

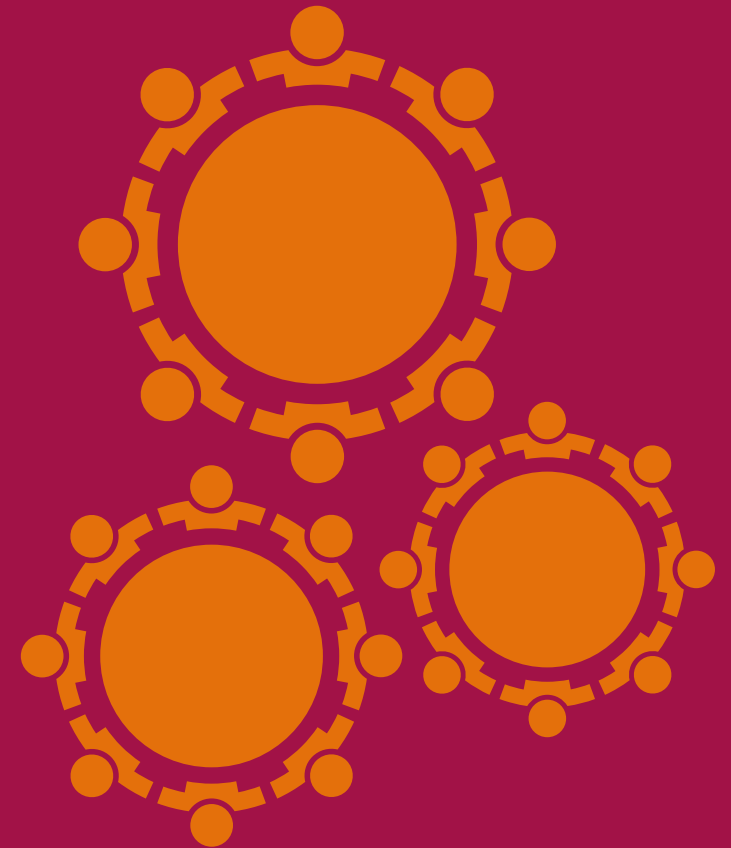
Governance volunteers and board practice

School and trust governance in 2021

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www.nga.org.uk/governance2021

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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 practice, providing an up-to-date picture of governing board practice across England.

The annual governance survey has been running since 2011 and is the largest survey of its kind, this year achieving 3,848 responses. This longitudinal national data documents the evolution of governance which otherwise may have been overlooked. It is open to everyone governing state funded schools, whether as trustees of academy trusts or governors of single schools. Respondents cover all school phases, types and regions. It is open to all, not only NGA members.

Respondents were asked about their characteristics, the manageability of the role, their experience of governing in practice and stakeholder engagement.

Part one of the report looks at governance volunteers. While almost anyone aged 18 or over can join a governing board, the 2021 data confirms what previous years shows, that a challenge persists for boards in attracting volunteers to the role and filling vacancies on the board and several groups remain significantly underrepresented.

Part two explores the practice of governing and respondents' views. Despite the substantial responsibility of the governance role, induction training is not mandatory. Support from respondents for mandatory induction is overwhelming.

This report is an important window into the experience of governing, often not visible to those outside the board room. Overall, the data tells a good news story: the experience of those governing is by and large a positive one.

NGA's Visible Governance campaign aims to highlight the huge contribution to the education system that governing boards play, shining a light on the difference that good governance makes to the success of schools and trusts and on the opportunity to join this band of a quarter of million people.

Key findings

- 01 Our surveys consistently show that several groups remain significantly underrepresented in school and trust governance, particularly young people and those from Black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds.

- 02 Board leadership roles are predominantly held by white, older volunteers (60 to 69 years old) – though those in this group are also most likely to say they find it difficult to manage their governance role.

- 03 The most common reasons by far for getting involved in governance are having children at school or working within the education sector. This accounts for how over half of volunteers got into their role.

- 04 Less than one in ten respondents heard about the opportunity to govern through a route other than already being involved in or connected to their school or trust.

- 05 Numbers of governor and trustee vacancies and difficulty with recruitment remain a prevalent problem for boards with a third having two or more vacancies and 64% reporting challenges to recruiting volunteers compared to 50% in 2015.

- 06 Virtual governance has not had a significantly positive impact on recruiting to the board.

- 07 Over a third of respondents were retired (36%). This is an increase from the 24% who reported being retired in 2015 and shows a rising trend of school governance growing more reliant on the retired population.

- 08 Education is the sector supplying the largest number of volunteers, showing that NGA's Educators on board campaign has had an effect, with 35% of respondents now working in the education sector compared to 30% in 2019.

- 09 The proportion of boards of ten people or fewer has grown three-fold from 16% in 2013 to almost half of all boards (48%) in 2021, while the number of boards with eight or fewer individuals has grown from 12% in 2017 to 20% in 2021.

- 10 Almost three quarters of respondents (72%) say governing has been more challenging because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- 11 Support for high quality induction remains strong – just 4% of respondents said they do not agree with this.

- 12 Feelings of inclusion among governors and trustees is high generally, with 95% saying their opinion is valued by their board, but this is less so for certain ethnic and younger age groups.

- 13 Volunteers are remaining in governance for longer but changing their role more often – there has been a 20% decrease in those governing more than 8 years in the same role compared to those sitting on their current governing board for up to four years (54%).

- 14 Use of skills audits has dropped to 74% compared to 87% in 2019.

- 15 Only 23% of respondents said their board conducted an internal review of governance and just 6% had an External Review of Governance in the last year.

- 16 The highest level of engagement by governing boards was with parents, but engagement with stakeholders overall was hindered with 23% of engagement activity prevented due to the pandemic.

Governance volunteers

Who governs – a snapshot

- 10% of volunteers are aged under 40
- Half (51%) of governors and trustees are aged 50 to 69
- 3% of respondents identify as LGBTQ+
- 1 in 5 respondents under the age of 30 identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community
- 93% of respondents reported their ethnicity as white British
- 1 in 5 respondents aged under 30 are from an ethnic minority background
- 7% of respondents consider themselves to have a disability
- Respondents were 63% female, 35% male
- 55% of chairs are female, 41% are male

Employment and governance

Likely because of the older profile of governors and trustees, over a third of individuals report that they are retired (36%). This is an increase from the 24% who reported being retired in 2015, 27% in 2017, 30% in 2018 and 32% in 2019, showing a steady rising trend of school governance growing more reliant on the retired population. 59% of respondents report being employed, including those that are either self-employed or work part-time – this compares to 66% in 2017. Meanwhile 4% of respondents reported that were looking after home or family, while 1% were either studying or unemployed.

While chairs who were not retired were most likely to be working in a manager, director or senior official position (37%), vice chairs and committee chairs were more likely to report they worked in an educational setting at 31% and 36% respectively. Young governors aged between 18 and 29 were also far more likely to report working in an educational context (42%) compared to working in a manager, director or senior official role (15%). In terms of board type, those governing a multi academy trust (MAT) were more likely to work in a managerial or director role (32%) compared to those governing in a maintained school (24%) but were just as likely to be working as an educational professional (37% and 36% respectively). 72% of those who identified as educational professionals gave 'I work in education' as the reason they started to govern.

40% of respondents who are employed say they get paid time off, maintaining similar levels reported in 2015 and 2018 at 43% and 42% respectively. 25% of those employed, either full time or part time, said they haven't asked. 46% of chairs said they got given time off including 33% of chairs who were given paid time off. While individuals aged between 18 and 29 reported they were more likely to take unpaid time off compared to any other age bracket, there were also significantly few respondents in this age bracket. Young governors and trustees (18 to 39 years old) were also the most likely to say that they did not need time off.

Pleasingly the number of those in employment who have asked but been refused is very small – at just 2%, and marginally down from 4% who were refused in 2016. While this indicates a stable picture, it also reveals little progress in school and trust governance volunteers getting paid time

Increasing participation

The picture of the demographic of school and trust governance volunteers has not changed much at all over time. There are some signs of progress such as 20% of volunteers aged under 30 coming from an ethnic minority background. Of those who have been involved in governance for less than 12 months, 10% are from ethnic minorities. Despite 81% of respondents believing that the composition of their board reflects the community they serve, our data shows that governance and board leadership does not broadly reflect national data for pupil, teacher and head teacher ethnic diversity.

Explore the demographic of school and trust governance volunteers in detail. Visit <https://www.nga.org.uk/increasing-participation> to read our Increasing participation in school and trust governance (June 2021) report.





off for governing duties. Given that 21% have indicated that they are yet to ask, and the rate for refusal once asked is so low, this suggests that governance volunteers should be encouraged to request paid time off for their role. Employer support for volunteers is essential to ensuring enough volunteers, and the longitudinal data offered through NGA's survey results over the years shows that by and large, employers remain very supportive and accommodating to these requests.

Who governs – by region, phase and type

The demographic makeup of governors and trustees varies slightly by region, most significantly in London where one in five (20%) governors and trustees are from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic background. In comparison, overall Black, Asian and minority ethnicities were underrepresented particularly in the North West (3%), South West (2%) and North East (1%).

London also had a higher percentage of younger governors and trustees than anywhere else, with 20% identifying as being in the 18 to 29 age bracket, compared to just 6% in the Yorkshire and Humber region.

There was little difference in who is governing in each region, phase or type in terms of gender or disability. The only exception being female respondents were slightly more likely to govern in a primary setting compared to male respondents (49% vs 42%).

Younger volunteers were more likely to report governing in a primary setting, with 56% of 18 to 39 years olds governing in a primary setting, compared to 45% of those 40 and over governing in primary settings.

The proportion of governors and trustees from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic background did not differ significantly across any governing board type or phase of school. Local authority (LA) maintained schools and single academy trusts (SATs)

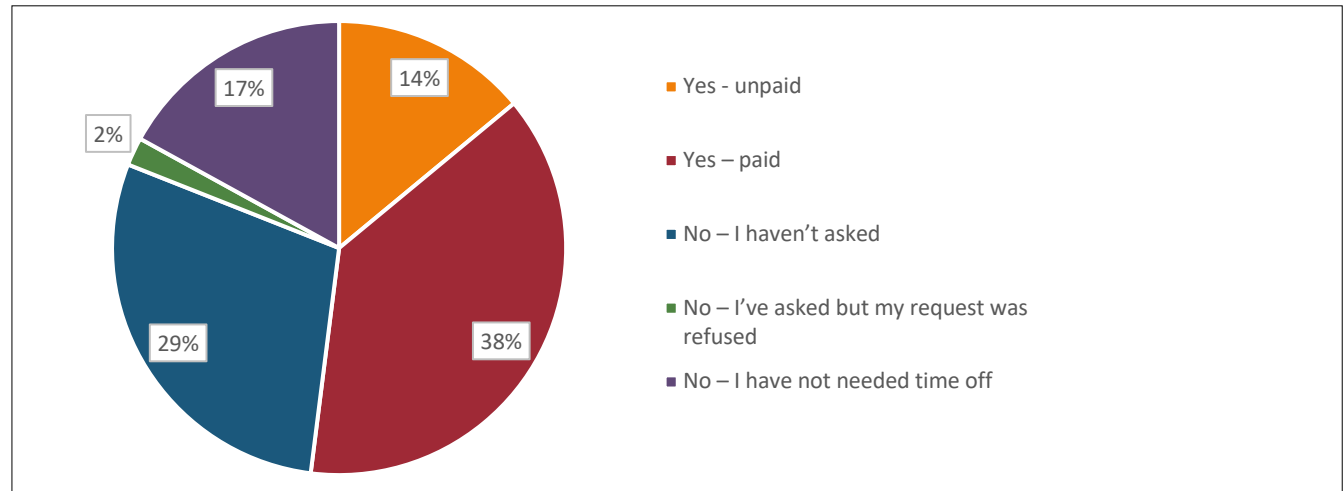


Figure one, percentage of respondents requesting time off for governance duties and whether their employer supports them.

