



**School
Governance
2020**

www.nga.org.uk/governance2020

September 2020

Foreword

An extraordinary quarter of a million people volunteer their time and skills to oversee state schools in England in the interests of pupils. This report confirms that those who volunteer as school governors and academy trustees are motivated by making a difference for children and serving their community. It is a good and important thing which they do on behalf of the rest of us, ensuring the country's schools are as good as they can be.

The publication of this data on who these hidden givers are provides the opportunity to say thank you to this amazing group of people. They come together in governing boards that set the vision and ethos for schools and trusts: what children should leave the 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 those boards need to be diverse in background, skills, experience and perspectives.

The survey data shows we have not yet been successful in increasing the overall percentage of Black, Asian and minority ethnic governors and trustees nor those aged under forty, who count as young in governance terms. So NGA is making pledges on further action, expanding and going beyond the Everyone on Board campaign. We are determined that this coming year we will see change in the diversity within the membership of governing boards.

Emma Knights, chief executive
National Governance Association

Introduction

While almost anyone aged 18 or over can join a governing board, previous research and the data gathered in this survey for the past five years shows that several groups remain significantly underrepresented in school governance, particularly young people and those from Black, Asian and other minority ethnicities. Initiatives from organisations including NGA to address this persistent, historical issue have not yet significantly impacted the national figure, but there are promising changes in the demographic especially when looking at recent governance recruits and those recruited from outside of boards' existing networks.

Without this diversity of thought, governing boards are at risk of suffering from groupthink. It is also important that governing boards reflect the diversity of the community they serve and of wider society. A key challenge for governing boards is attracting volunteers to the role and filling vacancies on the board.

The annual school governance survey has been running since 2011 and is the largest survey of its kind, this year achieving 6,864 responses. In this year's survey, governors and trustees were asked about their characteristics, their motivations for volunteering and their board's experience of recruiting volunteers.

6,864

respondents
engaged with
the survey

In this series

- Leadership and staffing
- Finance and funding
- Governance volunteers
- Governance practice
- Multi academy trust governance
- Pupils, communities and accountability

Find the full series of School Governance
in 2020 reports at
www.nga.org.uk/governance2020

Key findings

Here's what governors and trustees told us about their characteristics, their views on volunteer recruitment and their motivations for volunteering.



- 01 Young people are underrepresented in school governance, with most governors and trustees not having recent experience of being a pupil or of being a young person in today's world. There is a higher proportion of volunteers aged 70 and over (14%) than there are aged 40 and under (11%), and an even smaller proportion under 30 (2%).
- 02 Individuals from Black, Asian and other minority ethnicity backgrounds are underrepresented on governing boards meaning that boards often lack the diversity of their pupil populations or wider school communities which they serve. 94% of governors and trustees surveyed identified as white, 1% identified as Black/ African/ Caribbean/Black British, 2% identified as Asian/Asian British, and 1% identified as mixed or being of multiple ethnic groups.
- 03 Black, Asian and minority ethnic governors and trustees are more likely to be aged under 40, or parent governors, indicating useful routes to increase volunteer numbers from underrepresented groups.
- 04 60% of governors and trustees surveyed identified as female while 39% identified as male. Although more than half of chairs (55%) are female, this shows that women are less likely to take the chair. Half of women (49%) want to take on the chairing role in the future compared with 61% of men.
- 05 Almost two in three governors and trustees are employed, but they are either self-employed (18%) or work part-time (22%) meaning that only 35% of respondents are in full-time employment.
- 06 Though Black, Asian and other minority ethnicities are even more underrepresented in chairing roles, 54% of Black governors and trustees and 42% of Asian governors and trustees said that they would consider or plan to chair their board in the future compared to 30% of white governors and trustees.
- 07 Governance recruitment is more difficult than it was five years ago. 63% of governors/trustees agree that recruiting to their governing board is difficult, a 13% rise from 2015.
- 08 Governance recruitment is a greater challenge for alternative provisions and pupil referral units. Nearly four in five respondents governing in these settings report that it is difficult to recruit to their board. 70% of governors and trustees of special schools also found governance recruitment challenging.
- 09 Wanting to make a difference for children is the number one motivator for those governing (62%), followed by a desire to serve the community (56%) and an interest in education (52%).
- 10 Volunteers from groups which are generally underrepresented on governing boards overall are less likely to report 'being asked to join the board' as the reason they became involved in school governance.

