exclusive. This is an area for development.'

'We have selected the best available candidates irrespective of age, ethnicity or any underrepresented part of the community. We welcome everyone who can have a positive impact on the school and its children. If they had the right experience and attitude that was what mattered. We simply want the best people for our school, irrespective of other considerations.'

Many respondents noted that when looking at recruiting to the board, there was a conflict between skill set and background.

## Our voice



When working to increase the diversity of your board, we encourage you to talk to stakeholders (pupils, parents, staff and the wider community) – to let them know the work you are doing and why, and what change you feel is necessary (and possible). The governing board is responsible for setting the vision and ethos of the school. Taking board diversity seriously will set the culture for equality and inclusion to thrive and will set an example 'from the top down'. NGA's research on increasing participation in school and trust governance places a spotlight on the value that diversifying your board can add to carrying out the core functions of governance.





## Interviewing

This year, not including those elected, over half (59%) of respondents were interviewed upon joining the governing board in their current role, with 30% of governors and trustees being interviewed formally and 70% saying that they were interviewed informally. Our questions on interviewing prospective governors and trustees have varied over the years, but this practice is spreading, and the number now being interviewed is significant compared with ten years ago. 44% were not interviewed at all for their current role on the governing board.

There is an evident trend which shows that more boards are conducting interviews (either formally or informally) on prospective governors and trustees wishing to join the board. As seen in figure 21, the percentage of those having joined the board in the past two years were more likely to have been interviewed than not.

A higher percentage of respondents that govern on SAT boards and MAT boards were likely to have been interviewed for their current role on their board and were more likely to have had an interview done formally compared to other governing board types. A slightly higher percentage (52%) of those on academy committees reported that they had been interviewed for their current role compared to those who had not (48%). This was similarly the case for local authority maintained schools with 52% of respondents on this type of board having been interviewed and 47% having not had an interview. [The Competency Framework](#) set out by the DfE is useful for governing boards to construct questions for interviewing prospective governors and trustees to the board. It is also designed to help governing boards assess what knowledge, skills and behaviour are needed to govern the school, or group of schools, most effectively.

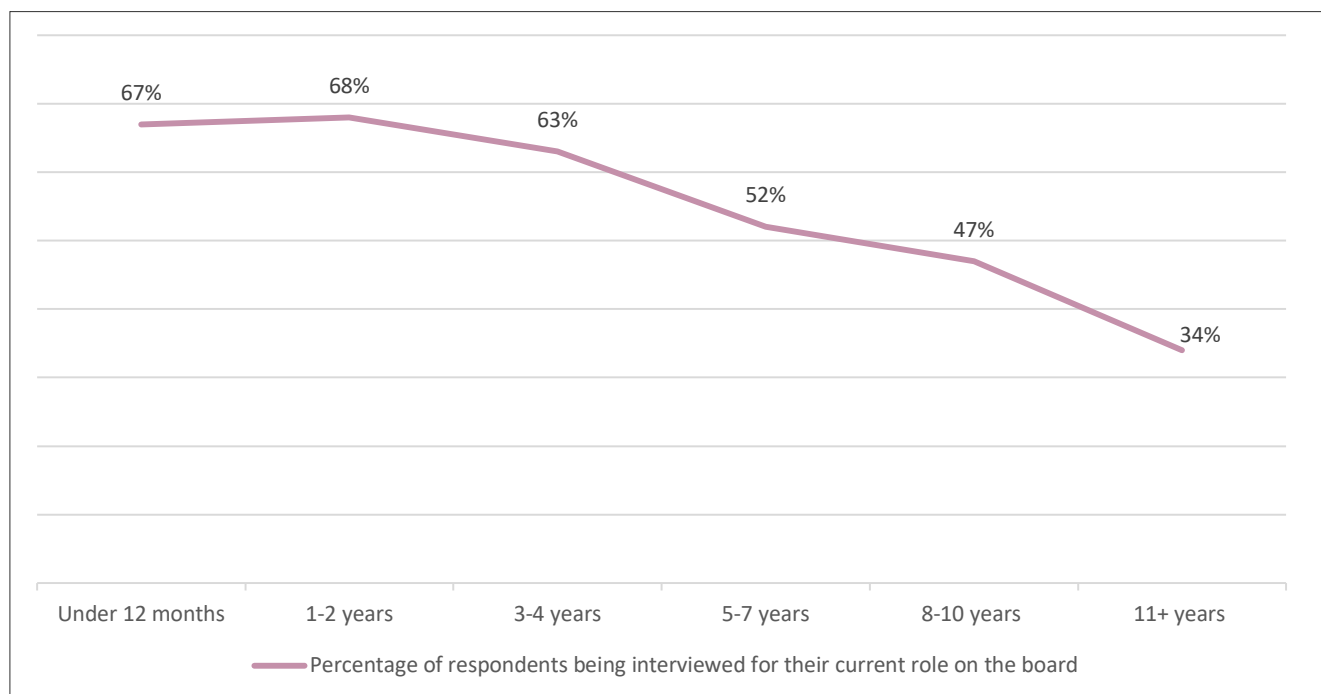


Figure 21, percentage of respondents being interviewed for their current role on the board by length of service.

### Everyone on Board: increasing diversity in school governance

To address this historic underrepresentation, and to improve outcomes for all pupils, NGA's Everyone on Board campaign aims to increase the participation of people from ethnic minorities and young people in school governance. The campaign aims to provide the resources, skills and expertise to attract under representative people to your board.

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





# Part D

## Governance practice

Governance training and development

Manageability and payment

Governance professionals

Governance reviews

### Your voice



'Whilst the experience was overall good, I think it could be improved with a proper school induction programme and more signposting to key documents. Since becoming chair, I have introduced these'

'I had previously been chair of the same body and did not feel a need for a buddy.'