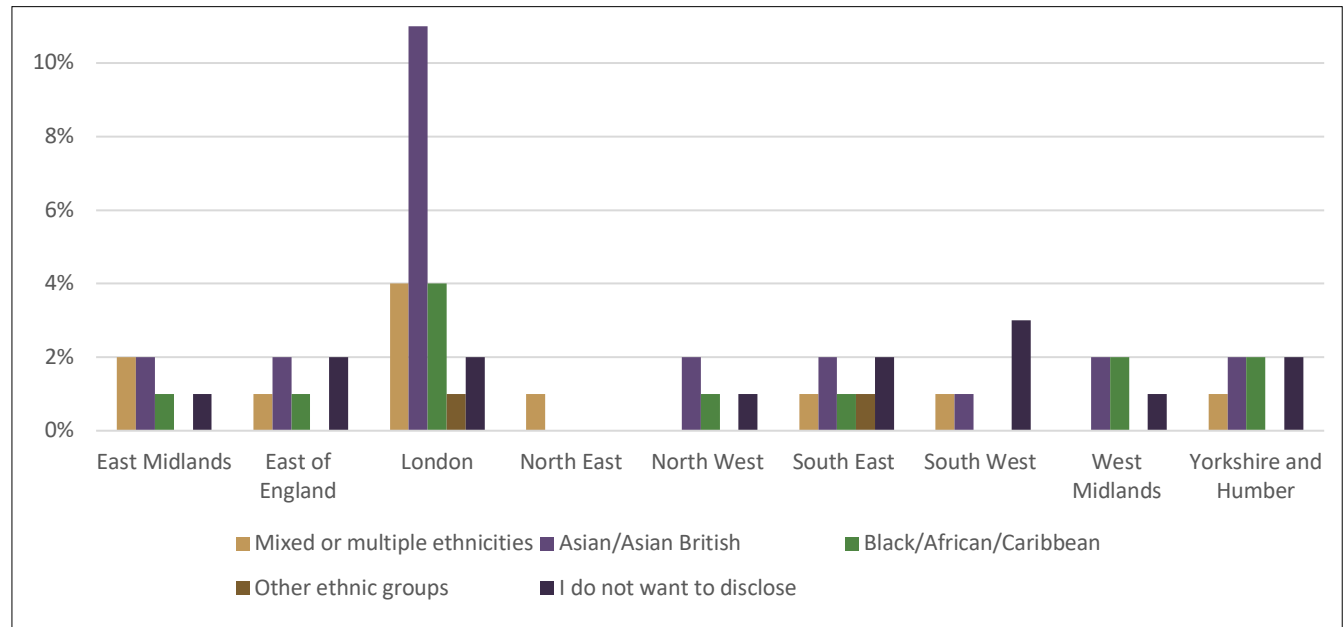


Figure two, regional breakdown of respondent ethnicity excluding white ethnicities.



were the most diverse settings with 6% of governors and trustees from underrepresented ethnicities with federations only having 1%. All-through schools had 6% of respondents from underrepresented ethnicities and 0% in middle schools.

Leadership demographics

Who leads boards – a snapshot

- 97% of chairs are aged 40 and over
- 93% of vice chairs are aged 40 and over
- 2% of chairs are from a Black, Asian or minority ethnicity, 95% are White
- 55% of chairs are female, 41% are male
- 77% of co-chairs are female
- 45% of chairs were retired, 24% employed full time, 13% part time and self-employed, 5% looking after home or family
- 37% of chairs in employment are at managerial, director or senior official level
- 25% of chairs in employment are in the education profession

As identified in NGA's 2020 report *Chairing a board*, approximately 5,000 new chairs are needed every year and together chairs contribute the equivalent of about £145 million a year to the school system, greatly outweighing the contribution the system makes to their development.

In 2021, 37% of chairs told us they got into governance because of having a child at the school, while a further 19% said it was because they work in education, showing a clear link between the importance of these two routes into governance and the ongoing sustainability of leadership positions within school governance. The often-understated role of vice chairs followed a similar pattern, with 35% of vice chairs getting into governance through their child and a further 17% because of working in the education sector.

Our voice



Although there is no legal constraint on the length of time a chair of governors can serve, NGA's view is that an element of regular renewal is beneficial to all schools, and that all chairs should normally expect to step down after a maximum of six years in post.

In line with good practice in the charity sector NGA thinks that governors and trustees should serve no more than two terms of office (eight years) in any one school.

NGA does not think that it is good practice for any individual to serve on more than two governing boards at one time – unless there are exceptional circumstances (eg being requested to sit on an Interim Executive Board).

A connection remains between the length of time someone has been governing and taking on the chairing role. Of the chairs completing the survey, almost a third said they had been part of their current governing board for upwards of five years, while over a third (36%) said they had served for over nine years. Almost a quarter of chairs (22%) said they had been a part of their board for more than 12 years.

Co-chairs are an often-overlooked option, with an extremely small 1% of total respondents saying they were a co-chair – down from the 4% of chairs reporting they were a co-chair in 2020, suggesting this model needs more consideration and promotion.

Recruiting for leadership roles presents a slightly more optimistic picture compared to the overall trend of increasing difficulties with board recruitment. 38% of respondents stated that it was difficult to attract good candidates for a chair and/or vice chair position, compared to 64% who find overall board recruitment difficult. This presented a marginal rise from 35% in 2020. 43% of respondents disagreed that attracting a good chair or vice chair was difficult, while 18% had no view.



Volunteering to govern in a different school or trust offers a fantastic professional development opportunity for people working in education. Education professionals can also make a valuable contribution on boards by sharing their expertise and experience to influence strategic decision making.

There was a notable increase in the number of volunteers who come ready-made for conversations on education, with over a third of respondents now working in the education sector itself. This is a five-percentage point increase in the number of education professionals responding to the annual survey in 2021 compared to when last asked in 2019 (30% to 35%). The number of volunteers with education experience will be even higher given this question asked respondents only asked about their current occupation.

The education sector now supplies the largest number of volunteers. A quarter of overall respondents said they first found out about the opportunity to govern through working in education – the second most popular way that individuals heard about governing.

There are also education leaders who are ex-officio members of their own school or trust's board as part of their paid role. Although most leaders do continue to be members of their own institution's board, particularly at school level, a few trusts are now following the more standard practice of charities where the chief executive is not a trustee. NGA considers this better practice as the primary role of the governing board is to hold the executive leaders to account.



Those in the North East found it easiest to attract a good chair with 50% disagreeing it was difficult and only 30% saying it was difficult, while those in the South East found it hardest with 45% saying it was difficult and 39% disagreeing it was difficult. MAT trust board respondents were most likely to agree they found it hard to attract a good chair or vice chair (43%) whereas SAT respondents were the least likely to agree (33%).

Governance service

Overall this year, there is an emerging picture of people governing for longer and in different settings. Just over a third (35%) of respondents said they had now been governing for more than a decade – the highest ever proportion since the survey started, compared to 25% saying the same in 2011 and 30% in 2014 before moving back down to 27% in 2016.

The proportion of governors and trustees continuing to offer their time to the sector for more than eight years has risen by 17 percentage points since 2020 (27% to 44%). This brings the figure back in line with the level we reported in 2017 (43%) when we first differentiated between the total length of time governing and length of time governing on a respondent's current board.

Looking at respondents' time in their current governance role, there was a five percentage point increase in those governing for less than 12 months (14%) bringing it back in line with 2017 figures. There has been a 12 percentage point increase in those governing for between one and four years (40%) compared to 2020 (28%). Just a quarter (24%) of respondents had exceeded two terms of office on their existing board, down from 44% reported in 2020.

It is a positive finding that volunteers are remaining in governance for a longer period. Rather than remaining in the same post for longer than eight years, they are seeking new opportunities to govern elsewhere. By moving to a new post this allows for sharing knowledge and experience and keeps views and perspectives on the board dynamic and challenging.

Nearly half of all those beginning to govern in the last 12 months were in a LA maintained school (48%) – compared to 52% of all respondents governing this school type. Meanwhile almost a quarter (24%) of those new to governance in the past 12 months were in MATs – above the average of 19% of respondents overall governing in that school type. The proportion of new volunteers in all other board types were broadly proportionate to the average.

Governance service and age

Older governors and trustees were more likely to be experienced school or trust governance volunteers with 59% of those aged 40 and over reporting being involved in school governance for at least five years which applied to only 16% of those aged under 40.

New governors and trustees tend to be younger – 36% of those aged under 40 have governed for less than 12 months compared to 8% of those aged 40 and above. 64% of those under 40 have been involved in school governance for less than two years compared to only 21% of those aged 40 and over. Those aged over 40 were more likely to report being longstanding members of their current board with 48% of those respondents being on their current board for longer than five years, compared to only 12% of those under 40 governing for longer than five years.

Recruiting to the board

Difficulty in filling governor and trustee vacancies remains a recurring theme with this year's survey. Almost two thirds (64%) of respondents report a challenge in recruiting to the governing board in comparison to 50% in 2015.

This rising trend demonstrates that recruitment of volunteers is becoming increasingly difficult: this was a consensus from respondents across all board types. When broken down by board type, over two thirds (67%) of MAT board respondents reported difficulty in recruiting trustees, compared with 54% of SAT respondents. The challenge of recruiting volunteers was most prominent for respondents in academy committees

(local governing bodies) within a MAT at 70%, compared with those in maintained schools at 63%.

When assessed by region, respondents in the South West were most likely to report it was a challenge (68%), followed by South East (67%) and the West Midlands and East of England (both at 66%).

The disruption faced during the last 18 months has made the challenge harder for some, while bringing new opportunities and new ways of doing things for others. Over a third (36%) of respondents overall said they found recruitment more challenging during COVID-19. Respondents in the South West were most likely to agree with this statement (41%) whereas respondents in the North East were the least likely to say this made it more difficult (29%). MAT respondents were the most likely to report the increased challenge (39%) compared to just 27% of SAT respondents. However, this should be seen in the wider context of the increase of virtual governance opening potential new ways of contributing to governing (for example virtual committee meetings), with 22% of respondents saying as a result, governing virtually has made it easier to recruit to the board.

Some boards may have temporarily paused recruitment activity because of the pandemic as this would not have been a priority. 28% governors and trustees reported that they have not advertised any vacancies over the past year despite half (59%) of them having one or more vacancies.

A third of respondents (36%) said their board has no vacancies meaning slightly fewer full boards than when we last asked in 2019 and significantly fewer than five years ago when 42% were full boards. A quarter (25%) of respondents in 2021 said their board had a single vacancy which NGA believes is not a concern because it can take a while to consider the needs of the board and undertake a recruitment process. Having a single vacancy can also enable you to manage succession proactively. However, a similar number (23%) have two vacancies, while a third of boards (34%) in total have two or more vacancies.



