

# Putting a price on effective clerking

## Summary report

National Governance Association

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## Introduction

The role of clerk/governance professionals is key to the improvement of governance. There is no question that the workload of governors and trustees is made more manageable where a clerk/governance professional covers the full job description and is able to avail themselves of relevant CPD.

NGA launched its Clerking Matters campaign with four main aims: to increase the understanding of the importance of the work of clerks and what can be expected of a well-trained clerk; help governing boards find good clerks where there is difficulty in doing this; to help clerks know where continuing professional development can be found, and to encourage appropriate remuneration of clerks.

This paper is a summary of a much larger report following extensive research into the requirements of professional clerking and the implications for pay. It accepts that the varying nature of the clerk/governance professional role and governing structures does not lend itself to a uniform pay structure. However, it also highlights the fact that too many clerks/governance professionals are not being paid at an appropriate level, or even for the number of hours that they work. The research provides credible recommendations that point to a proportionate and reasonable rate of remuneration for those clerks completing the role as defined in the NGA model job description.

NGA has produced separate model job descriptions for clerks at maintained schools and academy trusts to emphasise the subtle but important differences between the roles.



## The three phases of the research

The research on which the report is based had three distinct phases.

**Phase one** of the research was to gain an accurate perception of the pay that clerks currently receive. This was needed to provide some context, make comparisons and distinctions between the requirements of those recruiting clerks and what they were paying them. It was also the basis for assessing the feasibility of any recommendation made about the minimum level of pay that a clerk fulfilling the role as set out in the NGA model job description should expect to receive.

To gain this perception NGA carried out a nationwide trawl of 163 advertised clerking roles, the requirements of the roles and the salary being offered. A formula was used to calculate an hourly rate for each role, which allowed NGA to look further into regional variations and make like for like comparisons based on specific requirements e.g. those job descriptions where a clear/greater emphasis had been placed on the advisory aspect of the clerk's role.

**Phase two** of the research involved placing the role of the clerk into an occupational category using standard occupation classification categories as defined by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). By identifying the category (ies) that best fitted the role and duties as described in the NGA model job description, it was possible to assess the "market value" of the role that was based on the available data on qualifications and pay attached to the category (ies).

The occupational classification category of "secretarial and related occupations" was clearly the best fit as it covered a lot of what is in the NGA model job description such as arranging meetings, issuing agenda papers, attending meetings, taking and preparing minutes etc. However it was not an ideal fit as it did not attach enough significance to the role that the clerk has in giving professional advice on governing practice and the procedures that they are informed by. The occupational category of "secretarial and related occupations" also has a broad range of occupational sub-headings, which include unqualified company secretaries and related keyboard occupations. This goes some way towards explaining differences in the pay that is received by occupations that fall within "secretarial and related occupations".

**For phase three** of the research NGA convened an advisory group of governance professionals, clerking service managers, and academic researchers and pay and conditions specialists. The advisory group subjected the NGA model job description to a job evaluation process. A job evaluation process ranks the roles contained within a job description against several "factors". These factors relate to the level of knowledge, skill and responsibility required to fulfil that role, as well as the demands and working conditions related to them. Factors are given a weighted ranked point score and the higher the overall score the more challenging the role in terms of skills, knowledge, responsibility and/or demand. From that it is possible to assess how much a role should be paid in order to offer a competitive salary in comparison to the national labour market.

Both the NGA model job descriptions and Department for Education (DfE) Clerking Competency Framework were adapted to fit the descriptions of the profiles of eight "school support staff" roles



provided in the national joint council (NJC) job evaluation scheme (JES). This provided the basis for a weighted ranked point score to be allocated to each role within the job description using a scoring and weighting matrix also provided in the NJC JES.

The overall score for the job descriptions was then translated into a pay figure by comparing it with those attached to five publically available local authority pay scales.

In a separate but related process the advisory group aligned the NGA model job descriptions to the knowledge, skills, responsibilities and demands of the the eight roles that are referred to above. From this the three roles were identified as fitting the job description and the consensus amongst the advisory group was that the role referred to as “Administrator 4” was the best fit overall. “Administrator 4” was also highest of the administration level profiles and is linked to office manager responsibilities.

Taking the same five publically available local authority pay scales, NGA were able to identify the salary band that the “Administrator 4” role would fall under and compare it to nineteen job advertisements, which also matched the profile of “Administrator 4”. This provided us with further insight into the market value of the role as set out in the model job description.

The conclusion reached in phase three of the research was that clerks fulfilling the role as it is described NGA model job descriptions **should receive no less than between £12.85 per hour and £14.74 per hour based on their experience.**

It was acknowledged throughout the research that NGA did not have the specific employer context or the primary data that are available to employers when carrying out job evaluations and market-pricing. Instead we relied upon secondary data from schools and local authorities with no guarantees as to consistency of application.