Findings

- Demographic of volunteers
- Recruitment to boards
- Motivations of volunteers



Age

Young people remain underrepresented in school governance with only one in 10 governors and trustees surveyed reporting that they are under 40 (11%) and an even smaller proportion reporting being under 30 (2%). This means that there were a higher proportion of governors/trustees aged 70 and over (14%) than were aged under 40, signaling that most of the volunteers who are contributing to the decisions made by boards do not have a recent experience of the education system or of what it is like to be a young person in today's world. Meanwhile, the bulk of governors/trustees who took part in the survey were aged between 40 to 49 years

(24%), 50 to 59 years (24%) or 60 to 69 years (26%). 32% of new volunteers (within the past year) are aged under 40.

Ethnicity

Governing boards have little ethnic diversity, much less than the school communities they serve. 94% of governors and trustees who were surveyed identify as white, 1% of respondents identify as Black/ African/Caribbean/Black British, 2% identify as Asian/Asian British, and 1% identify as mixed or being of multiple ethnic groups.

	Census 2011 population data (%)	Pupils in England (%)	Teachers in England (%)	Heads in England (%)	Governance volunteers surveyed (%)	Chairs of governing boards surveyed (%)
White	86%	73%	84%	97%	94%	96%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	3%	6%	2%	1%	1%	0%
Asian/Asian British	8%	12%	4%	2%	2%	1%
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	2%	6%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Other ethnic group	1%	2%	1%	<1%	0%	0%
Rather not say/not obtained	x	1%	8%	x	2%	1%

Figure 1, table showing ethnicity of pupils, teachers, headteachers those surveyed in school governance survey in 2020 and the general population.

These figures demonstrate that there is a significant gap between the ethnic diversity of those on governing boards and school stakeholders, including pupils, parents, teachers, and the wider community as seen in figure 1.

Younger governors and trustees are more ethnically diverse as seen in figure 2 with 10% of governors and trustees under 40 identifying as being from an underrepresented ethnicity (5% Asian/British Asian, 2% Black/African/Caribbean/Black British, 3% mixed/multiple ethnic groups, >1% other ethnic group). Only 4% of those who reported being 40 years and over identified as being from any Black, Asian or other minority ethnicity. There are positive signs that with new volunteers, the diversity of boards is improving. Of those volunteers that have joined their board within the past year, 90% identify as white, 2% as Black, 3% as Asian, 3% from mixed/multiple groups and 1% from other ethnic backgrounds.

The demographic makeup of governors and trustees did also vary by region, most significantly in London where overall 17% of governors and trustees are Black, Asian and other minority ethnicities as seen in figure 3. In comparison, overall Black, Asian and other minority ethnicities were underrepresented particularly in the North West (3%), South West (2%) and North East (1%).

A higher proportion of Black, Asian and other minority ethnic respondents were parent governors (10%) compared to those who reported being co-opted (3%).

- Office for National Statistics (2011), Ethnicity and National Identity in England and Wales: 2011, available here: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/ethnicityandnationalidentityinenglandandwales/2012-12-11#ethnicity-in-england-and-wales>
- Department for Education (2020), Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2020, available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2019>
- Department for Education, School workforce in England: November 2019, available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2019>