Of those respondents with the smallest board composition (eight or fewer when full), 40% had two vacancies, compared to just 34% of boards with 11 to 12 individuals, and just two percentage points less than those boards with at least twice the size. This may add an increasing degree of challenge, as having two vacancies on a board of eight is arguably more of an issue than two vacancies on the board of twelve.

MAT board respondents were most likely to say they had no vacancies (45%) whereas those on academy committees (local governing bodies) within a MAT were the most likely to report having two or more vacancies (37%). Regionally, the South West was again most affected with 41% of South West respondents saying their board has two or more vacancies.

Getting into governance

From 2017 to 2020, we asked respondents what motivated them to become involved in school governance. There was a conclusive find – governors and trustees were motivated to govern to make a difference for children, followed by serving the community and then having an interest in education.

This year we wanted to find out instead what first made respondents aware of the opportunity to govern. Respondents indicated a variety of reasons which made them aware of the opportunity to volunteer in school governance (multiple choice):

1. They had a child or grandchild at the school (40%)
2. They work in education (25%)
3. They were approached by the school or trust (18%)
4. They were approached and asked to take on the role by a personal or professional connection (12%)

The routes into governance were often age-related. Those aged 18 to 29 were most likely to start governing due to their occupation within the education sector (53%) whereas respondents aged between 30 and 69 began governing because they have a child at the school. Respondents aged

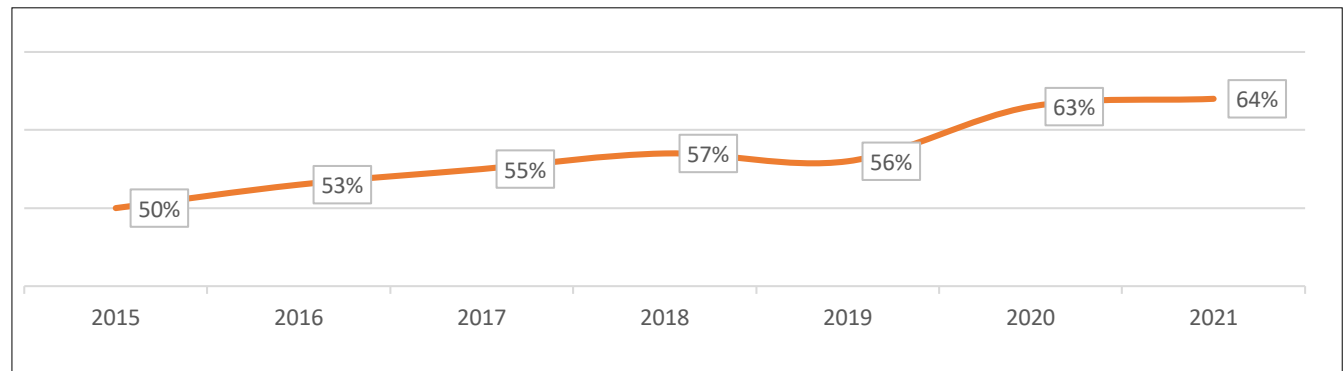


Figure three, percentage of respondents reporting that it is difficult to recruit to the governing board.

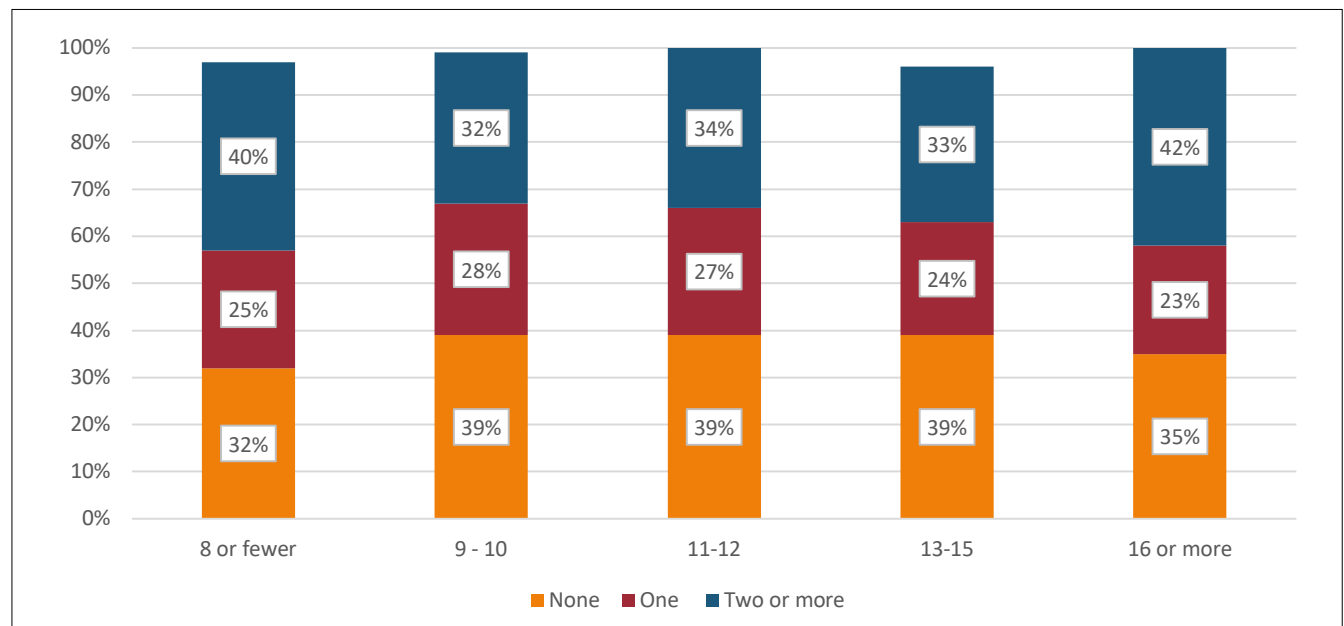


Figure four, number of vacancies compared to the governing board size at full capacity.



70 plus were equally as likely to get into governance through working in education or being approached to take on the role by either the school or trust or a personal or professional connection.

Less than one in ten respondents heard about the opportunity to govern through a route other than already being involved in education, with the school or having a connection to someone who was. 5% found out through a local recruitment campaign and 2% through a national recruitment campaign while 3% found out through their employer.

Having a child in the school and working in education are the two most popular routes into governance irrespective of length of service.

Appointment to the role

Appointment directly by their board (being co-opted) remains the most common method with almost half of respondents saying they were appointed this way. While a trend emerged of more individuals being co-opted with 49% of respondents co-opted in 2018 compared to 39% in 2016, the increase appears to have levelled off, with 47% in 2021. MAT respondents were almost as likely to be co-opted by the board (37%) as they were to be appointed by members (38%).

Meanwhile 12% of respondents report being elected by the parent body, down from 19% in 2016. This is not surprising given the reducing number of elected parent places. MAT trustees were the least likely to be appointed by the parent body (7%) compared to 13% of governors in LA maintained schools. Those governing for under 12 months on their current board (19%) and those governing for one to two years (18%) were significantly more likely to be elected by the parent body than those governing nine years or more on their current board (4%). Female respondents were more likely to report being appointed by the parent body in comparison to male respondents (14% compared to 7%).

Key findings on recruitment from our increasing participation report

The most common methods of advertising governing vacancies were:

- Using the school's channels (eg website, newsletter, social media) – 46%
- Identifying people governors, trustees or executives know personally or professionally and ask them – 38%
- Using an independent recruitment service (eg Inspiring Governance, Governors for Schools, Academy Ambassadors) – 22%
- The least popular methods were:
- Using free or paid for job boards – 3%
- Asking other schools/ trusts if their governors would take on an extra role or swap – 3%
- Contacting school alumni – 2%

Although from a very low base, we know that contacting alumni is something which is now being considered more often as former students will be younger, know the community and if they have moved away, now can join virtually.

When boards do actively seek candidates from underrepresented groups, they are more likely than not to be successful. Looking at the two most underrepresented groups, almost three quarters (73%) of respondents said that their board had actively sought volunteers from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic background had successfully done so, while 83% of boards actively trying to recruit a young volunteer had successfully done so.

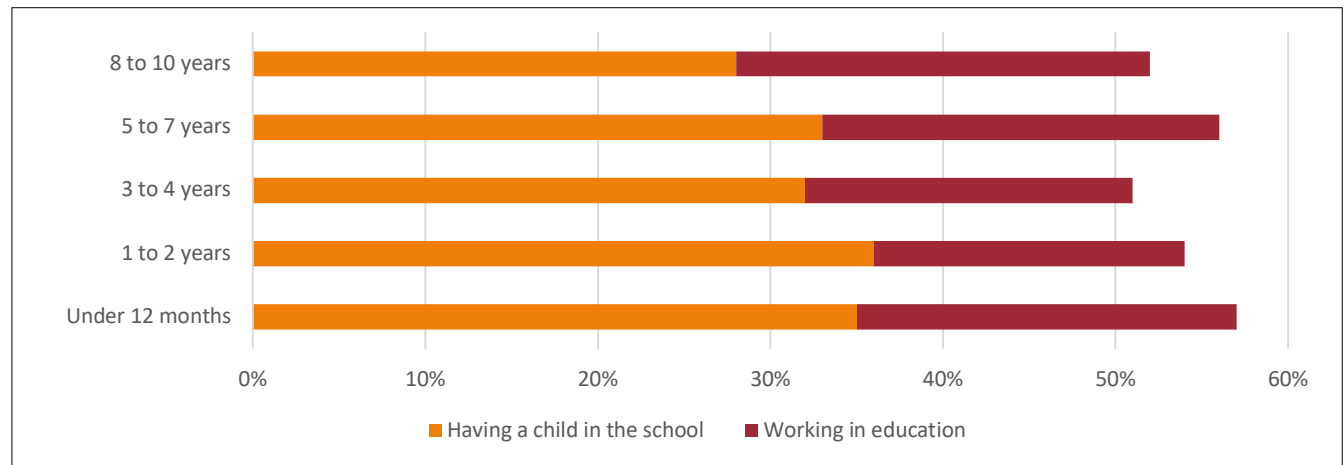


Figure five, how respondents first found out about the opportunity to govern by length of their service.



Only 9% of respondents were appointed after being nominated by the LA, down from 14% in 2016. However, those governing for more than 12 years were significantly more likely (17%) to be appointed via this route, in comparison to just 4% of those governing for under 12 months, and 5% of those governing for one to two years.

Resignation of volunteers

While most respondents said they had not considered resigning from their current governing role (72%), there has been an increase in the proportion of respondents that were considering resignation. 28% of respondents considered resignation in 2021 compared to 25% in 2020. While in 2019 we asked a slightly different question – if respondents were planning on resigning over the next 12 months – just 13% answered yes to that question at the time, indicating that resignation appears to be at least a growing consideration for a significant number of respondents.

Of those who were considering resignation, the main reasons were:

1. Respondents feel that they do not have adequate time to give to the role (21%). This leading reason is the same as in 2020.
2. A change in their circumstances (15%)
3. Respondents were finding the role too demanding (9%)
4. The board's perceived ineffectiveness (9%)

Other reasons accounted for 39% and included making way for new recruitment to the board.

