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[www.nga.org.uk/governance2020](http://www.nga.org.uk/governance2020)

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# Overview

This is the tenth annual school governance survey; and over that time the number of respondents has risen to 6,864 in 2020 which is more than 13 times as many respondents as in 2011. Over that period there has been a revolution in governance, which would otherwise have gone undocumented. In the absence of official data, the National Governance Association (NGA) steps in to fill the gap. The respondents are self-selecting, but we know their region, what phase and type of school they govern and at what level of a multi academy trust (MAT). Overall they are more or less representative of the state sector in England: variations are reported in the methodology section. They are skewed towards, but by no means exclusively NGA members.

We sometimes replace questions with more topical ones, but at its core this annual exercise is to uncover the practice and concerns of those with responsibility for overseeing state schools in the interests of pupils. Over the decade, the size of governing boards has reduced as has the number of committees. This led us a few years ago to reduce the estimate of the number of school governance volunteers in England from 300,000 to a quarter of a million, generally serving four-year terms of office. This is still a huge number to retain and replenish. It is reported to be more difficult than ever to recruit to governing boards, and this is largely about the workload, the responsibility and time required. Boards are not as diverse as they should be and NGA is extending, with the help of many partners in particular Inspiring Governance, the Everyone on Board campaign. This year's results also confirm that many potential volunteers are unaware of the opportunity, and in 2021 NGA plans to keep spreading the word with our Visible Governance campaign.

The survey was carried out in the relatively early days of COVID-19 as the move to remote governance began. This has involved a considerable change in a short period, not just for the volunteers who are now using the same virtual platforms many of us are at work, but also for their professional advisers, clerks.

Boards are sometimes still characterised as fuddy-duddy amateurs, despite the fact we have been providing the evidence for years that most volunteers are or have been employed as managers or in professions. The fact that governors and trustees have been shown in their hundreds of thousands to be ready and able to step up and adapt when required, continuing to govern from their homes in the interests of their pupils and communities I hope will put this lazy stereotype to bed for once and for all.

Despite governing during a pandemic, two of the top three concerns that governors and trustees say face their organisation have been at the top of the list for some years: balancing the budget and staff wellbeing.

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**6,864**  
respondents  
engaged with  
the survey

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The top six issues overall were:

1. Balancing the budget: 40%
2. Staff wellbeing including workload: 36%
3. Ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum: 28%
4. Improving attainment: 28%
5. Pupil wellbeing: 28%
6. Support for pupils with SEND: 22%

There are of course variations:

#### By phase

- Providing services for children eg health services and mental health support is among the biggest issues for 31% of respondents in special schools and alternative provisions respectively, higher than all other phases;
- Balancing the budget was more of an issue for respondents in nurseries (43%) and primaries (42%) than any other phase;
- Ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum was in the top three challenges for 29% of primaries and secondaries respectively but less of a challenge for special schools (14%) and alternative provisions (18%), which were also less likely to put improving attainment in the top three – 12% of special schools and 18% of alternative provisions compared to 31% of secondaries and 28% of nurseries and primaries.

#### By Ofsted rating

- Improving attainment is the most variable with 45% of requiring improvement focused on it compared with 19% of Ofsted rated outstanding schools;
- Balancing the budget varies from 43% in Ofsted rated outstanding schools to 37% in requires improvement and 30% for inadequate schools;

- Recruiting senior leaders was most likely to be reported as a top three concern by inadequate schools.

#### By structure

- Balancing the budget varies from 43% for maintained schools to 38% for stand-alone academies (38%) and 34% for multi academy trusts;
- Recruiting high quality leaders is more of a challenge in MATs (12%) compared to all other structures;
- Both attracting and developing staff were more of an issue for single academy trusts and MATs than for maintained schools or federations.

#### By region

- Those governing in the North East (35%), South West (38%) and Yorkshire and the Humber (34%) were more likely to choose staff workload and wellbeing as more of a concern than balancing the budget;
- Respondents in the North East were more likely than all other regions to put support for pupils with SEND (29%) and ensuring pupil premium makes an impact (19%) as among the biggest challenges facing their school;
- A quarter of respondents in the West Midlands say that providing services for children eg health services and mental health support was one of the biggest challenges facing their school, more than any other region.

Staff wellbeing was almost universally the second in the list of top concerns – and we know from all NGA's contact with governing boards that the wellbeing of senior leaders at present is a particular concern.

The fundamentals of good governance do not change: it must be ethical and accountable, listening to the voices of all stakeholders, as well as effectively managed.