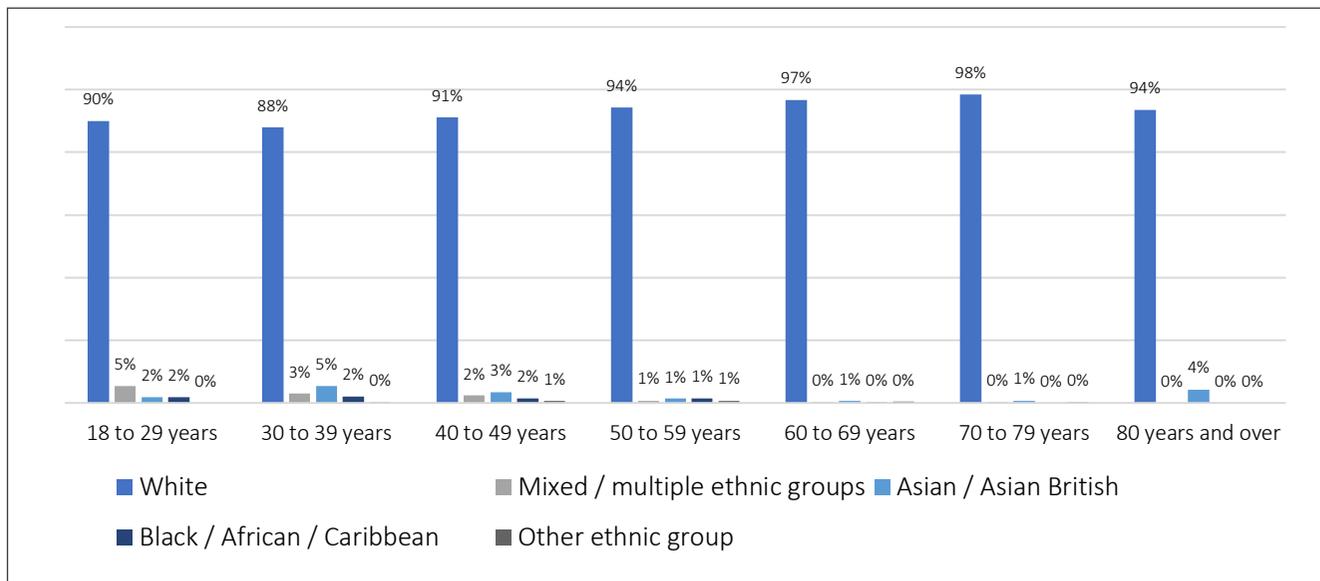


Figure 2, showing ethnicity of volunteers by age group

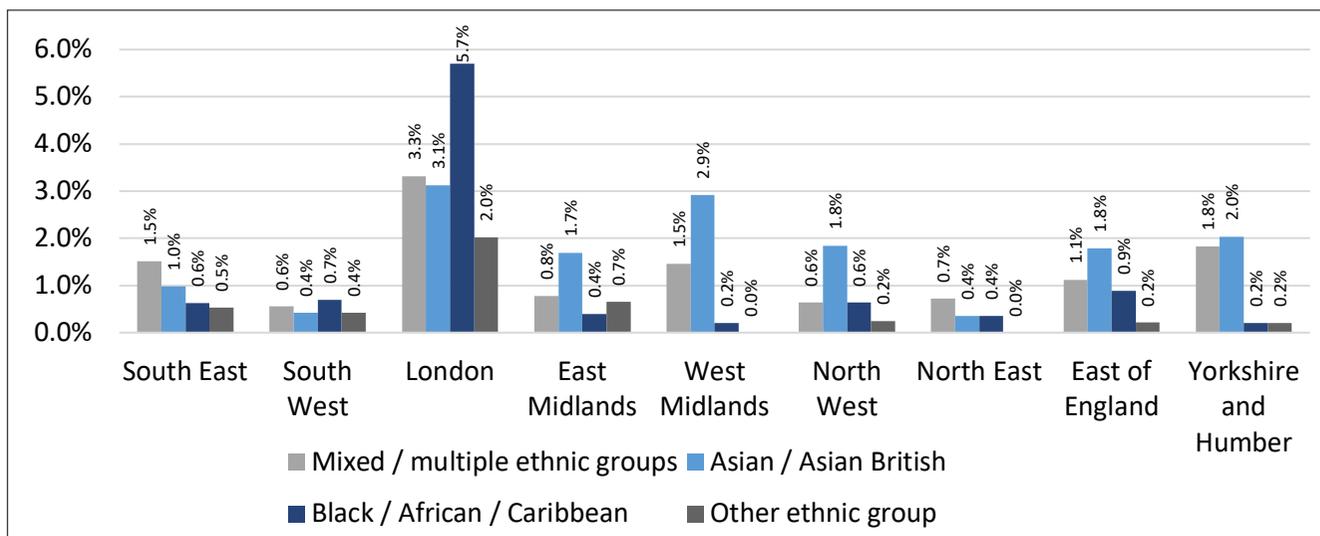


Figure 3, ethnicity of respondents by region

Gender and LGBTQ+

60% of governors and trustees identified as female and 39% identified as male (>1% either preferred not to say or preferred to self-describe). Of those aged under 40, 65% were female and 34% male, with those aged 40 and over 60% female and 39% male. Over twice as many parent governors identified as female compared with males (68% vs 31%).

The gender makeup of boards is most evenly balanced in secondary schools. Males were most likely to govern in secondary settings than other phases with 48% of secondary school governors/trustees identifying as male compared to 51% of females. In nursery settings, 61% of respondents were female, and 38% male, similar to primaries with 60% female and 39% male. In special schools, 58% were female and 41% male and this was similar to alternative provisions/pupil referral units, where 59% were female and 39% male.

Male governors and trustees also tend to be older than females with half of all male governance volunteers surveyed being aged 60 years or above (50%). Only 34% of female volunteers were aged over 60 with over half of all females aged between 40 and 59 (54%) compared to 40% of males. 10% of males were under 40 compared with 12% of females. Likely due to the age differences between male and female governors and trustees, a higher proportion of males were retired than females (39% vs 27%) while a higher proportion of females were currently employed (females 65% vs 58% male). However, females were more likely to be in part-time employment compared with males (27% vs 14%). 6% of females reported that they were currently looking after home or family compared with only 1% of males.

3% of respondents identified as LGBTQ+ and 3% of respondents preferred not to say while 95% did not identify as LGBTQ+. One in five of those respondents aged under 30 identified as LGBTQ+.

Employment status