'I had a one day training. I am learning whilst doing it.'

'I was informally supported by all the governors, but a buddy system could ensure people read the docs / upload on time / know the correct procedures etc.'

'I have used my experience to develop an electronic induction and have taken on a recent role to assist with Governor recruitment.'

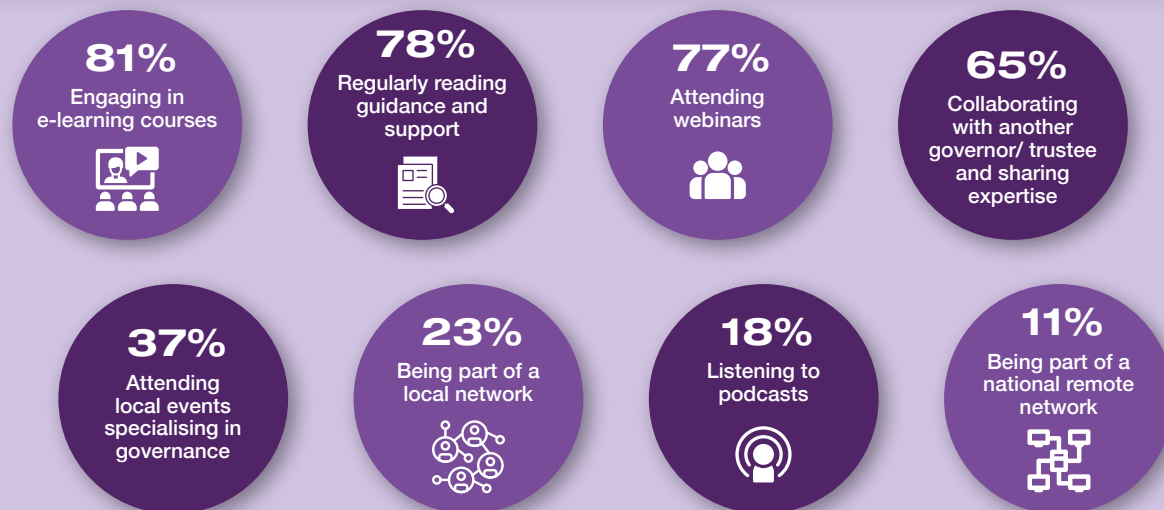
### Governance training and development

Almost a quarter of respondents reported that they received a buddy or mentor upon joining their current board (23%), 85% of these respondents found this helpful and 15% did not. Over half of respondents (55%) did not have a buddy or mentor and just over a fifth (21%) did not have a buddy or mentor but would have liked one. NGA considers this to be an important part of the induction of first-time governors or trustees. Findings demonstrate that those that joined their current governing board longer ago were slightly less likely to have had a buddy or a mentor upon joining the board, but the practice was a little more successful.

94% of respondents support relevant, high-quality induction training as mandatory for new governors and trustees. Since first asking this question in 2011, an overwhelming majority of respondents have always supported the view that induction training should be mandatory for new governors/ trustees joining a board.

Governors and trustees that have been governing for longer than three years are more likely to be part of a local network or attend local events specialising in governance compared to those who have been governing for less than three years. Findings show that methods that involve

### When asked which forms of governance training or development respondents has accessed, the most to least popular types of training were:





engaging in webinars, e-learning and collaborative networking were commonly used regardless of the length of time that respondents have been governing. Findings show that governors and trustees utilise an array of tools to support their development and increase their governance knowledge. The range of methods that respondents use is irrespective of role, age and the type of governing board they sit on.

## Payment

As shown in figure 22, there is a cumulative appetite for the governance role to be a paid one, whereby over a third (38%) of respondents said that they think there should be an option to pay governors and trustees as well as receiving expenses. Just under a half (45%) of respondents do not think that this should be the case. Despite a higher proportion of respondents thinking that the governance role should not be a paid role, this is the highest percentage of respondents saying that it should since first asking the question in 2011. Findings from 2011 show that only 28% of respondents shared the view that the role should be paid, showing a 10- percentage point increase between 2011 and 2022. As a result of this, this year's findings also show that the percentage of those thinking that the governance role should be a paid role is at its lowest in 12 years.

There is no direct correlation between the proportion of those reporting that their governance role is unmanageable alongside other commitments with the proportion of respondents sharing the view that there should be an option to pay governors and trustees as well as receiving expenses. For example, 66% of respondents that think there should be an option to pay those in a governance role and think that their governance role is manageable, compared to 30% thinking that there should be an option for pay and saying that their governance role is not manageable.

	Joined the board up to 2 years ago	Joined the board 5 or more years ago
Yes, it was helpful	20%	20%
Yes, but it was not helpful	6%	2%
No, I did not receive a buddy/mentor	46%	59%
No, but I would have liked one	28%	17%
Don't know	0%	1%

Figure 21, the percentage of respondents receiving a buddy or mentor upon joining their governing board less than 2 years ago versus 5 or more years ago.