## Our recommendations

The research project set out to answer the following research question:

*“What would be considered fair remuneration for clerks based upon the NGA job description(s) and the current job market?”*

NGA concluded that, for clerks completing the duties as outlined in the NGA job descriptions for academies and maintained schools, the following recommendations should apply:

### Recommendation one

While role content is very different, the school office manager is the closest match to the clerk in terms of responsibility, skill and knowledge. Just as the office manager would expect greater remuneration than other administrative staff, there is a degree of complexity and responsibility to the role of clerk which is often overlooked and means that they should be paid more than school administrators.

NGA was clear throughout the research that employers are best placed to conduct their own job evaluations and determine appropriate remuneration based on affordability and local conventions.

However, phase three demonstrated that the role of clerk is best matched to the highest-level administrative officer in a school (i.e. the Office Manager) and that the skills, responsibilities and demands of the role are more significant than other less senior administrative positions. The evidence is therefore clear that the clerk should not be treated as a mid-level administrative post when it comes to determining pay.

NGA thinks that clerks should be paid more than an administrative officer in their organisation and, where appropriate, they should be paid at a similar level to the office manager.

### Recommendation two

Individuals who have the skills and knowledge to complete the role of clerk as defined in the NGA job descriptions, but who lack direct experience and/or qualifications, should be paid no less than £12.85 per hour or £24,799 per annum full time equivalent. This should be appropriately uplifted for roles advertised in London.

Of course, “benchmarking” the role of clerk to Office Manager may not always be possible nor practical. For example, small schools may not have an Office Manager and larger organisations (such as MATs) may have back office functions which are removed from individual schools. Taking account of the above data, NGA would expect schools to pay their clerk no less than £12.85 per hour. This figure is based on a detailed analysis of the skills, responsibilities, knowledge and demands of the clerk’s role.



This amount is proportionate with the findings of phase one of the research, which indicates an average wage for clerks across the UK as being £12.19 per hour.

### Recommendation three

When requiring an experienced clerk to fulfil the role as outlined in the NGA job descriptions (i.e. with national accreditation, clerical experience and/or governance knowledge) schools should pay no less than £13.80 per hour or £26,910 per annum full time equivalent. This should be appropriately uplifted for roles advertised in London.

Just like in any role, clerks with qualifications and experience would not expect to be paid at the lowest point in a salary bracket.

The figure given in recommendation three represents the mean average of the mid-point on the salary scale determined in phase three of the research. Overall, 79.8% of advertisements reviewed in phase one of the research offered below this figure.

### Recommendation four

Employers should ensure that the contractual arrangements for their clerk are fair. Unless employed to complete clerking on a full-time basis (i.e. across multiple schools), clerks should be paid by the hour. An hourly rate of pay would also be appropriate for those clerks whose services are engaged directly, with boards being invoiced periodically. This is to take account of the fact that a clerk's hours are not fixed. Finally, all clerks should have an annual appraisal and pay review meeting in line with other employees.

One option would be to pay clerks for 9.1 hours per meeting as this was identified as the average time spent by clerks per meeting in the NGA Clerks Survey (2016). However, as the number of hours clerks spend carrying out their role vary and to reflect that their role is not confined to meetings alone boards should allow clerks to claim remuneration based on a self-assessment of hours worked. This will help ensure that clerks receive a fair amount of remuneration for the hours they complete.

A meaningful process of appraisal that is linked to pay progression is fundamental towards ensuring that clerks are paid at a fair rate, which matches the level of responsibility, skill and knowledge required and the number of hours worked. NGA believes that the appraisal process should involve the Chair of the governing board even if the clerk's services are engaged from a third party.



## Recommendation five

While employers should take the lead in setting appropriate remuneration for clerking posts, it is important that clerks feel confident enough to have discussions with their employers about what an appropriate salary looks like. Clerks should also think carefully about applying for posts which advertise below an acceptable rate.

We want to be clear, that although we have included pay ranges, we are not saying that clerks cannot be paid above this. The aim of this research is to put forward recommendations based on NGA's job descriptions and so there will be circumstances where a higher rate of pay is justified.

While employers have an ethical (and, in some cases, legal) responsibility to pay their employees appropriately and proportionately, an important element of the job market is supply and demand. If there is a surplus of individuals willing to offer their significant skill set for less, this will push wages for clerks down. If employers struggle to recruit clerks for less than the minimum salary recommendation proposed in this report, this will encourage employers to offer more.

Those employing clerks and remunerating them at a rate that is lower than referred to in recommendations two and three should question whether this is commensurate with the level of professional support that they require and should expect to receive. Equally those clerks currently being remunerated at a rate that is lower than referred to in recommendations two and three should question whether their contribution, knowledge and skills are being recognised.



### National Governance Association

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 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.

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