Likely because of this older profile of governors and trustees, a third of individuals report that they are retired (32%). While overall 63% of respondents report being employed, this includes those that are either self-employed (18%) or work part-time (22%) meaning that only 35% of respondents were in full-time employment. Meanwhile, 6% of respondents reported that they were looking after home or family while 1% reported that they were studying and 1% reported being unemployed.

Leadership demographics

While overall respondent demographics show that the school governance population as a whole lacks diversity, this is even more true of those leading the board. 41% of chairs were retired, 30% were employed and 23% were self-employed with only 6% having different work circumstances.

Chairs also tended to be older with 94% of chairs saying they are 40 with just 5% under 40.

A higher proportion of those in leadership positions identify as white (96% for chairs and 94% for vice chairs) while this fell slightly to 91% for those in non-chairing positions. Those who were not chairs were slightly more likely to identify as Black, Asian or another minority ethnicity (7% all governors/

trustees compared with 3% chairs) and people from ethnic minorities were also more likely to say they would consider or are planning on becoming chair in the future compared with white volunteers (42% vs 30%), as seen in figure 4.

While 55% of chairs are female compared to 44% of males, this varied by school setting with 58% of chairs of local authority (LA) maintained school boards reporting being female compared to 55% of academy committees (also known as local governing boards) and 50% of single or multi academy trust boards. Meanwhile, female non-chairs were less likely to say they were planning or were considering become chair of their board compared to male non-chairs (23% vs 36%). Overall, 61% of females said they would not become chair compared with 49% of males.

Governance service

Currently there are no limits as to how many governorships an individual can undertake, although NGA has long held the view that it is not best practice to serve on more than two governing boards at once, and this position is also included in the Department for Education's Governance Handbook. 83% of governors/trustees surveyed reported that they only served on one governing board, 13% reported serving on two while 5% reported serving on three or more boards.