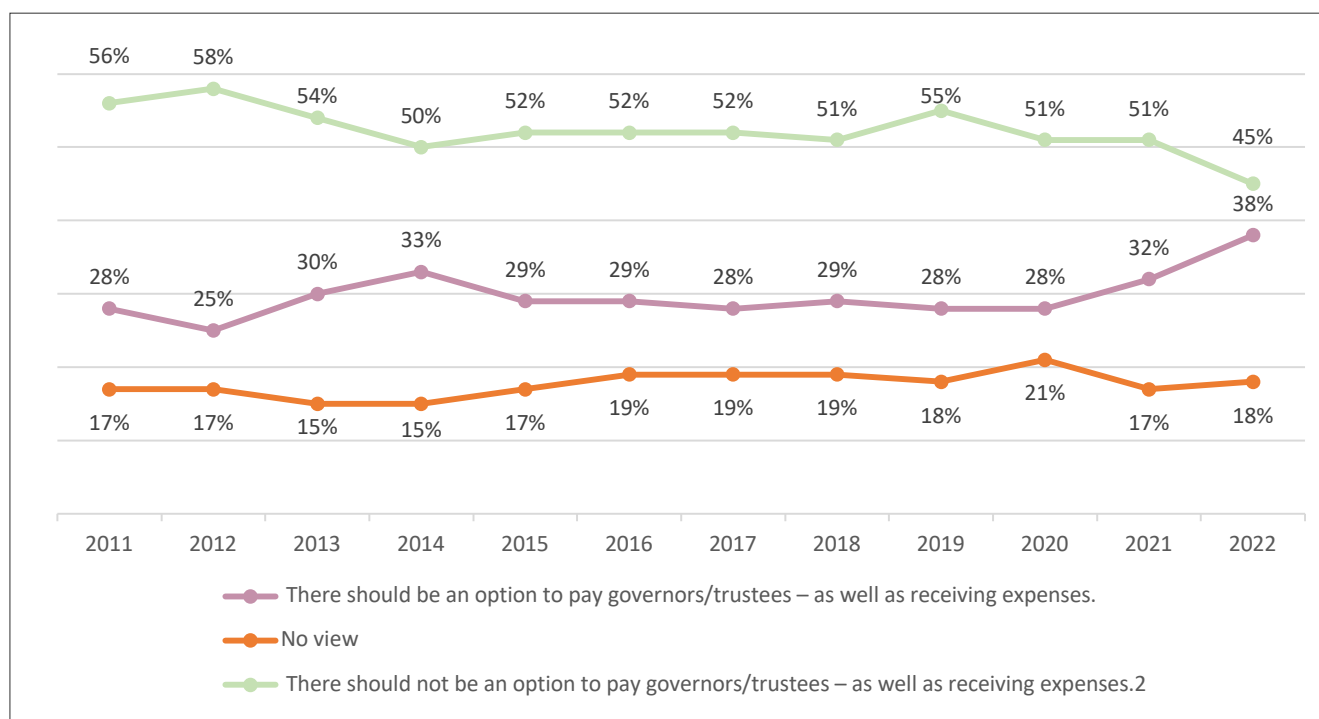


Figure 22, percentage of respondents sharing their views on whether the governance role should be paid between 2011 and 2022.





## Governance professionals

A third of governors and trustees surveyed shared that their governance professional is employed directly by the school or trust (33%) and 36% of governance professionals are contracted through the local authority (28%) or service provider (8%). Fewer respondents said that their governance professional had another role in the school (14%).

Over a quarter (27%) of governors and trustees surveyed reported that it is difficult to recruit a good governance professional compared to 54% reporting that they did not think it was difficult to recruit a governance professional to the board.

## Manageability of the role

Three quarters of governors and trustees surveyed say that their governing role is manageable around other personal and professional commitments, while just over one fifth (21%) believe that it is not. This has risen from 16% in 2019.

This year's findings show that those aged between 30 and 59 are less likely to feel that their governance role is manageable with other commitments. 93% of the small number of governors and trustees aged under 30 felt that their governance role was manageable compared to 67% of those in their thirties, 64% in their forties, 70% in their fifties, 81% aged 60-69 and 84% aged 70-79. This is despite the fact that those over 60 are more likely to be chairs and are less likely to be in full time employment.

## Governance reviews

It is expected practice that boards regularly review their governance. The Governance Handbook advises boards to evaluate themselves on a routine basis and NGA recommend that self-evaluation takes place annually. This is likely to consist of the board asking themselves reflective questions that cover areas such as board size, compliance, and core functions. An effective external review of governance will