Respondents governing on MAT boards were the least likely to say they had considered resignation, whereas academy committee (local governing body) respondents were the most likely to say they had considered it. In terms of employment status, respondents who were employed either full time or part time were most likely to have considered resignation, while those in the 40 to 49 age bracket were also more likely to have considered resigning compared to any other age group.

The reasons for considering resigning were similar regardless of the amount of time the respondent had been governing. However, those governing for under 12 months were more likely to say they were considering resignation because of a lack of induction (17%) whereas no-one who had been governing for more than three years said this. Similarly, those considering resigning because of a lack of training were more likely to have been governing for under 12 months. Meanwhile an average of 29% of those who had served at least one term were considering resigning due to a change in circumstances compared to 16% of respondents who were in their first term.

Respondents who were considering resigning from their governance role were more likely to support the need for mandatory high quality training induction for new governors and trustees particularly where respondents felt they did not have the right skillset for the role.

Manageability of the role

Governing a school or group of schools is a significant responsibility and it is always important for those volunteering to be realistic about the time commitment. NGA has previously set the expectation that time spent on governance should be manageable within 10 to 20 days per year, a benchmark borrowed from the wider charity sector.

This year, 74% of respondents said that their role is manageable around personal and professional commitments, a similar picture to last year. Those governing in the South West were the most likely to say their role was unmanageable (31%) whereas those in the North West were the most likely to agree it was manageable (78%).

The age profile of respondents also affected their perception on the manageability of the role. Respondents aged 50 and over were the more likely to find their role manageable than governors and trustees under 50.

Our voice

Findings on how volunteers find out about the opportunity to join a board show that people are less likely find out unless there is a direct connection with someone attending or working in the school, trust or wider



education sector. NGA's Visible Governance campaign aims to celebrate, champion and raise the profile of governance. The more we understand about how people get into governance, the more we can build on that and encourage others to follow suit.

This data reinforces the need to continue to raise the profile and understanding of the role of governance among the public, and to provide services which support governing boards in this work including the encouragement of using a wider range of advertisement.

This is in part explained by the findings that those who are retired were also more likely to report that their governance role is manageable compared with those in employment. 83% of retirees agree that the role is manageable around their personal and professional commitments compared to 70% of those employed part time and only 64% of those who were in full time employment. A high proportion of those who report that their employment status was looking after home or family also said the role was manageable (79%).

Those governing in a maintained setting were most likely to find their role unmanageable (26%) while trustees of both SATs and MATs were the most likely to say the role was manageable (78%).

Just over a quarter (26%) of chairs said that their governance role is unmanageable compared to 19% of other governors and trustees. It is surprising that 26% of co-chairs also



reported the role as unmanageable. This is a slight increase compared to our 2020 findings which showed 24% of chairs felt their role was unmanageable. This year's survey sought to identify the extent to which COVID-19 was a factor that affected the manageability of the roles on boards.

Nearly three quarters (72%) of respondents reported that COVID-19 has impacted them in carrying out their role. Those governing in maintained schools and academy committees (local governing bodies) were most likely to agree that COVID-19 had made their role more challenging (74%) whereas MAT trustee respondents were least likely to say it had (65%). Understandably those in leadership positions, chiefly chairs, were more likely than any other role to say COVID-19 had made their role more challenging (79%) compared to just 64% of other governors and trustees.

There was also a significant difference by age in those that did or did not find the pandemic made their role more difficult. While just 45% of respondents aged 18 to 29 said COVID-19 made their role more challenging, 77% of those aged 70 and over said the same.

Payment

The discussion on whether governors and trustees should receive payment for their role has cropped up at various points during the decade or so of the survey, and it is one question that we have asked since 2011. In 2011, 28% of respondents said there should be an option to pay governors and trustees compared to 34% in 2021. The last decade has revealed a consistent view of under a third of respondents wanting payment to be an option.

While 2021 presents the highest proportion of respondents in favour of payment since 2014, it is a small statistical difference, and the picture remains conclusive that most respondents remain against payment. Interestingly lead executives were more likely to indicate they backed payment for governance roles with 43% saying this should happen, compared to 33% of chairs, 36% of co-chairs, and 31% of

Your voice



The comments shared by respondents illustrated a range of experiences:

"I feel committed to representing the children in my community from disadvantaged backgrounds; Knowing that good education can give them a better life and positively impact everyone in the community."

"The role is more challenging and time consuming than I had anticipated when I was elected chair and the demands clearly grow as one gains a greater understanding of what is involved and, hopefully, one's input becomes more valuable. However, I find the work enormously rewarding and worthwhile."

"I feel that there was some assumption that I knew exactly what duties were etc. My workplace would appoint a buddy to 'handhold' at the beginning. COVID-19 has compounded this. I would expect that there would be a more structured comprehensive induction, not just a list of courses to go on."

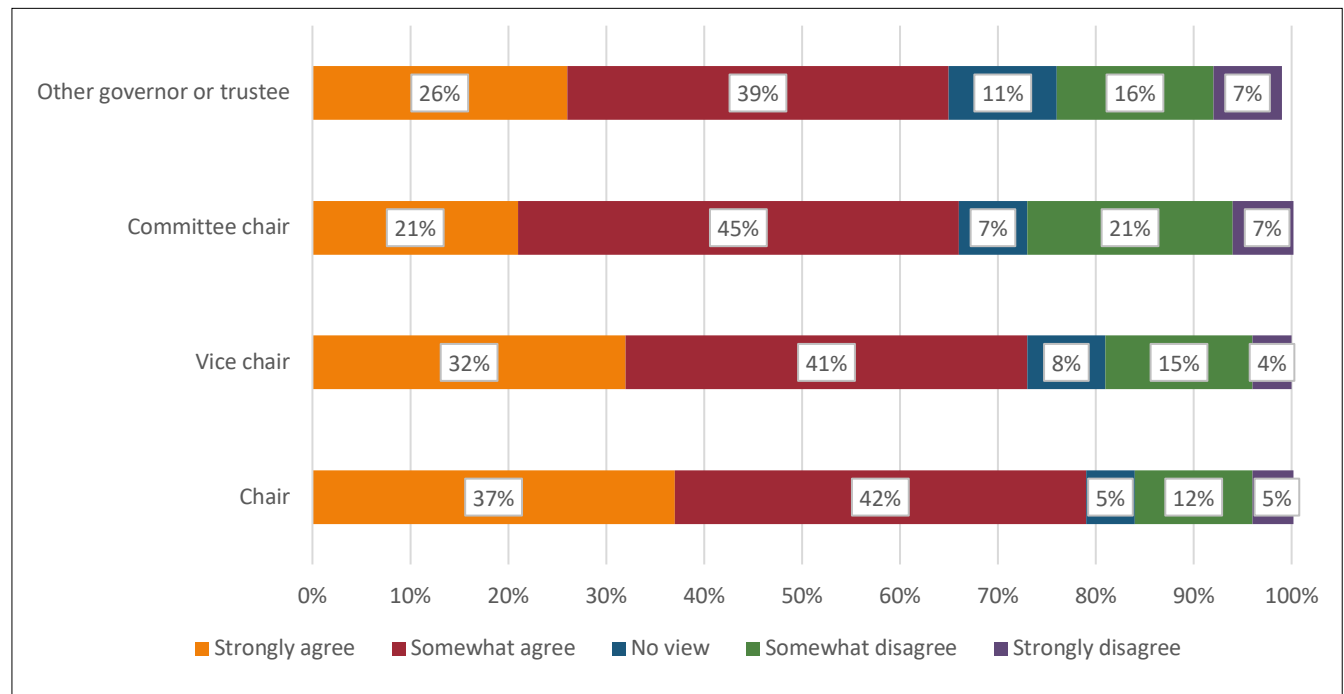


Figure six, views on governance role becoming more challenging due to COVID-19 by position on the board.



other governors and trustees. Half of respondents considering resigning either because they did not have adequate time for the role or because they felt the role was too demanding said they were in favour of the option for payment, at 49% and 53% respectively, comparing to just 29% of those not considering resignation.

Experience of inclusion

Inclusion: a snapshot

- 90% feel that they 'belong' on their board
- 95% feel that their opinion is valued by their board when it is offered
- 91% feel able to express a contrary opinion without the fear of negative consequences
- 75% stated that they have an opportunity to develop and progress on their board
- 80% say their board reviews its practices to ensure meetings are accessible to everyone
- 92% say they are invited to participate in board discussions equally to others
- 74% stated their role is important to the way they think of themselves as a person

While there are causes for concern in relation to ongoing recruitment challenges, and some concern about the minority of those governing who have considered resignation, for the vast majority the experience of governing is clearly shown to be a positive one. With nine in 10 respondents saying they feel they belong on their board and more than nine in 10 saying their opinion is valued by their board, our findings show that once on the board, volunteers are likely to find a fulfilling role that they can meaningfully contribute to. There was little significant difference by board type for these statements, however both younger respondents and those from ethnic minority backgrounds were more likely to report a less positive experience of governing.

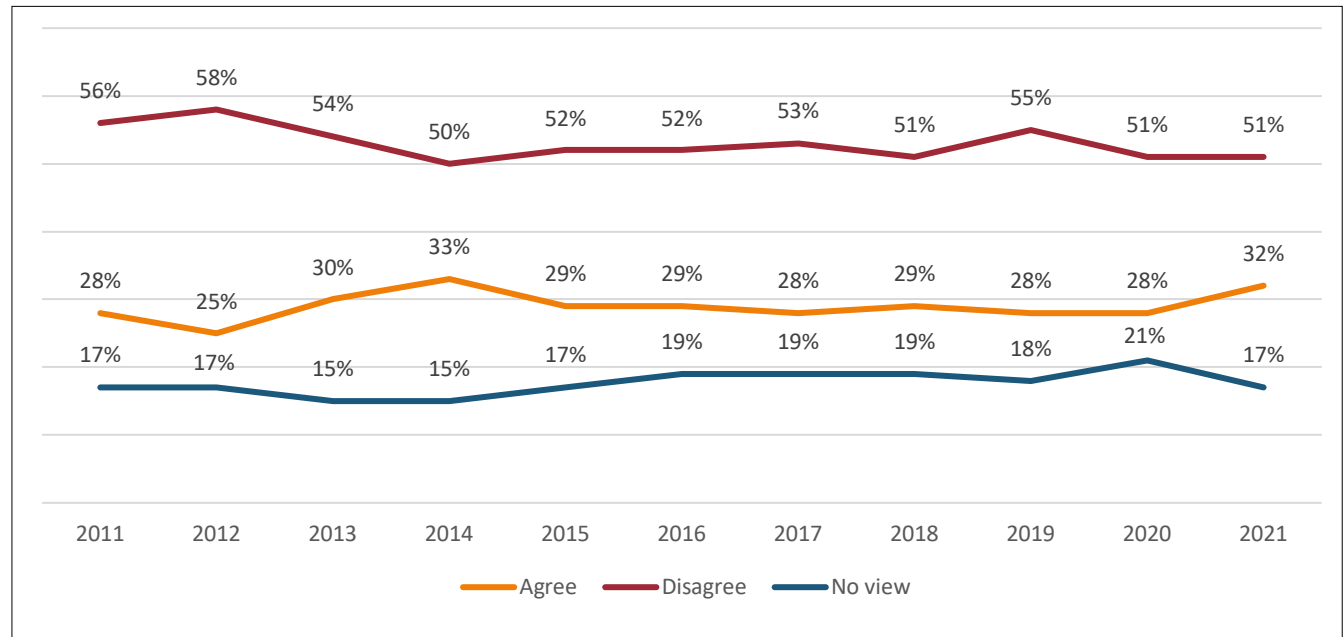


Figure seven, percentage of respondents expressing their views on the payment of governors/ trustees over the timescale of a decade.

