

School and trust governance professionals: 2021 and beyond

Summary report

National Governance Association
June 2021



Key findings from the 2021 survey of governance professionals

There is support for using the term governance professional.

1. The majority of respondents (70%) support use of the term governance professional as a collective description or umbrella term for all roles within the profession.
2. An increasingly varied portfolio of governance professional roles in the state school sector reflects complex governance structures and various levels of support, and different job titles will continue to be needed to distinguish between those roles within the profession.

There is insufficient focus on development within the profession.

1. Over a quarter of respondents were offered no induction training, with significant variations in quality and scope where such training was offered.
2. Many respondents (39%) still do not receive an annual appraisal.
3. Where appraisals do take place, almost three quarters of them are not being used to support conversations about professional development.
4. A majority (59%) believe minimum qualification requirements would improve the quality of clerking.
5. Only a very small minority of those surveyed were required to hold a qualification or accreditation both initially and following any subsequent performance appraisals.

6. Respondents were most likely to rate themselves 'not so confident' when identifying appropriate CPD.
7. Only a small minority saw scope for progression in their roles.
8. Many decisions not to pursue qualifications and other training opportunities reflect a lack of perceived benefit.
9. Paid hours do not always cover or account for the time required to undertake CPD.

The profession continues to be under-paid, especially clerks.

1. The majority of respondents (58%) with the job title clerk are still being paid below that NGA's recommended minimum rate for clerking a single governing board.
2. Low pay and lack of understanding as to what the role entails are among the reasons for wanting to leave the profession.
3. For the vast majority (85%) of those who gained a qualification, it did not result in a pay increase, though benefits other than pay were acknowledged.
4. Rates of pay were affected by who sets the pay: those respondents who set their own rates of pay were more likely to earn NGA's recommended figure.



In more detail

Routes into the profession

- The profession is accessible from a range of other jobs.
- Most practitioners have not served as governance professionals in another sector.

Employment and self-employment

- The majority are employees of schools/trusts (57%) or local authorities (30%).
- The majority of practitioners (71%) work as a governance professional on a part-time or casual basis.

Serving multiple boards

- An increased number are clerking multiple boards since 2016 when NGA last conducted this type of survey.
- The average number of boards clerked by respondents was four, although 42% of practitioners serve only one board.
- Of respondents who clerk MAT boards, 30% clerked all the academy committees as well, 42% clerked some of the academy committees and 27% managed others who clerked the academy committees.

Job titles

- Most respondents (80%) had the title 'Clerk' with 17.5% of those being clerk to the trust board and the large remainder serving maintained school governing boards or academy committees.
- The other one-fifth of respondents had a wide variety of job titles.

Levels of confidence and satisfaction

- Confidence and satisfaction varies according to role.
- Practitioners are least confident at identifying relevant CPD.
- Remuneration and opportunities for progression account for the lowest levels of satisfaction.

Qualifications required

- A very small number of practitioners (5%) were required to hold a qualification at the point of recruitment.
- There were more initial expectations on those first recruited longer ago.
- A majority of practitioners (59%) would support the introduction of minimum qualification requirements, with the greatest level of support (73%) for this coming from those who already possess a qualification.

Induction

- Over a quarter of those surveyed were not offered an induction for any of their roles.
- Induction practices are patchy and inconsistent.

Qualifications held

- A majority of practitioners hold relevant qualifications undertaken as personal development and to improve skillsets.
- Most qualifications did not result in a pay increase but were otherwise seen as beneficial.
- Decisions not to pursue qualifications reflect lack of time and availability but also lack of perceived benefit on the part of boards as well as practitioners, making associated costs difficult to justify.

On-going training and development

- Various forms of training and development hold broad appeal that cuts across roles, though ongoing CPD is more popular amongst those who have also completed qualifications.
- Time, availability and the cost of CPD were the three leading reasons for not undertaking further training and development opportunities.
- As with qualifications, incentives are sometimes compromised by a perceived lack of pay and progression benefits.

Appraisals

- The use of appraisals has increased from 48% of respondents in 2016 to 61%.
- However, almost three quarters of appraisals are not being used to support conversations about professional development.

Raising the profession's profile

- Practitioners are clear that culture and structure must evolve in order to increase recognition for the profession and help raise its profile.

Career progression

- Most (74%) of those surveyed were unable to identify opportunities for progression.
- Over a quarter of respondents (28%) believe there are not enough high-quality qualifications available.
- A lack of career pathway that supports progression opportunities is restricting pay and status.

Conclusion

- There is a single governance profession working across schools and trusts, within which there are different roles requiring different knowledge, with many individuals having experience of serving both maintained schools and academy trusts.
- Governance professionals are undervalued because their critical and valuable role is not well understood by the sector.
- The governance profession requires a career framework linked to clear expectations, relevant qualifications and remuneration.
- Governing boards have been slow to implement the Clerking Matters expectations which has had a detrimental effect on advancing pay to appropriate levels and ensuring CPD is rewarded.

Longstanding Clerking Matters expectations needed to ensure effective school and trust governance:

1. Governance professionals are entitled to appropriate CPD, including induction to new roles.
2. Governance professionals should receive an annual appraisal, involving the chair of the governing board (even if the clerk's services are engaged from a third party) at which CPD is discussed.
3. Governance professionals need to be invested in (both in terms of remuneration and adequate time).
4. Governing boards need to understand the scope and importance of the role of their trusted, independent adviser.

Governing boards, governance professionals and the wider sector must renew their commitment to implementing the clerking matters expectations as part of a collective response to giving the profession the status, recognition, support, challenge and reward it needs and deserves.

NGA is calling for action to happen now, so that we are not returning to these same concerns next year and the year after that. NGA is committed to working with others to develop the required career framework.