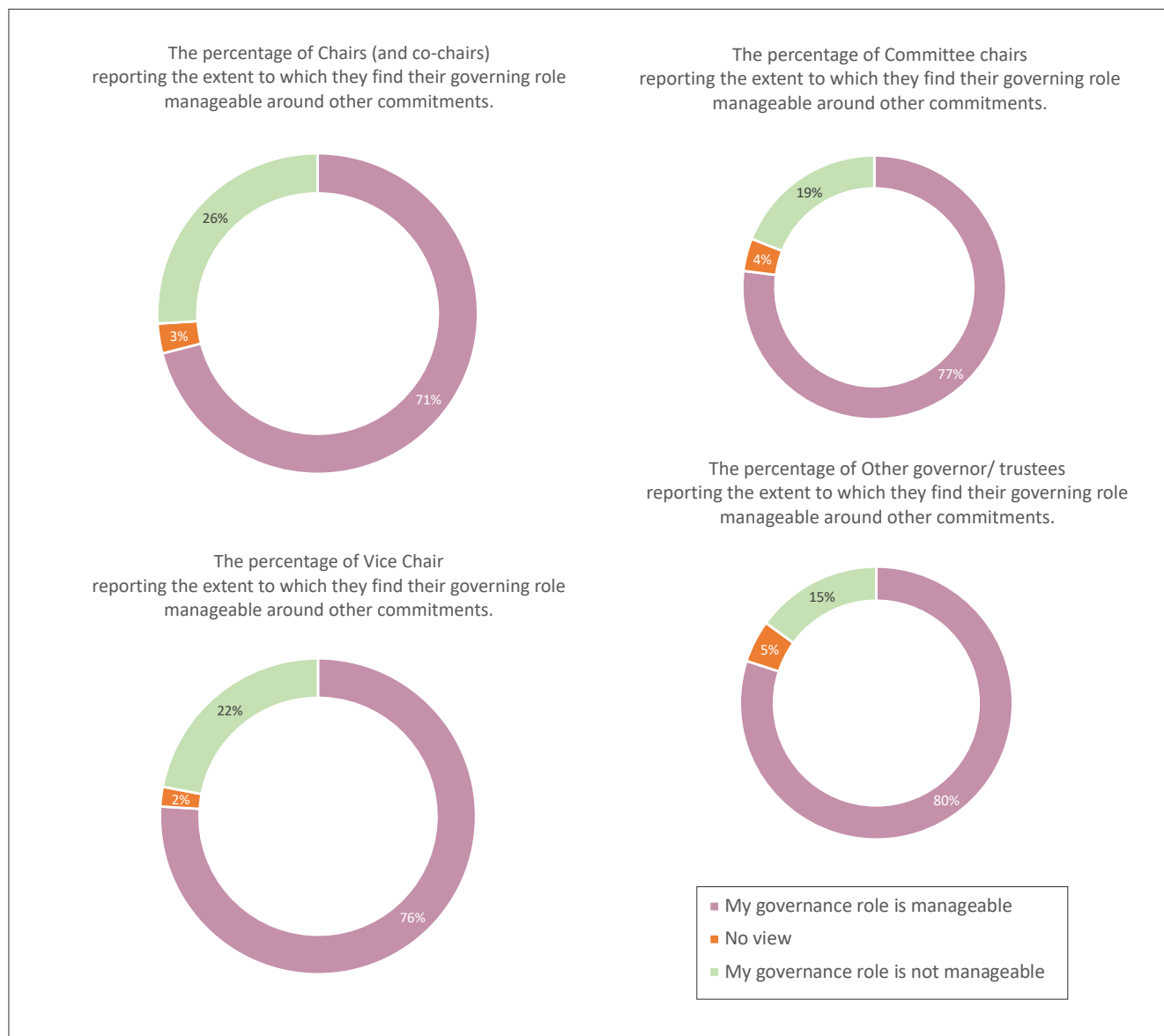


Figure 23, the percentage of governors/trustees reporting the extent to which they find their governing role manageable around other commitments.



monitor and improve the quality, performance, and impact of governing boards. Reviewing board effectiveness is good practice and guidance can be found in both the DfE's Governance Handbook and the Academy Trust Handbook. NGA recommends boards and senior leaders self-evaluate annually and undertake an external review every three years or in the event that the school or board are part of a significant change.

For the first time, over half (51%) of respondents said their board had conducted a governance review this year. The percentage of governing boards undertaking an internal self-review has nearly doubled to 41% from 23% last year and the most popular methodology was that 31% of boards undertook an internal governance review using NGA's questions for board self-evaluation.

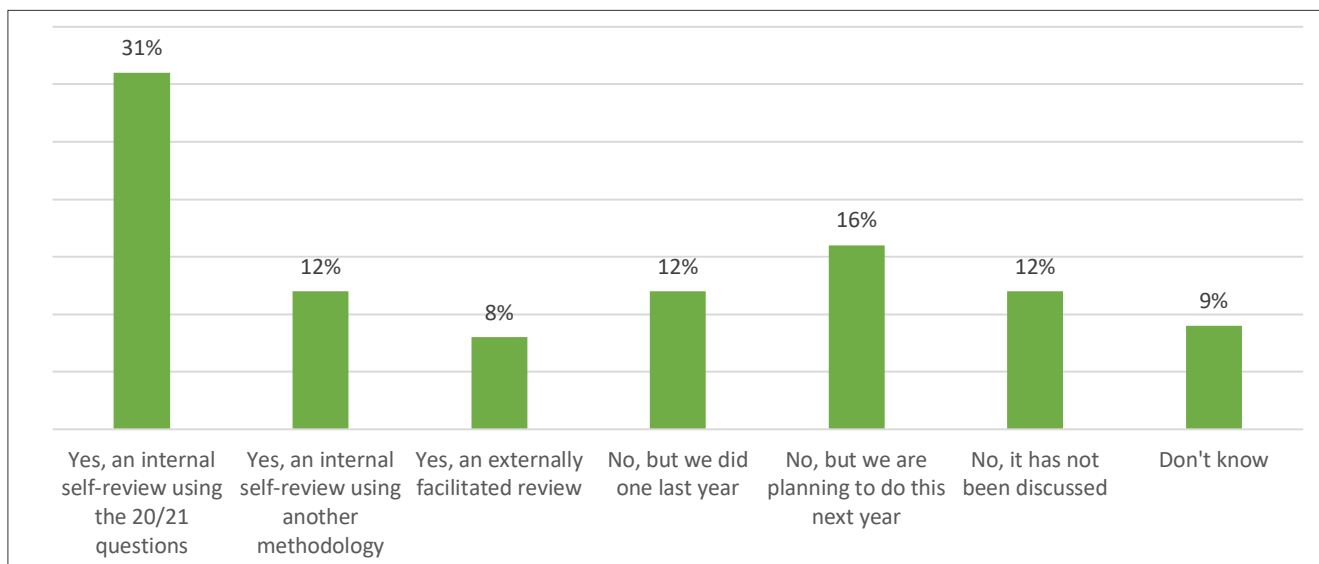


Figure 24, percentage of governing boards carrying out a governance review this year.

### Challenging governors and trustees



Six per cent of respondents reported that their governing board has had to remove a governor/ trustee because they were considered too challenging, 20% did not know whether this had happened on their board and three quarters (75%) of respondents reported that their board has not removed someone on their governing board because they were considered too challenging.