We also found that those governing for less time, both across multiple governing roles and in their existing board, were more likely to indicate a less positive experience. For those with less than 12 months experience in governance, 82% said their opinion was valued and almost one in 10 said their opinion wasn't valued – this compared to 98% of those with over a decade of governing experience saying their opinion was valued, and just one in 100 saying it wasn't.

There was a big difference on each end of the age spectrum in terms of governance being important to a respondent's identity. 91% of those aged 80 and over said being a governor or trustee was important to the way they think of themselves – this compares to just 60% of those in the 18 to 29 age bracket and 70% of 30 to 39 year olds.

Increasing participation

Although these findings broadly paint a positive picture of board practice and individual experiences, people from underrepresented groups (young people and ethnic minority backgrounds) are more likely to report a negative experience in governing. Meanwhile volunteers from most ethnic minorities were more likely to strongly agree that being a governor or trustee is important to the way they think about themselves compared to white volunteers. We explore this in detail in Increasing Participation.

Governance practice

Size of boards

Boards are getting smaller. Almost half (48% of respondents) say their board has 10 or fewer volunteers when full. Boards of eight or fewer volunteers have increased by three percentage points since 2019 to 20%, and eight percentage points overall since 2017. Since 2013 the number of boards of ten people or fewer has grown threefold from 16% to almost half of all boards now.

Boards with 16 or more people are on the other hand reducing in prominence, dropping from 29% in 2013 to 5% in 2021. Smaller boards are a change the government set out to achieve a decade ago.

In 2021, MAT boards were the most likely to have eight or fewer individuals on the board (35%) followed by academy committees (34%), federations (6%), compared to SAT boards that were more likely to have 11 or 12 individuals on the board (25%). A small portion of maintained schools still had 16 or more on the board (4%), compared to just 3% of academy committees and 6% of MAT trust boards. There is a deviation from previous findings in that SAT boards are now smaller than any other board type except MAT boards – in 2017 we reported that SATs were the least likely of all board types to have eight or fewer on board.

Alternative provisions were the most likely to have eight or fewer (38%), followed by all through schools (28%) and special schools (25%), while lower (13%), middle (16%) and then secondary schools (16%) were least likely to have eight or fewer people on the board. London and the South West

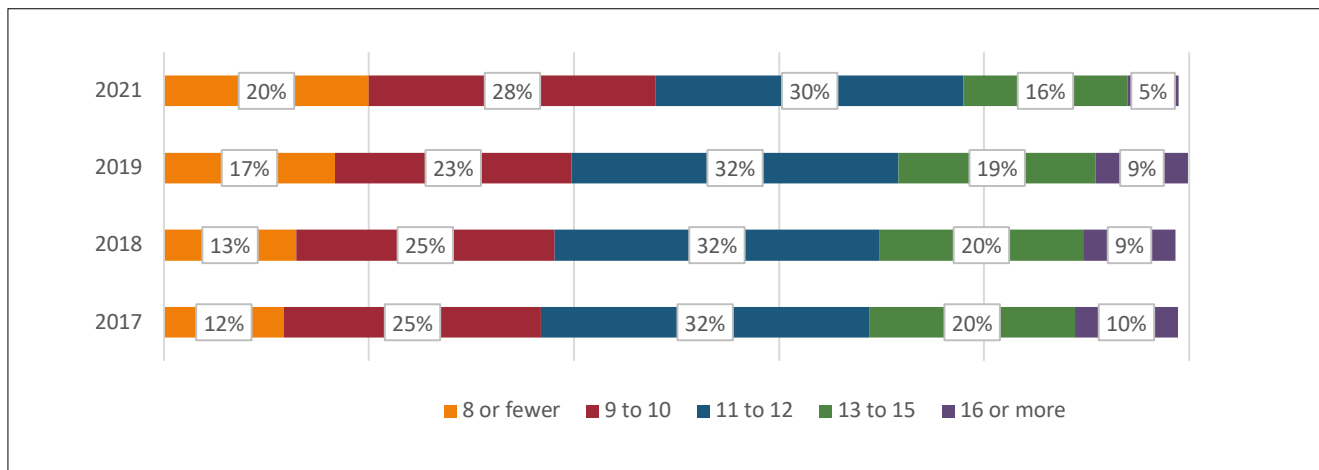


Figure eight, size of governing boards when at full capacity according to respondents in annual surveys 2017 to 2021. Question was not asked in 2020.

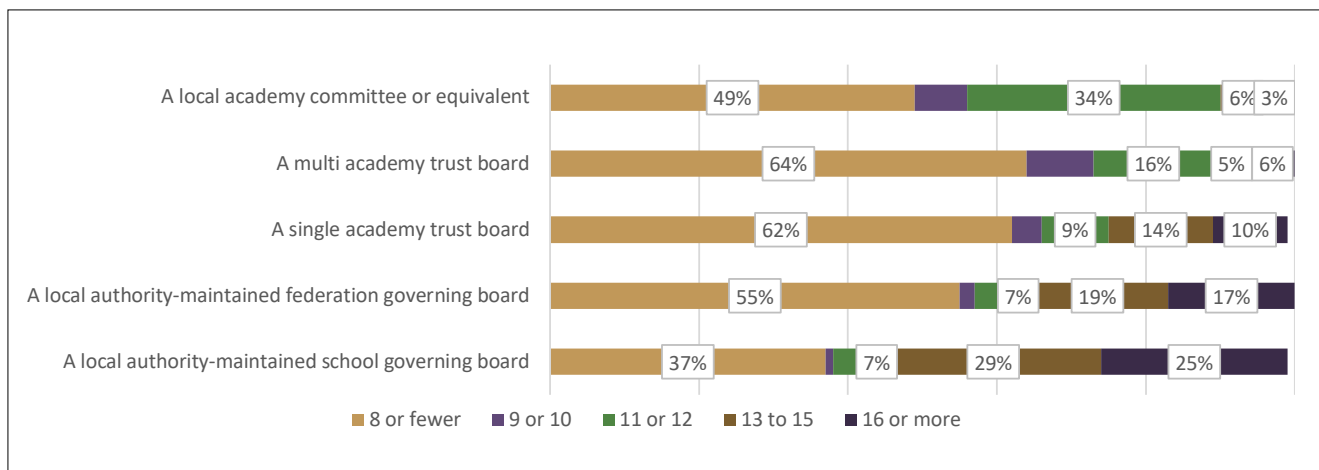


Figure nine, size of governing board when at full capacity in relation to different board types.



were more likely than any other region to still have boards with 16 or more (8% and 10% respectively) while the East Midlands and Yorkshire and Humber were most likely to have eight or fewer (27% for both).

Induction

95% of respondents agreed that high quality induction training should be mandatory for new governors and trustees. Just 4% of respondents disagreed. The strength of agreement has been consistent over the past decade – 90% said the same in 2011, moving up to 93% in 2016. This figure remains largely consistent when looking at respondents across regions, board type and phase, length of service and other factors.

Strong agreement with mandatory induction training can be compared with whether respondents are considering resigning their role. 100% of those considering resignation because they felt they had not been properly trained supported mandatory induction, while 97% of respondents who were doing so because they felt the role was too demanding or their board was ineffective said the same.

Reviewing board practice and effectiveness

Reviewing board effectiveness is more than just good practice: it is reflective of board culture and valuing and embracing the opportunity to improve. A combination of measures including the completion of an annual skills audit, adopting a code of conduct and maintaining a focus on both annual self-review and periodic external review provide a package of methods that boards can use to monitor and improve the quality and impact of their governance.

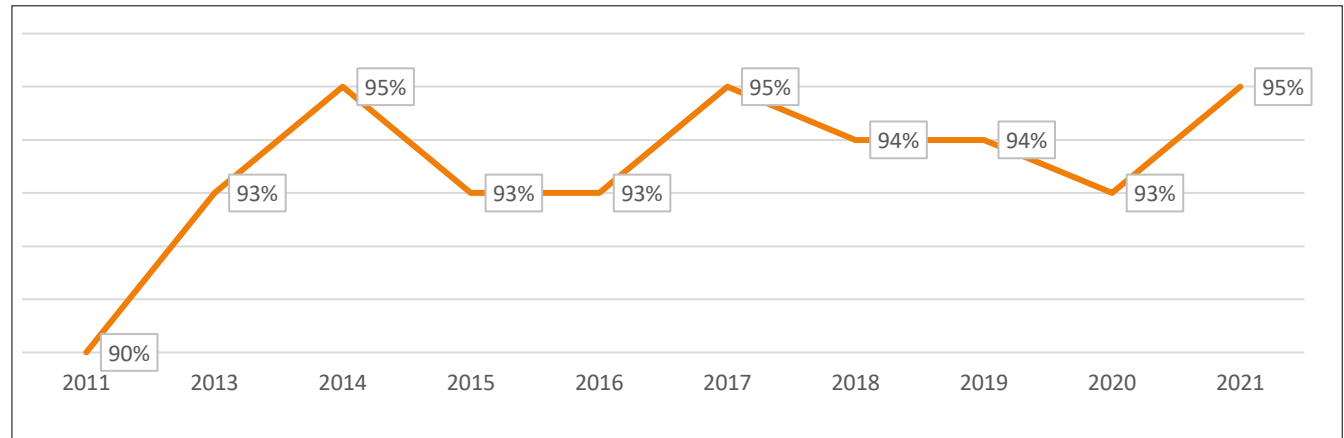


Figure ten, a longitudinal view on the support for mandatory induction of new governors and trustees. Question not asked in 2012.