	White	Asian / Asian British	Black / African Caribbean / Black British	Mixed / multiple ethnic groups	Other ethnic group
Would consider or planning to chair their board in the future	30%	42%	54%	34%	40%
Would not consider chairing their board in the future	58%	39%	24%	44%	52%
Unsure	12%	19%	22%	22%	8%

Figure 4, table showing proportion of respondents who would consider or are planning to chair their board in the future by respondent ethnicity

Older governors/trustees were more likely to be experienced school governance volunteers with 68% of those aged 40 and over reporting being involved in school governance for at least five years which applied to only 19% of those aged under 40.

New governors and trustees tend to be younger – 27% of those aged under 40 have governed for less than 12 months compared to 7% of those aged 40 and above, and 60% of those under 40 have been involved in school governance for less than two years compared to only 18% of those aged 40 and over.

More older governors and trustees reported being longstanding members of their current board. Almost a third of those aged 40 and over had been a member of their current board for over 8 years (29%), compared to 3% of those under 30, exceeding the maximum recommended good practice of two four-year terms on a single board. Half of the those aged 40 and over had served between five to seven years at their current board (50%) meaning they were approaching the end of their second term of office. Meanwhile, 37% of those under 40 had served between one to two years on their current board.

Recruiting to the board

Governance recruitment is increasingly challenging with 63% of governors/trustees surveyed reporting that recruiting new volunteers to their governing board is difficult compared with just half of those surveyed in 2015. As seen in figure 5, this marks a 13% increase in the proportion of respondents finding board recruitment difficult and over one in five respondents in 2020 said they strongly agree (22%) that this is difficult while only 3% strongly disagreed. This reinforces the need to continue to raise the profile and understanding of the role among the public, and to provide services which support governing boards in this work.

Governors/trustees of London schools were less likely to report that board recruitment is difficult with 48% agreeing. Among the regions that had the highest proportion of respondents who found recruitment difficult were the South West, the East Midlands and the East of England, as seen in figure 6.

Recruitment is particularly difficult for those governing alternative provisions/pupil referral units (PRUs) with nearly four in five respondents in these settings agreeing that recruitment is a challenge. Special school governors and trustees also found governance recruitment challenging with 70% agreeing that recruiting to the board is difficult. This fell to 67% of respondents in nursery settings and 63% in primary settings while only 53% respondents in secondary settings reported that recruitment was difficult.

Chairs (70%) and senior executive leaders (72%) also perceived recruitment to be more difficult than other governors and trustees (56%).

Motivations

Respondents indicated a variety of motivations which led them to volunteer in school governance.

The most reported motivations from governors and trustees were:

1. Making a difference for children (63%)
2. Serving their community (56%)
3. Interest in education (52%)

Developing skills for their professional life was the least selected motivation by respondents (20%).

Excluding staff governors and ex-officio members of the board, 21% of respondents reported that they work or had worked in education while 52% of staff governors reported that they joined the board to develop skills for their professional life.

42% of governors and trustees reported that their first governance position was as a parent governor. This was slightly higher for new governors and trustees who had been

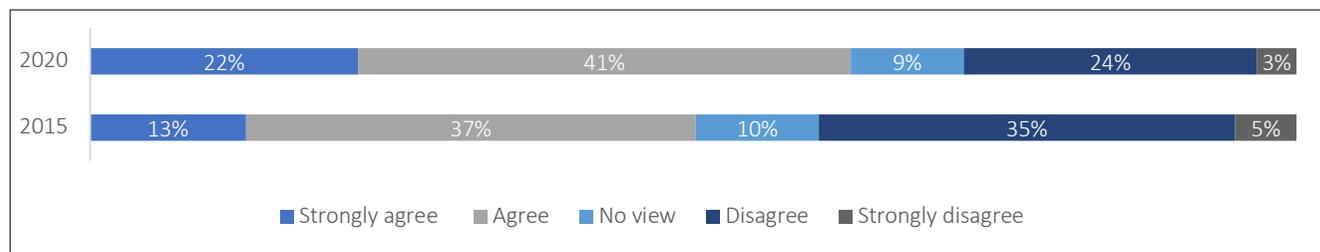


Figure 5, proportion of respondents who agreed it was difficult to recruit to the board (2015, 2020)