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2021	2022
Yes, an internal self-review	41%	32%	41%	37%	23%	43%
Yes, an externally facilitated review	7%	13%	13%	14%	6%	8%
No, but we did one last year	n/a	9%	14%	19%	17%	12%
No, but we are planning to do this next year	20%	20%	13%	12%	19%	16%
No, it has not been discussed	17%	14%	10%	10%	22%	12%
Unsure	14%	11%	9%	8%	12%	9%

Figure 25, the percentage of boards undertaking a governance review from 2013-2022.





# Part E Stakeholder engagement

The pandemic undoubtedly impacted the extent to which governing boards have been able to engage with stakeholders; this was evidenced in NGA's 2020 and 2021 survey findings. To explore this further this year, we asked whether engagement with the different stakeholder groups had been challenging. Overall, engaging with parents, pupils

and staff has been a challenge for governing boards, however 38% of respondents had stated that their board had adjusted their approaches to suit the COVID-19 context.

Governing boards are not engaging with all stakeholder groups equally. While 64% are engaging with parents, only 41% are engaging with staff, falling to 35% reporting that they engage with pupils. The most popular method of engaging with stakeholders was through monitoring results of surveys: 81% seeing findings from parent/carer surveys (81%), 67% monitoring staff surveys and 66% pupil surveys (66%). Under half of governing boards (44%) contributed to the school newsletter/ bulletin.

Engagement with stakeholders can look different across various school types. Overall, 47% of respondents reported using a survey as a method of engagement and findings indicate that academy committees and MAT boards are more likely to monitor surveys distributed to stakeholders in comparison to other governing board types. 31% of MAT boards and 32% of academy committees monitor results of a parent/ carer survey in addition to 51% of MAT boards and 57% of academy committees monitoring results of a staff survey.

Many respondents sitting on a trust board stated, as expected, that their local governance tier undertook most stakeholder engagement methods.

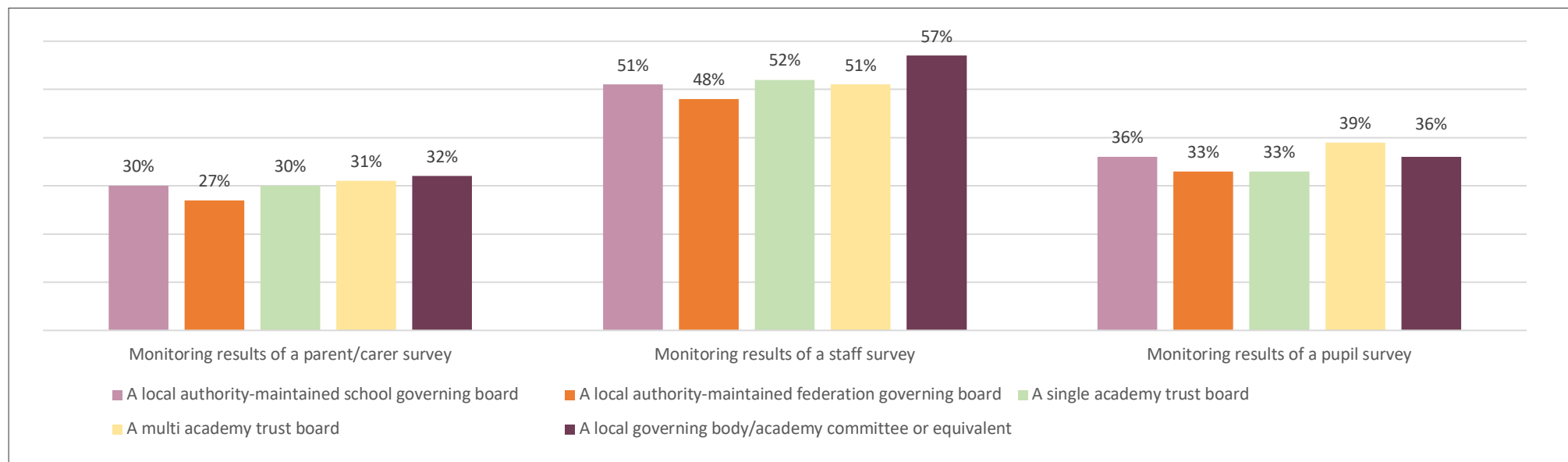


Figure 26, different board types using surveys as a method to engage with stakeholders.



Overall, 22% of respondents reported that parental and community engagement is one of their top strategic priorities. Where parental and community engagement was listed as one of the board's strategic priorities, respondents were more likely to report that it had been a challenge in the past year and more likely to have adjusted parental engagement to suit the COVID-19 context with 41% of governing boards reporting that adjustments were made to engage with parents.

Governors and trustees surveyed reported that engaging with pupils was the biggest challenge out of the stakeholder groups with 44% of respondents reporting this compared to 32% of respondents reporting that engaging with parents has been a challenge and 29% of respondents reporting challenges around engagement with staff.

## Parents

2021 findings show that the pandemic had a negative impact on the methods that governing boards used to engage with parents. This year's survey results show that governing boards are now returning to engaging with stakeholders face-to-face following on from the pandemic. However, this has still not returned to pre-pandemic levels, for example in 2018 half of respondents reported holding consultative meetings with parents on a particular issue compared with 39% this year. As well as meetings specifically directed at parents, 18% also held meetings aimed at the wider community, up from 12% last year but still lower than the 27% in 2020.

Findings did not show a substantial difference between types of boards on the challenge of engaging with parents, but those governing on academy committees within MATs were slightly more likely to find engaging with parents a challenge (87%) compared to MAT boards (83%), SAT boards (80%), local authority-maintained federations and schools (both 83%).