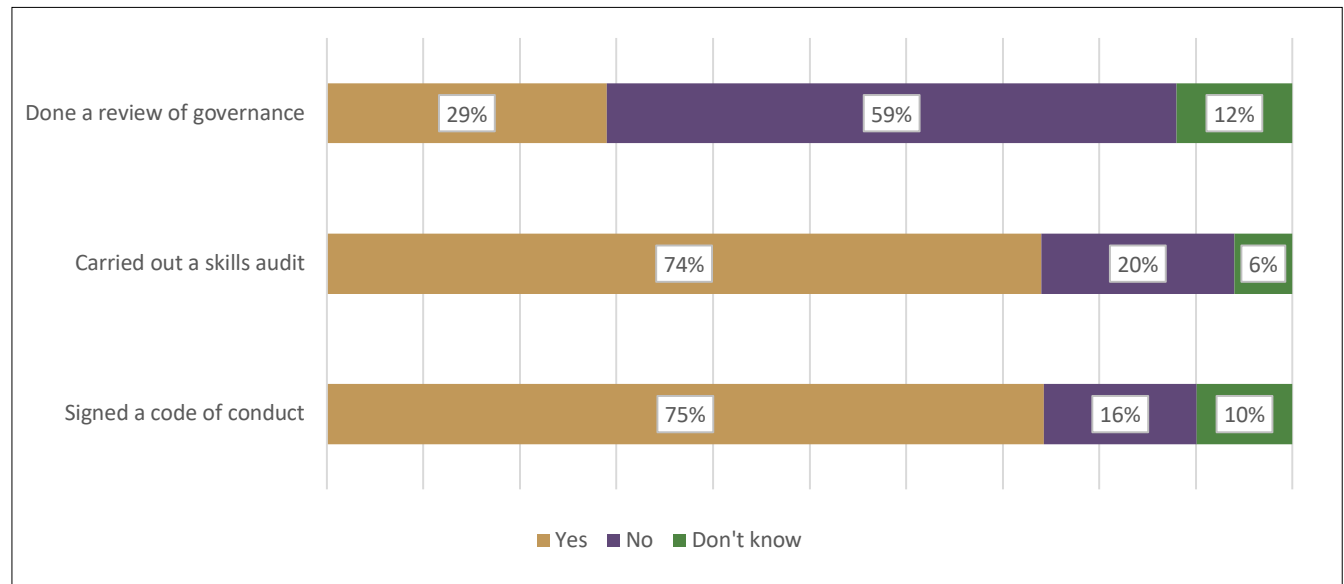


Figure eleven, percentage of respondents reporting on whether their board conducts tactics to monitor and improve quality and impact of governance.



Skills audit

Skills audits are crucial in helping governing boards to identify where they need to develop knowledge, skills and behaviour to deliver their functions effectively. Despite the potential value it brings to board development, the use of skills audits has dropped since last investigated. 74% of respondents completed a skills audit in 2021 compared to 87% in 2019. It is likely the pandemic has played a role in the reduced usage of skills audits.

Across all respondents to this year's survey, 65% found completing a skills audit useful whereas 9% said that while they did complete one, they did not find it useful. Those governing in a federation were most likely to both complete a skills audit (81%) and find it a useful exercise (77%). Academy committee (local governing body) respondents were least likely to complete one (72%) and if they did, most likely to say it was not helpful (14%). Respondents who conduct a self-review or commission an external review were also more likely to conduct a skills audit (79%) compared to just 51% of those who had not discussed self or external review.

Respondents stated that completing a skills audit was used for:

- training purposes (67%) up from 58% in 2013 and 45% in 2018
- recruitment (51%) up from 33% in 2013 and down from 56% in 2018
- Assigning governors or trustees to committees (50%) down from 64% in 2014 and 54% in 2018
- Assigning link roles (47%)

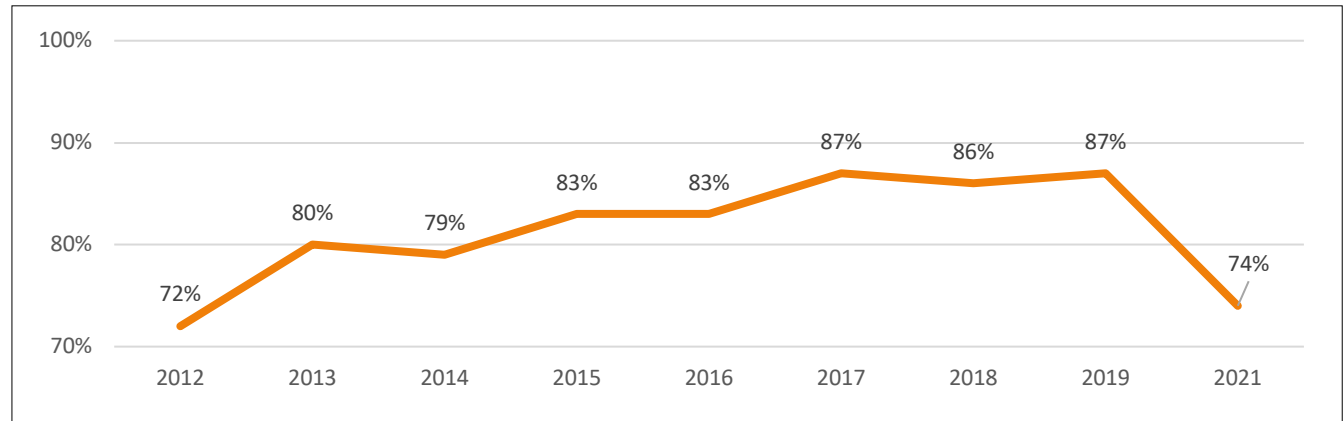


Figure twelve, percentage of respondents reporting their board's use of a skills audit.

NGA skills audit



NGA has made significant changes to the NGA skills audit following consultation with our members and in response to our report last term on Increasing Participation in Schools and Trust Governance.

A new section evaluates governors and trustees experience and understanding of the communities they serve and their capacity to lead an inclusive culture, so that the board can assess how resourced it is to fulfil its role in encouraging diversity and ensuring equality.

Other new features include a skills dashboard to identify whole board development priorities and develop a plan to address them, and guidance notes and a simplified scoring system producing an accurate and consistent evaluation.

NGA recommends that all boards complete the skills audit at the start of each academic year, and as a minimum new volunteers should complete the audit when joining the board.

Read more about the updates and [download the skills audit](#) from the Knowledge Centre.



Code of conduct

Setting out a code of conduct helps everyone on the board understand what is expected of them and contributes to effective governance.

75% of respondents said their board had agreed a code of conduct in 2021, with 64% of respondents saying they found it useful – a three percentage point increase since 2019. Overall, there has been a decline in the proportion of respondents using a code of conduct from when we first recorded this in 2012.

Over a fifth of respondents who had not signed a code of conduct were considering resignation due to lack of training and induction. As with the use of skills audit, respondents from academy committees (local governing bodies) were most likely to say they did not use a code of conduct.

Governance reviews

Conducting a review of the board can be important to ensure board effectiveness and to monitor the quality and impact of their governance. 23% of respondents said their board had conducted an internal governance review in the past year: this is the lowest level of respondents saying they had done so since we have asked the question. This may be a result of the disruption caused by the pandemic with reviews of board practice and performance being pushed as boards deal with business related to COVID-19. However, it is worrying that only 19% reported that their board plans to conduct a review in the coming year.

A small proportion of respondents stated that their board had an external review of governance (6%). While external reviews should happen less often than self-reviews, this is again the lowest since we first asked in 2013 (7%), with highs of 27% and 26% of respondents saying their board had commissioned an external review in 2017 and 2018 respectively. Again, the pandemic will form a part of the

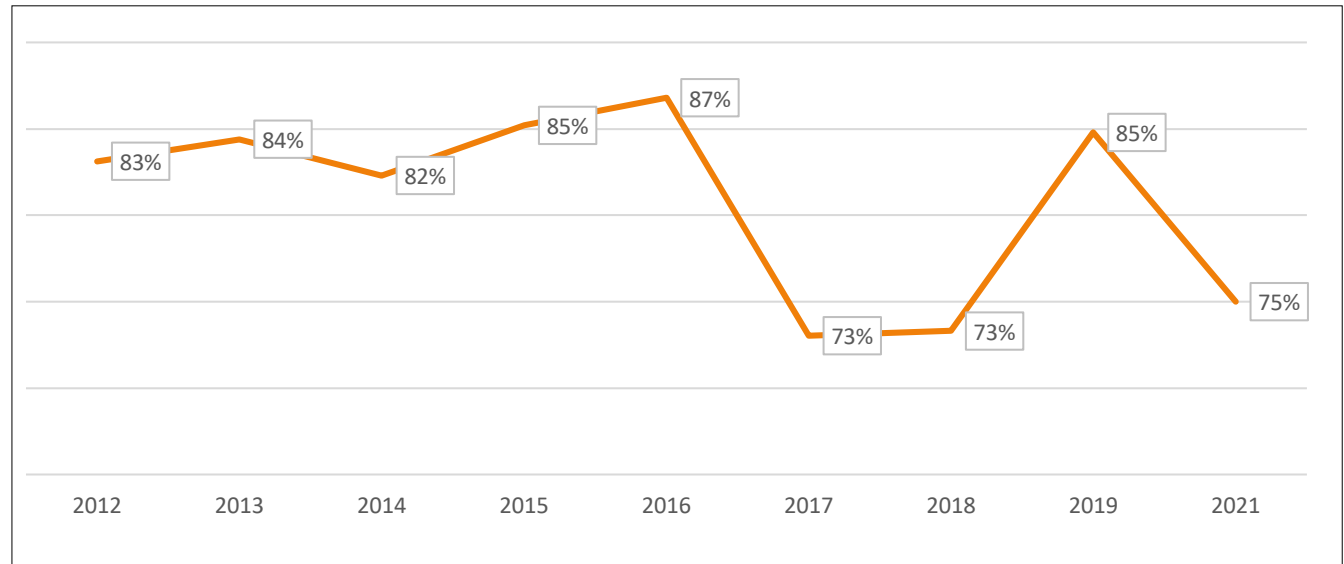


Figure thirteen, percentage of respondents saying their board signs a code of conduct.

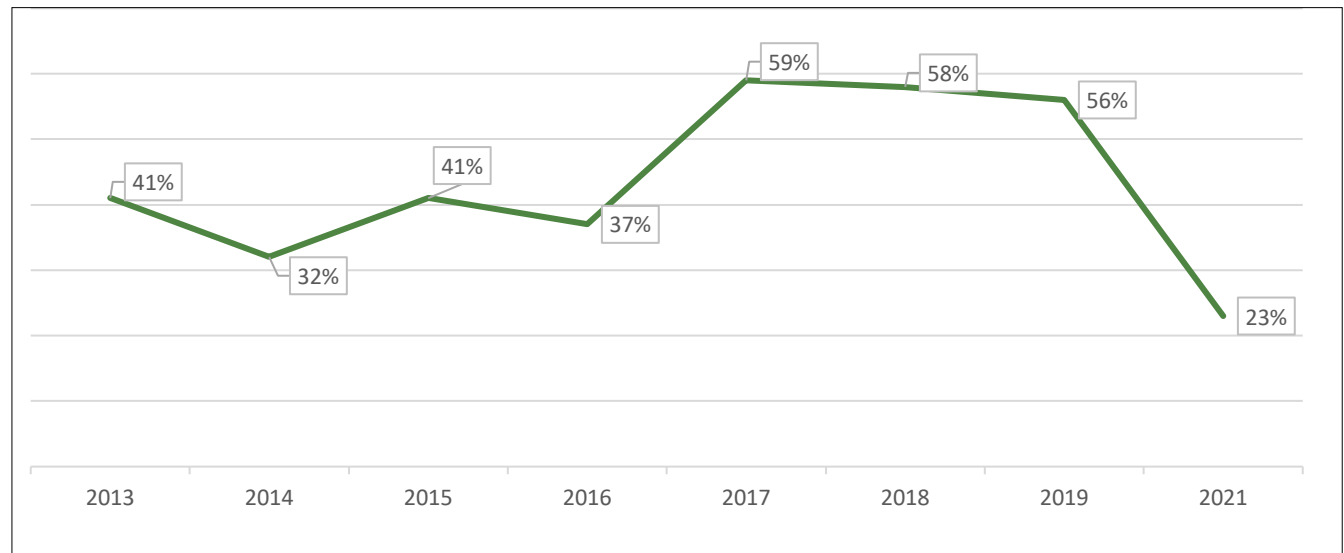


Figure fourteen, percentage of respondents saying their board conducts internal reviews between 2013 and 2021.



explanation for the drop in this year's figures, although it is perfectly possible to undertake an external review using remote meetings.