	South East	South West	London	East Midlands	West Midlands	North West	North East	East of England	Yorkshire and Humber
Strongly agree or agree	64%	68%	48%	68%	65%	61%	60%	67%	65%
No view	30%	34%	36%	32%	29%	31%	40%	33%	35%
Strongly disagree or disagree	9%	8%	15%	10%	7%	9%	8%	8%	10%

Figure 6, table of respondents and extent to which they agree that recruiting to their governing board was difficult by region

recruited within 12 months or 1 to 2 years ago (both 49%). This fell to 44% for those who had been governing for 3 to 4 years, to 42% for those governing for 5 to 7 years and was only 37% of those who had been governing for over 8 years demonstrating that getting parents involved in school governance remains a powerful recruitment tactic.

Some groups were more likely to have been personally approached and asked to join their board. For example, those under 40 were less likely to say being asked to join was a motivation for governing than those 40 and over (19% vs 33%). This was also true for governors and trustees

from Black, Asian and other minority ethnicities (20% vs 32% of white governors and trustees), suggesting a bias in the characteristics of people recruited through personal or professional connections. Using independent recruitment services and promoting roles outside of existing networks should therefore help to improve the diversity of boards.

Those under 40 were notably more likely to report that they chose to govern to develop skills for their professional life as seen in figure 7 and that they had a child at their board's school compared with those over 60.