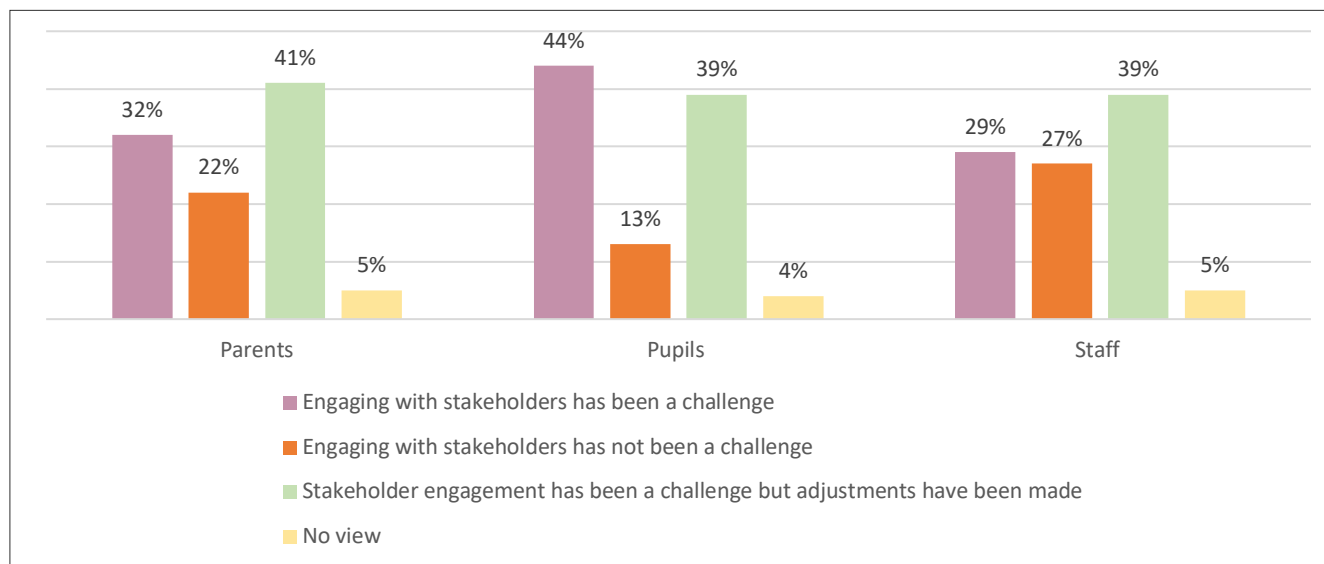


Figure 27, respondents reporting the extent to which engaging with parents, pupils and staff was a challenge this year.

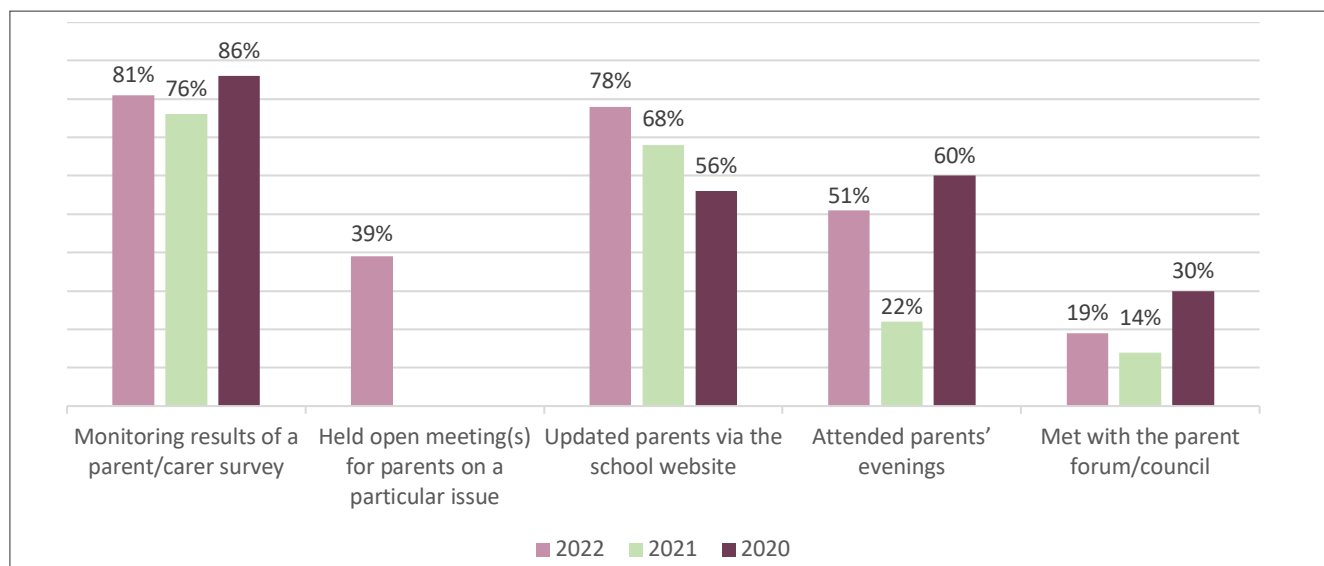


Figure 28, percentage of governors and trustees who employed listed methods to engage with parents 2021-2022.







## Pupils

Respondents reported that their governing board are using multiple approaches to engaging with pupils. The most popular method of engagement was through the monitoring of pupil surveys, and this has been consistently the case for the past three years. The findings show that using a strategy which enables pupils to directly meet with governors and trustees and provide full visibility of the governing boards were the least popular methods used to engage with pupils with, 15% inviting pupils to governing board meetings as seen in figure 29.

### Your voice



Respondents reported additional methods that they employed to engage with stakeholders:

- Safeguarding surveys for pupils, parents and staff.
- Meeting with parents informally at the school gate and in the playground.
- Community coffee mornings.
- Support for and from local charity targeting disadvantaged children.
- Governors' assemblies, annual governor awards.
- Governors attending staff meetings if relevant to their remit
- Governors asking parents for views on particular issues each term – independent channel for parents to feed in their views
- Every Governor is assigned a subject/topic and meets the staff member responsible for that twice a year to get feedback on a range of issues
- We're reviewing how the governing board engage with stakeholders and look for best practice at other schools (including web research).