Academy committees and LA maintained schools were the least likely to conduct either form of governance review, compared to other governing board types. MAT trust boards were the most likely of any school type to have reviews with 29% conducting internal reviews and 11% commissioning external reviews. The increased review activity for MATs is likely to increase further next year given that the ESFA's Academy Trust Handbook now specifies its "strong preference that external reviews of governance" are conducted routinely "as part of a wider programme of self-assessment and improvement". Trusts also need to provide evidence of their governance performance to their members.

Governance professionals

Recruiting governance professionals

Governance professionals, including clerks, are paid to provide procedural, legal and strategic advice and guidance to the governing board, as well as administrative support. Depending on their role and the governance structure served, they may also be the strategic lead for wider governance support provided by clerks. They make an invaluable contribution to board efficiency, effectiveness, productivity and compliance.

A quarter of respondents said their board found it difficult to recruit a good governance professional. Respondents in London (31%), the South East (31%) and the South West (32%) were the most likely to say they found it difficult, while MAT boards also found it more difficult (31%) than other board types, with academy committees having the least trouble (22%).

We asked respondents how they obtained the services of a governance professional, with 49% confirming this was through the LA, up from 42% in 2020. 26% said the governance professional has another role in the school –



Figure fifteen, who governors and trustees say conducts the governance professional's appraisal.

again a rise from 20% in 2020 and 25% said they were employed by the MAT – a jump of 10 percentage points from 2020, and up from just 9% who said the same thing in 2018.

Respondents from SATs were significantly more likely to say their governance professional has another role in the school (68%). This compares to just 24% of maintained school respondents and 16% of MAT trustee respondents who said the same. 13% of MAT respondents and 16% of academy committee (local governing body) respondents said they were reliant on the local authority to source this service.

When asked where temporary cover for governance professionals was sourced, there was a big difference between the North East where 53% of respondents said the LA and the South West where just 4% used the LA. While

40% of maintained schools sourced cover from the LA, just 10% of academy committees (local governing bodies) and 11% of MAT boards did the same, with both receiving significant cover from the trust itself.

Governance professional appraisal

When we asked governors and trustees if their governance professional receives an annual appraisal, 47% said yes – the same percentage reported in 2020. This compares to 61% of clerks and governance professionals who told us they receive an annual appraisal when we asked them in our separate 2021 survey of clerks and governance professionals. While 36% didn't know (compared to 40% who said the same in 2020), 17% said they did not have one (up from 13% last year).



Respondents in London were most likely to say that their governance professional or clerk did not receive an annual appraisal (23%), while in the South East respondents were most likely to say they were appraised (59%). By board type, academy committee respondents were least likely to appraise (40%) compared to SAT and MAT respondents who were most likely at 61% and 56% respectively.

What governance professionals do

When respondents were asked to select all duties that were carried out by their governance professional, the three most reported duties were drafting the minutes for the meetings they administer (96%), preparing the agenda for the meetings they administer (89%), and providing advice on legal, constitutional and procedural matters (68%).

68% of governors and trustees reported that their clerk provides the board with advice on legal, constitutional, and procedural matters – the same level reported in both 2020 and 2019. This did vary by employment type with more respondents whose clerks are employed through the LA or another service provider reporting that they provided this (53%), compared with 25% of clerks employed through the trust and only 22% of those whose clerk had another role within the school.

Just 33% of respondents said their governance professional co-ordinated governance across the organisation, down from 56% when we first asked this question in 2019. Meanwhile a higher proportion in 2021 report their governance professional proposes the meeting schedule for the year (57%) compared to 42% who said the same in 2019.

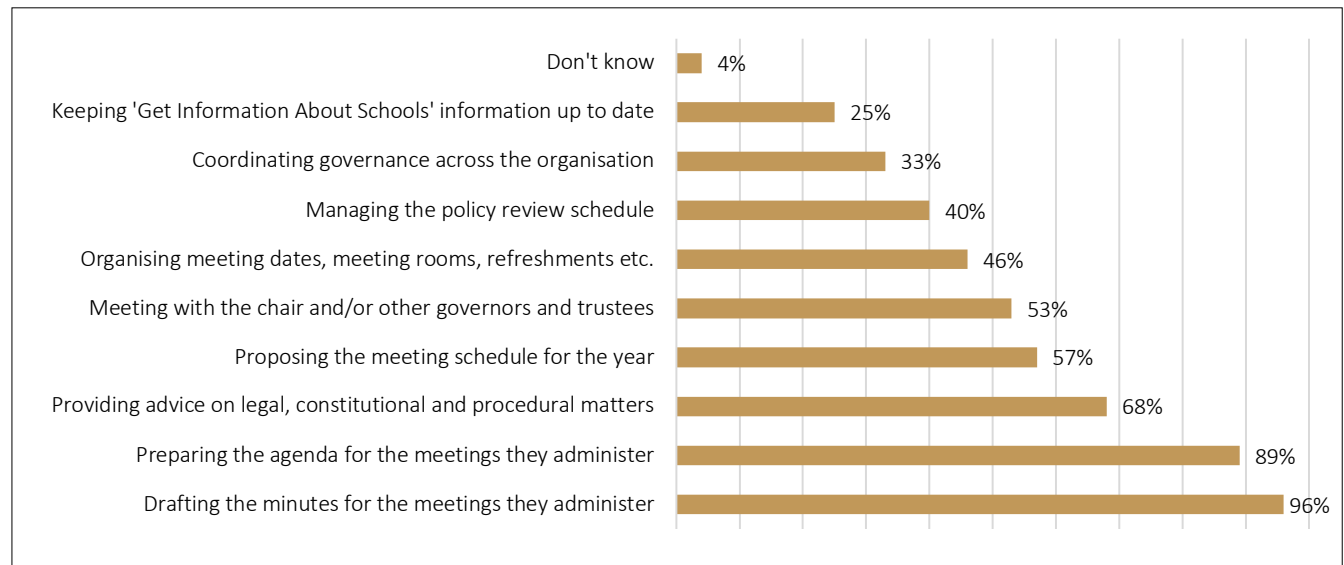
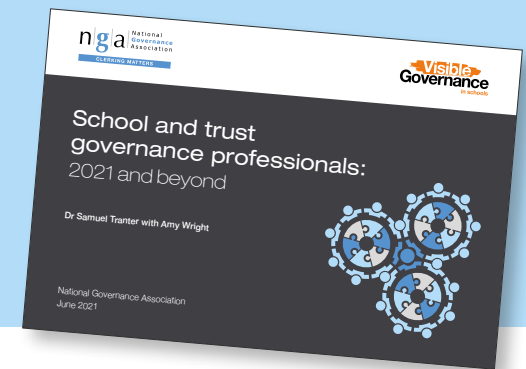


Figure sixteen, the duties that respondents say their governance professional undertakes.

Our voice

This research was used to support the findings of NGA's recent in-depth study: [Governance professionals: 2021 and beyond](#) which tested the progress and provided context to the ongoing debates surrounding the evolution of governance professional roles. This year's survey findings show that the expectations set out in NGA's long-standing [Clerking Matters campaign](#) for securing good school and trust governance have not yet been universally achieved. Moving forward, NGA will be focusing on providing quality online training modules, advice and guidance for governance professionals, along with formulating a career pathway in conjunction with the Department for Education (DfE) and developing remuneration advice and guidance to compliment it.





Stakeholder engagement

NGA recognises stakeholder engagement as the fourth core function of effective governance. A board cannot steer the strategic direction of their school or trust effectively without understanding the community or communities it serves. This year we asked those taking part in the annual survey what strategies their board uses to engage with pupils, staff, parents and the wider community and how this was impacted by COVID-19.

Stakeholder engagement has proven to be a challenge for many boards over the last academic year, with an average of 23% of opportunities for stakeholder engagement being prevented due to COVID-19. However, when we look at strategies over time a consistent picture emerges.

Monitoring the results of a parent or carer survey (76%), staff surveys (64%), updating parents via the school website (68%) and providing support for parents in engaging with their child's learning at home were the most used stakeholder engagement strategies. Unsurprisingly, the highest level of stakeholder engagement this year was with parents, backing up the general view that parental engagement increased because of the pandemic.

Engaging with pupils

The most used method of engaging with pupils among respondents was monitoring the results of a pupil survey (58%), followed by meeting with or observing a pupil council (21%). COVID-19 impacted these results significantly with a further 40% of respondents stating that they would have used this method. Those governing in LA maintained schools were more likely to engage with pupils. Half of governors in LA maintained schools reported meeting with, or observing pupil councils (50%) and 48% of respondents said that they held pupil focus groups.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2021 Would have but COVID-19 prevented us
Monitoring results of a parent/carer survey	70%	73%	78%	73%	86%	76%	16%
Monitoring results of a pupil survey	52%	56%	61%	59%	69%	58%	10%
Monitoring results of a staff survey	51%	47%	59%	56%	70%	64%	11%
Held open meeting(s) for parents on a particular issue	43%	43%	50%	47%	x	x	x
Met with the parent forum/council	x	x	27%	24%	30%	14%	33%
Held meeting(s) with staff on a particular issue	77%	42%	47%	45%	x	x	x
Held a staff consultation	x	x	x	x	27%	31%	15%
Met with or observed pupil council	71%	54%	54%	49%	49%	21%	40%
Invited pupils to attend governing board meetings	25%	20%	20%	18%	22%	17%	35%
Held pupil focus groups on a particular issue	26%	18%	17%	16%	22%	17%	24%
Contributed to school newsletter/bulletin	61%	53%	53%	52%	47%	50%	4%
Updated parents via the school website	69%	62%	62%	56%	56%	68%	2%
Attended parents' evenings	65%	59%	60%	57%	60%	22%	61%
Involved pupils in staff selection (eg when recruiting a headteacher)	47%	41%	40%	35%	x	x	x
Held community-wide events	x	x	x	x	27%	12%	44%

Figure seventeen, table showing the methods used by boards to engage with stakeholders between 2016 to 2021.

Our voice



Boards can benefit from a wealth of information to understand their organisation's strengths and weaknesses by engaging with stakeholders. That is why NGA recognises 'ensuring the voices of school stakeholder are heard' as a fourth core function of governance. Although this is not formally recognised by the Department for Education, proactively engaging with stakeholders is included in the Governance Handbook (2021). To support boards in embedding effective strategies and holding stakeholder engagement as a strategic priority, NGA will be developing resources. Guidance on pupil voice, parental engagement and staff voice will provide best practice advice and enable boards to understand the impact of stakeholder engagement on pupil outcomes and school improvement. Learning Link members can access NGA's updated bitesize module on stakeholder engagement which explores what stakeholder engagement is, what it looks like when done well and how to go about doing it successfully in your organisation.



Notwithstanding the impact of the pandemic, there has been a steady decline in boards meeting with or observing the pupil council since we first asked the question in 2016. Under a quarter of respondents reported using this method, as is the case with boards inviting pupils to attend governing board meetings with only 17% of respondents saying that they did this. Listening to pupils about what it is like to be a pupil at the school or trust can offer valuable insight for decision-making.