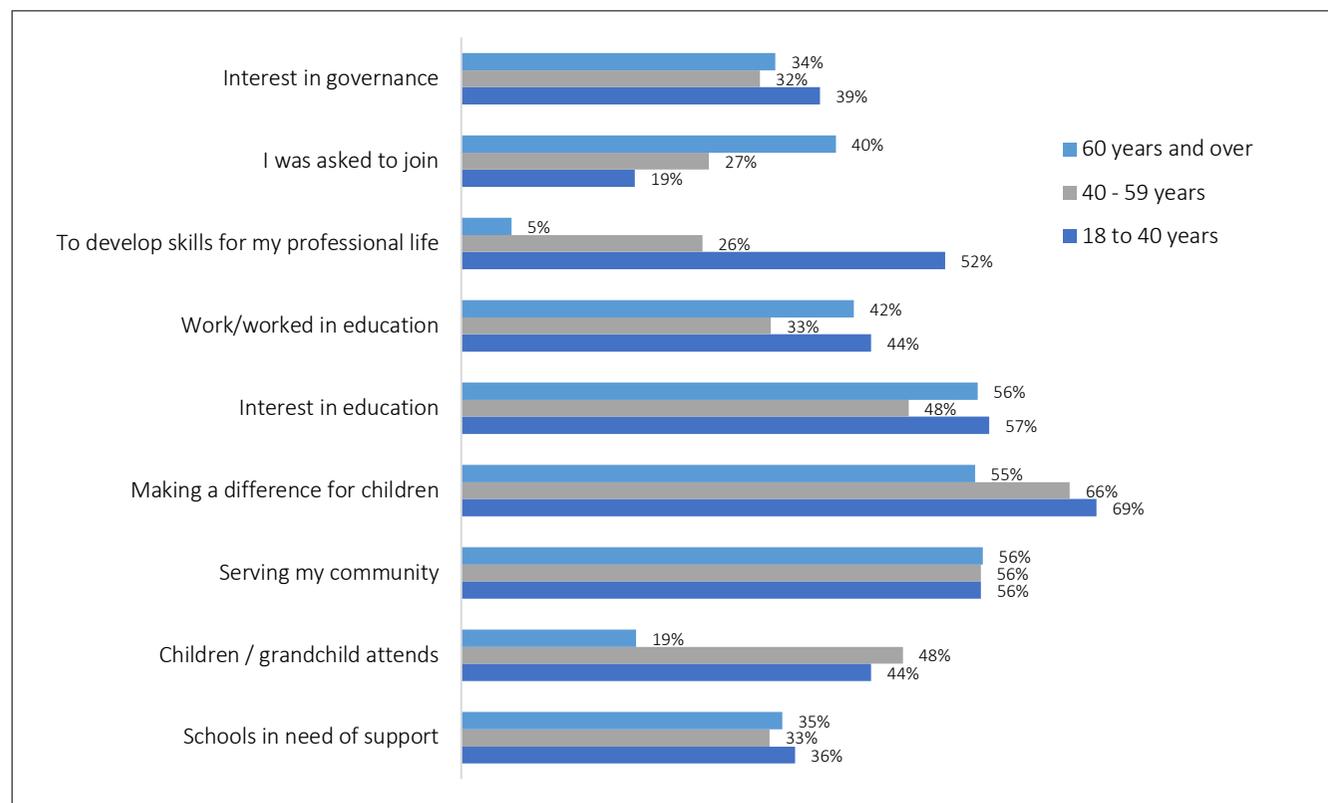


Figure 7, respondents' motivation for governing by different age groups

Resources for governing boards

n|gla National
Governance
Association

KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

In the Knowledge Centre, you will find a variety of guidance and information on topics relating to governance and education. Resources that will help you navigate the topics covered in this report include:

- [The right people around the table](#)
- [Preparing your board for the future](#)
- [Refreshing the board](#)

Visit www.nga.org.uk/knowledge-centre

Methodology

These findings are the results of a survey conducted between Tuesday 21 April and Tuesday 26 May 2020. The survey was open to all governors, trustees, and academy committee members (often also called local governors) of state-funded schools in England and 6,864 individuals engaged with the survey. Participants were self-selecting and therefore this survey is not a representative sample. However, the respondents who filled in the survey broadly match the national picture, being proportional to schools in England by phase, type, school structure and region.



	State-funded schools in England	Survey respondents
LA maintained schools	57%	61%
Academies within trusts	43%	39%

	State-funded schools in England	Survey respondents
East of England	12%	7%
East Midlands	9%	12%
London	12%	9%
North East	5%	4%
North West	15%	20%
South East	15%	19%
South West	11%	12%
West Midlands	11%	8%
Yorkshire and Humber	10%	8%

	State-funded schools in England	Survey respondents
Nursery	2%	10%
Primary	76%	65%
Secondary	16%	21%
Special	5%	4%
Alternative provision or pupil referral unit	2%	1%

About us

The National Governance Association (NGA) is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and clerks of state schools in England.

We are an independent, not-for-profit charity that aims to improve the educational standards and wellbeing of young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. We are expert leaders in school and trust governance, providing information, advice and guidance, professional development and e-learning.

We represent the views of governors, trustees and clerks at a national level and work closely with, and lobby, UK government and educational bodies.

If you are not already a member of NGA but would like to find out more, please visit www.nga.org.uk/join



inspiring governance

The school governance
recruitment and support service

Inspiring Governance is a free online service connecting schools and trusts in England with skilled volunteers in their area who are interested in becoming a school governor/trustee. This Department for Education funded service is already used by thousands of chairs and clerks and is available to maintained schools, academies, multi academy trusts, diocesan trusts, local authorities and more.

To find out more, please visit www.nga.org.uk/inspiringgovernance



The Young Governors' Network supports and encourages those aged under 40 to govern in schools by facilitating them to share their experiences, addressing the challenges faced by young people governing schools and creating sustainable connections amongst current and prospective governors. YGN is member-led: created and run by young governors with support from the National Governance Association and Inspiring Governance.

To find out more, please visit www.nga.org.uk/ygn



future chairs

The succession
solution for
school boards

Future Chairs is a free recruitment service designed to help governing boards that will need a chair, vice-chair or committee chair within a year to connect with volunteers who want to take on a leadership role. Utilising the technology behind Inspiring Governance, Future Chairs helps governing boards to connect with volunteers who have the right blend of skills, attributes and willingness to become chair.

To find out more, please visit www.nga.org.uk/futurechairs