I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to all those volunteers who are motivated to put something back into their communities and make a difference to the lives of children and young people. Thank you for your care, commitment and expertise. I hope this report reinforces that while every school and trust has its own story, there are common themes with which the governance community grapples. NGA is here to support you in this vital work and represent your views to others in the education sector and the powers that be.



**Emma Knights OBE**

Chief Executive  
National Governance Association

# Leadership and staffing

## Foreword

Effective governing boards know their senior leaders well, with relationships built on trust, mutual respect and professionalism. Challenging and supporting senior leadership is one of the governing board's role most important functions. Recruiting the senior leader – whether a headteacher or a chief executive of a trust – can be the most critical decision that a board takes. Attracting talent to those posts is much harder in London, followed by the South East and the East of England.

Senior executive leaders must be provided with relevant quality development. Organisational management very clearly tops the list of topics that new school leaders find most challenging, followed by other elements of the headteacher's and chief executive's role outside their experiences as a teacher. It is imperative that the professional qualifications currently under review by the Department for Education take this knowledge gap on board.

Governing boards are the employers – or act in place of the employers – of all staff, and the issue of staff wellbeing and workload is high on their agenda, with two-thirds of board stressing the importance of creating a healthy culture. However, there is still more that can be done in some schools and trusts as a quarter of respondents did not report using any formal method of engaging with staff. Furthermore, four out of five chairs report that their board monitors and addresses staff workload and wellbeing compared with just under half of staff governors saying the same.

While a good majority of governors and trustees support the government in raising the starting salaries for teachers, there is considerable concern that these pay increases may not be adequately covered by the current school funding levels.

**Emma Knights, chief executive, National Governance Association**

## Introduction

All governing boards have responsibilities as employers. The level of responsibility differs depending on the type of school, and multi academy trust (MAT) boards have the responsibility as the employer for all staff within their schools.

One of the main staffing functions of the board is the appointment of senior executive leaders, a crucial decision for any school or trust and the beginning of a key relationship between the board and senior leader. While the governing board will not necessarily have close contact with most other members of their school or trust's staff, it should always seek to develop an open, honest, and constructive working relationship with them. A vital part of the governing board's strategic role is upholding a duty of care to the school or trust's employees and maintaining a focus on workload and wellbeing.

Staff wellbeing including workload was reported as the second biggest issue facing governing boards overall (36% of respondents placed it in the top three issues facing their school or trust).

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 for their views on the recruitment and development of staff, particularly of senior leaders, and whether their board monitors and addresses staff workload and wellbeing, along with their opinions on the government's proposed changes to primary and secondary school teachers' starting salary.



# Key findings

Here's what governors and trustees told us about their experience of overseeing staffing issues and their views on relevant education policies.



- 01 Nearly two in five governors/trustees surveyed agree that it is difficult to attract good candidates for senior executive leadership posts (such as headteacher, executive head or CEO). A similar level of respondents also agree it is difficult to recruit for other senior posts (34%) and teaching posts (38%).
- 02 Senior executive leadership positions are particularly difficult to recruit in schools judged 'inadequate' by Ofsted, where 62% agree it is difficult to attract good candidates. This falls to 45% for those governing 'requires improvement' schools and 36% and 39% for respondents from 'good' and 'outstanding' schools, respectively.
- 03 Governors/trustees believe that the most important factors influencing the recruitment and retention of quality staff are workplace culture (65%), followed by school or trust reputation (53%), managing workload and wellbeing (45%), and continuing professional development and opportunities for professional growth (43%).
- 04 According to governors/trustees, the key challenges experienced by new senior executive leaders are related to organisational management including staff management, management of strategy and risk, stakeholder engagement and in particular, financial management.
- 05 While the government's proposed plans to raise primary and secondary school teachers' starting salaries to £30,000 by 2022/23 are supported by the majority of governors and trustees (71%), many voiced their concerns about how this increase could be managed within current school budgets.
- 06 81% of chairs of governing boards report that their board monitors and addresses staff workload and wellbeing while only 61% of those in non-chairing roles report the same. Staff governors were much less likely to report that their board monitors and addresses the workload and wellbeing of staff (49%).
- 07 26% of governors/trustees reported that they had not used any formal methods of engaging with staff within their school or trust in the past 12 months. Those that did engage reported monitoring results of staff surveys (70%) or holding staff consultation (27%).

# Findings

- Senior leader and staff recruitment
- Supporting and developing leaders
- Teacher salaries
- Staff workload and wellbeing

## Senior leader and staff recruitment

Nearly two in five governors and trustees surveyed agree that it is difficult to attract good candidates for senior executive leadership (SEL) posts at their school or trust (37%). 13% strongly agree that it is difficult to attract good candidates for this post with a quarter also agreeing (25%) while just under half disagree (49%).