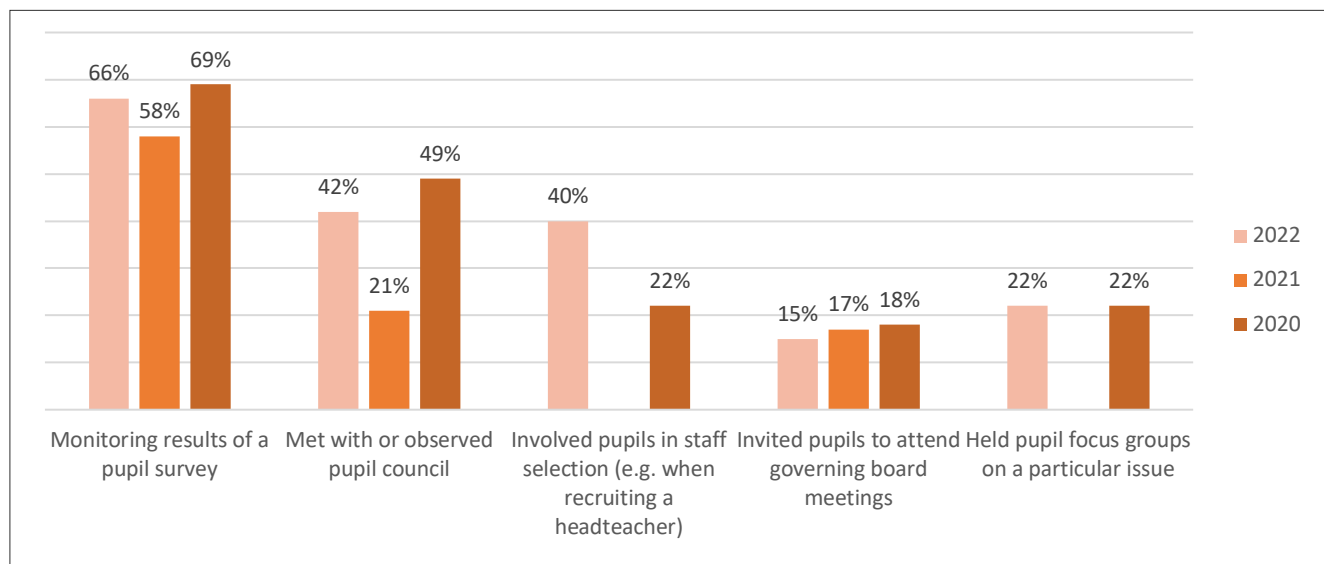


Figure 29, percentage of governors and trustees who employed listed methods to engage with pupils 2021-2022.

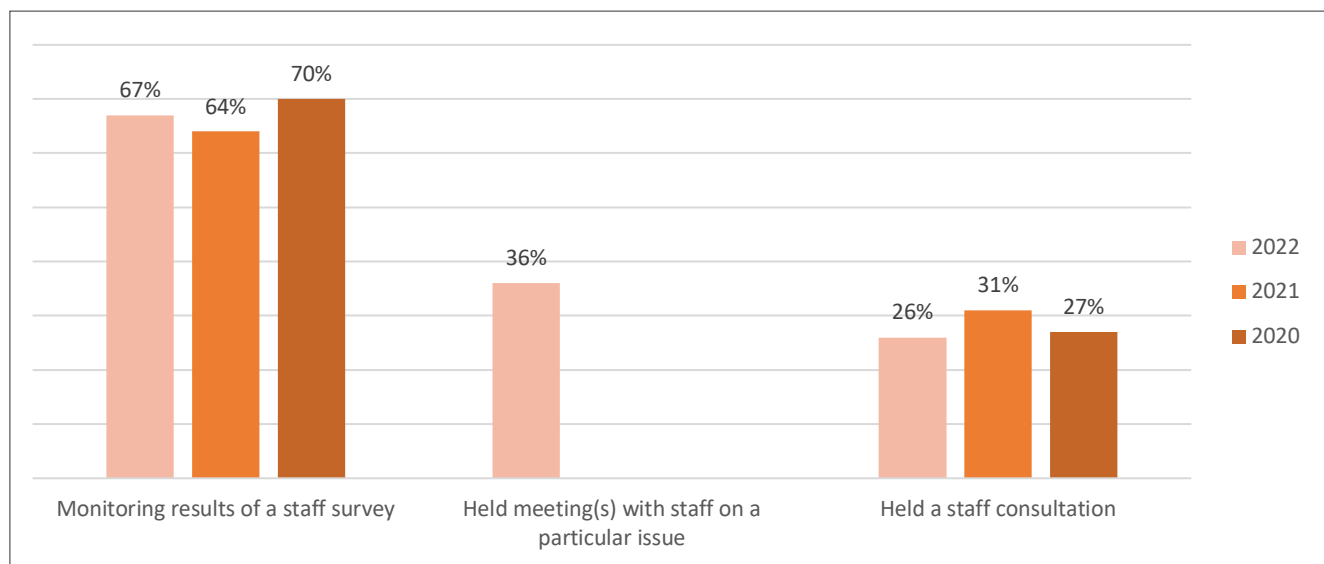


Figure 30, percentage of governors and trustees who employed listed methods to engage with staff 2021-2022.



## Staff

Over a third (36%) of governing boards reported that they held meetings with staff on particular issues meanwhile, just over a quarter (26%) held staff consultations. Meanwhile, monitoring the results of a staff survey continues to be the most popular strategy that schools and trusts are using to engage with their staff.