Engaging with staff

Surveys was the most used method of staff engagement, with 64% of respondents saying they had engaged with staff in this way and a further 10% reporting that they would have done so. 31% said their board had held a staff consultation this year and 15% were prevented from doing so due to COVID-19. Respondents in LA maintained schools were more likely to employ strategies to engage with staff followed by MATs.

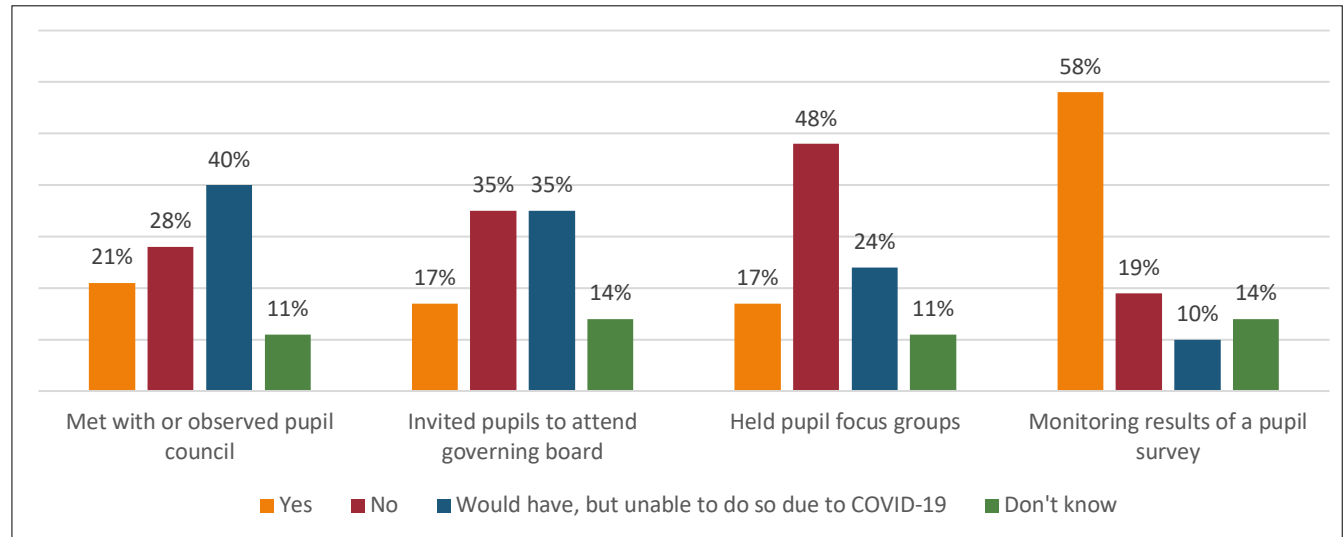


Figure eighteen, percentage of respondents who employed listed strategies to engage with pupils.

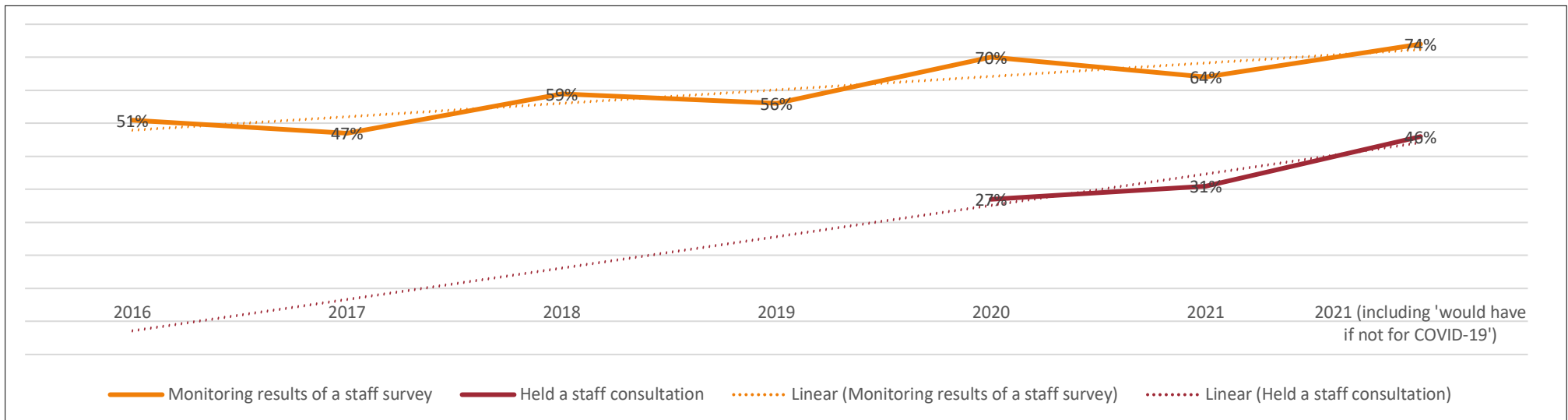


Figure nineteen, percentage of respondents who employed listed strategies to engage with staff since 2016. Question on staff consultations not asked between 2016 and 2019.



Engaging with parents

For all the disruption the last 18 months has brought, there was a standout silver lining in the level of parental engagement throughout. With parents' involvement with their children's learning being greater than it ever has been, there is an opportunity for boards to increase their level of engagement. We know that effective parental engagement can have a positive impact on the child's learning, and with 72% of governors and trustees stating that they provided support for parents in engaging with their child's learning at home, this approach was one of the most used methods of parental engagement among respondents. Boards were least likely to have engaged with parents in person over the last year, such as through parent forums or councils (14%) and parents evenings (22%). In comparison to the 2020 findings, boards updating the school website and contributing to the school newsletter have played a larger part on the way that boards have remained in contact with parents throughout the pandemic.

Engaging with the wider community

Schools have long been known as the hub of the community for children and young people and deliver essential services to their pupils.

With the impact of the pandemic on non-essential gatherings, it comes as no surprise that only 12% of respondents held community wide events during the last academic year, with 44% of governors and trustees stating that they would have done. A further 33% said that they had reached out to the wider community to engage hard to reach families with 16% saying that they would have done. This means community engagement is the least used form of stakeholder engagement.

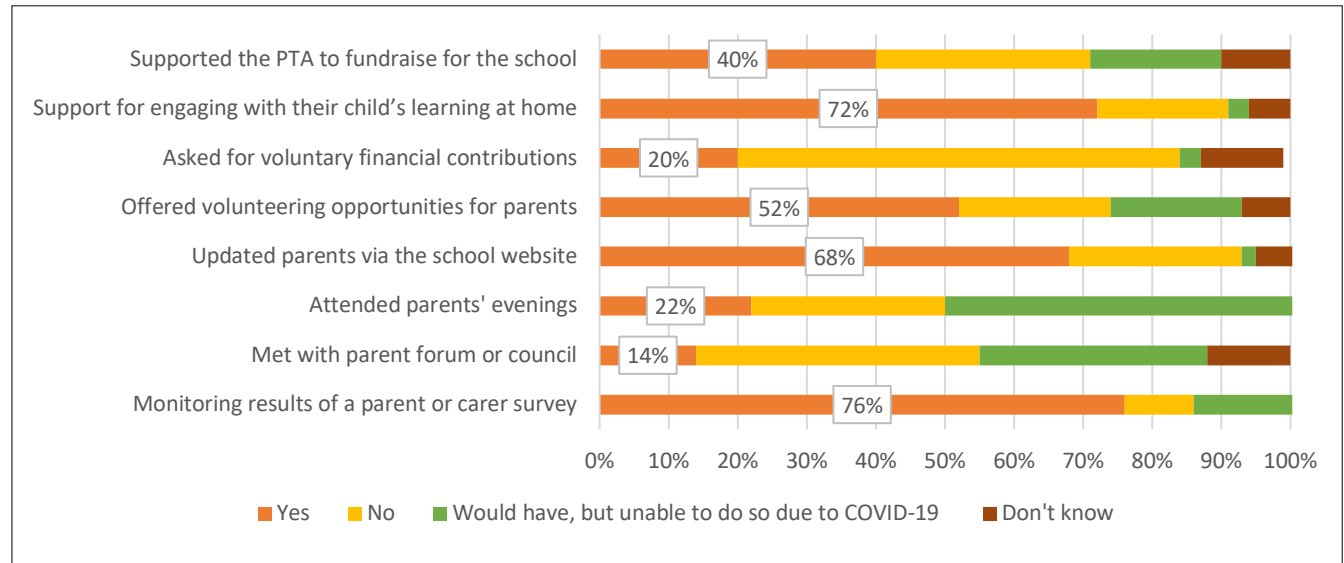


Figure twenty, percentage of respondents who employed listed strategies to engage with parents or carers.

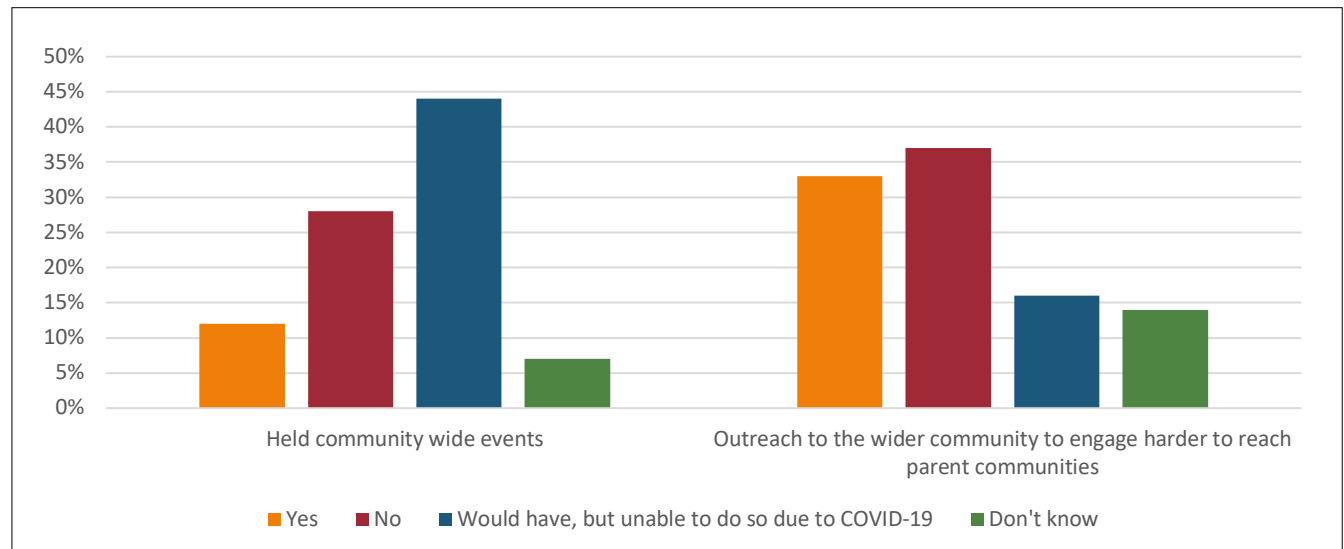


Figure twenty one, percentage of respondents who employed listed strategies to engage with the wider community.

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