## Stakeholder engagement and the local tier

Many respondents governing within a MAT expressed the value that the local tier of governance has when looking directly at engaging with stakeholders. 94% of respondents sitting at the local tier reported having a role in engaging with stakeholders such as parents, pupils and staff.

Despite the recognised importance of the role that the local tier has with stakeholder engagement, only 56% of respondents feel that their MAT is effectively engaged with parents and the wider school community, compared to 62% in 2021 and 64% in 2020. Three in 10 respondents (30%) feel that their MAT is not effectively engaged with parents and the wider school community, showing that there is a higher percentage of boards feeling that their MAT is engaging well with stakeholders compared to those who do not think this is the case.

### Your voice



When seeking to understand what respondents felt that their school would lose if they lost their local tier of governance, an overwhelming majority of respondents highlighted that the voices of stakeholders would be diminished along with the level of understanding and accountability that parents, pupils, staff and the local community can offer the school.

‘[we would lose] input from local community.’

‘[without the local tier, we would lose] Local knowledge; engagement with the community; less parental involvement in school direction.’

The connection to the community and external view outside of education.’

‘Local knowledge. Identifiable and accessible governors for parents and staff. Accountability both by the governors and for the school.’

‘We would lose much of the involvement by and feedback from parents and the local community.’

‘Community engagement and stakeholder voice are key parts of our local tier’s role.’

‘Local involvement of local stakeholders.’

### Our voice



NGA has been - and continue to be - involved in extensive conversations with the DfE during the development of the March 2022 White Paper, particularly as regards the Government’s vision to move to a fully trust led system within the next decade. We ensure the DfE is aware of the views and experiences of governing boards. The white paper emphasises the importance of strong strategic governance of MATs, the role of the local governance tier and effective stakeholder engagement. The DfE is aiming for all schools to have a “voice in the governance of their academy trusts through local governance arrangements, as already happens in most trusts”. Read more about local governance in our MAT governance: the future is local report.

## School and trust governance 2022

### In this series:

- Governing in a multi academy trust
- Governance volunteers and practice
- The priorities and challenges facing our schools

Find the full series of school and trust governance in 2022 reports at:

[www.nga.org.uk/governance2022](http://www.nga.org.uk/governance2022)





# Further reading

## Knowledge Centre Guidance

- [Staff engagement](#) – an information sheet explaining the benefits of engaging with staff and establishing a culture of meaningful and effective staff engagement.
- [Engaging with parents](#) – This joint guidance from the National Governance Association and Parentkind combines extensive knowledge on engaging with parents effectively.
- [Governing board self-evaluation Toolkit](#) – a range of tools to support governing boards conduct self-evaluation which helps the trust evaluate its effectiveness and identify areas for development.
- [Finding your next chair](#) – a guide to support boards on succession planning to ensure continuity within an organisation
- [NGA skills audit](#) – assess the strengths of your board and highlight the gaps that need to be filled by new board members.
- [Governing board diversity indicators form](#) – gather diversity data on your membership and identify potential 'blind spots'.
- [Welcome to Governance](#) – This induction guide is essential reading for anyone seeking a clear and practical understanding of governing at a single school.

- [Welcome to a Multi Academy Trust](#) – This entry level induction guide is essential reading if you are new to governing a multi academy trust board (MAT).
- [The Chair's Handbook](#) – A guide for chairs of Governing boards of schools and academy trusts.
- [Right people around the table](#) – provides practical advice to help ensure that your board has the right blend of knowledge, skills, perspectives and backgrounds to govern effectively.
- [Inducting new governors and trustees](#) – provides a starting point for those planning and delivering induction programmes.
- [Equality, diversity and inclusion e-learning modules](#) – Building on NGA's 'Equality and Diversity: A Practical Guide for Governors' e-learning module, NGA has partnered with ASCL to develop a suite of e-learning modules focusing on going beyond compliance to create an inclusive culture on your board. The modules are available to all Learning Link subscribers and freely available to those who sign up for a free trial of Learning Link.
- [Young Governors' Network](#) – supports and encourages young governors and trustees by allowing them to share their experiences, address challenges and opportunities and create relevant and sustainable connections.

## Research

- [Increasing participation in school and trust governance](#) – exploring volunteer recruitment and retention through the lens of the experiences and views of governors and trustees from Black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds and young volunteers (aged under 40) alongside data from NGA's annual survey 2021.
- [Annual school governance survey 2021](#) – gathering the views of those who govern in order to inform and shape education policy and, in the absence of official data, to provide an overview of the state of school governance in England in 2021.
- [Governance professionals: 2021 and beyond](#) – gathering in-depth views on the role of governance professionals, reflecting on experiences and practice
- [Chairing a board 2020](#) – draws on NGA's work with chairs across all types and phases of schools and trusts and takes an in-depth look at the current state of board leadership, who is and isn't stepping forward into chairing positions, the managability of the role and practice of current chairs, the recruitment process.
- [MAT governance: the future is local 2022](#) – sets out the features of successful local governance and explores the learning from established MAT governance structures

# Governing board membership

The National Governance Association is the membership organisation for governors, trustees, and governance professionals of state schools in England.

Sign up to access a range of resources that will support your board to develop the right skills and knowledge.

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- Complimentary copies of Welcome to Governance for all new governors/trustees
- A complimentary copy of The Chair's Handbook
- Access to virtual Welcome to Governance sessions for new governors/trustees
- Copies of Governing Matters magazine to every governor/trustee and a copy to the school
- Access to members-only content in our online Knowledge Centre
- A weekly e-newsletter featuring the latest education news and policy updates
- Free places at member conferences, events and networks
- Free places at NGA governance leadership forums
- Priority access to NGA webinars and podcasts
- National representation through our lobbying and campaigns

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