This was a similar picture for teaching posts with 38% of governors/trustees strongly agreeing (7%) or agreeing (31%) that recruiting good candidates for these positions is difficult with half of respondents disagreeing (50%). Meanwhile, a third of governors/trustees (34%) also strongly agree (7%) or agree (27%) that recruiting for other senior posts is difficult while 47% disagree.

Though these figures illustrate that staff recruitment at all levels is difficult for a substantial proportion of those governing, these figures mark an improvement across the last five years as seen in figure 1. Since 2016, the proportion of respondents reporting that recruitment is difficult has fallen across all staffing posts. 14% fewer respondents agree that recruitment for teaching posts is difficult in 2020 than did in 2016, 10% fewer respondents for senior posts and 5% fewer for SEL posts. One reason for this decline could be the overall reduction in staff posts due to budget constraints; 40% of respondents reported making a staff post redundant in the last 12 months with respondents reporting making on average 1.3 redundancies.

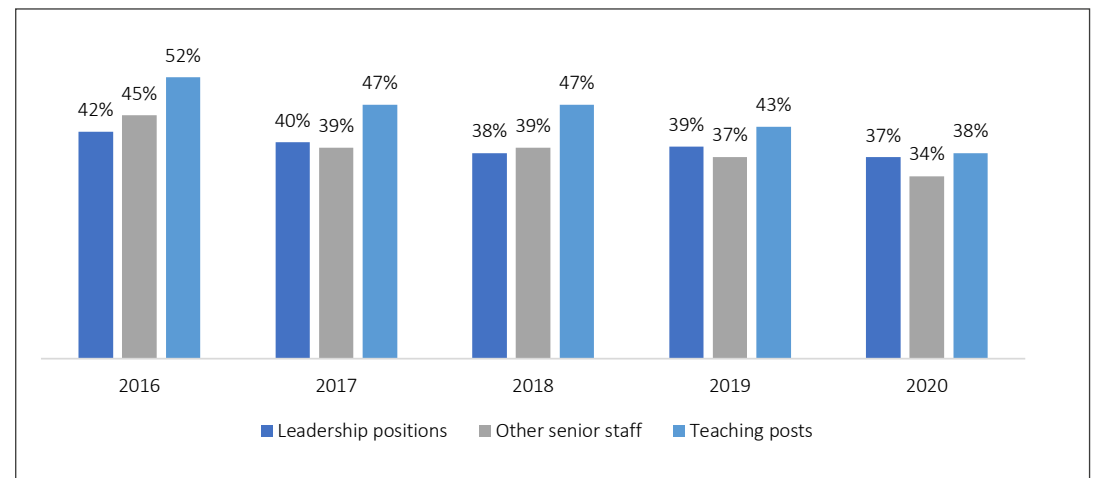


Figure 1, bar chart showing proportion of respondents who agree that recruitment for staff posts is difficult (2016 – 2020)

There was, in some cases, significant variation in difficulty by region. As can be seen in figure 2, respondents from London, the East of England and the South East are almost twice as likely to report that attracting good candidates for teaching posts is difficult compared with respondents from the North East and North West. This trend continues to a lesser extent with the recruitment of candidates for SEL positions and other senior staff with London, the East of England and the South East again the most likely to report that this is difficult.

A school/trust's financial position also affected respondents' answers. Schools and trusts with an in-year deficit or using a licensed deficit from their local authority or a loan from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) have a higher proportion of respondents reporting that recruitment is difficult compared with those balancing income and expenditure or building reserves. This applies to SEL posts (44% vs 34%), other senior posts (40% vs 31%) and teaching posts (42% vs 34%).

Another influential factor is their school(s) Ofsted grade(s) with respondents governing school(s) graded 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate' more likely to report difficulty recruiting for all staffing posts. 62% of those who governed schools graded 'inadequate' reported that it is difficult to attract candidates for SEL positions, which fell to 45% for those governing 'requires improvement' schools and 36% and 39% for 'good' and 'outstanding' school respondents respectively. For teaching posts, 54% of respondents from 'inadequate' schools said recruiting good candidates is difficult, falling to 50% for respondents from 'requires improvement' schools and 37% for both respondents from 'outstanding' and 'good' schools.

While there is some evidence to suggest that the recruitment in schools and trusts has improved slightly, the individual circumstances facing schools and trusts, such as location, Ofsted grade and financial position exacerbate recruitment difficulties.

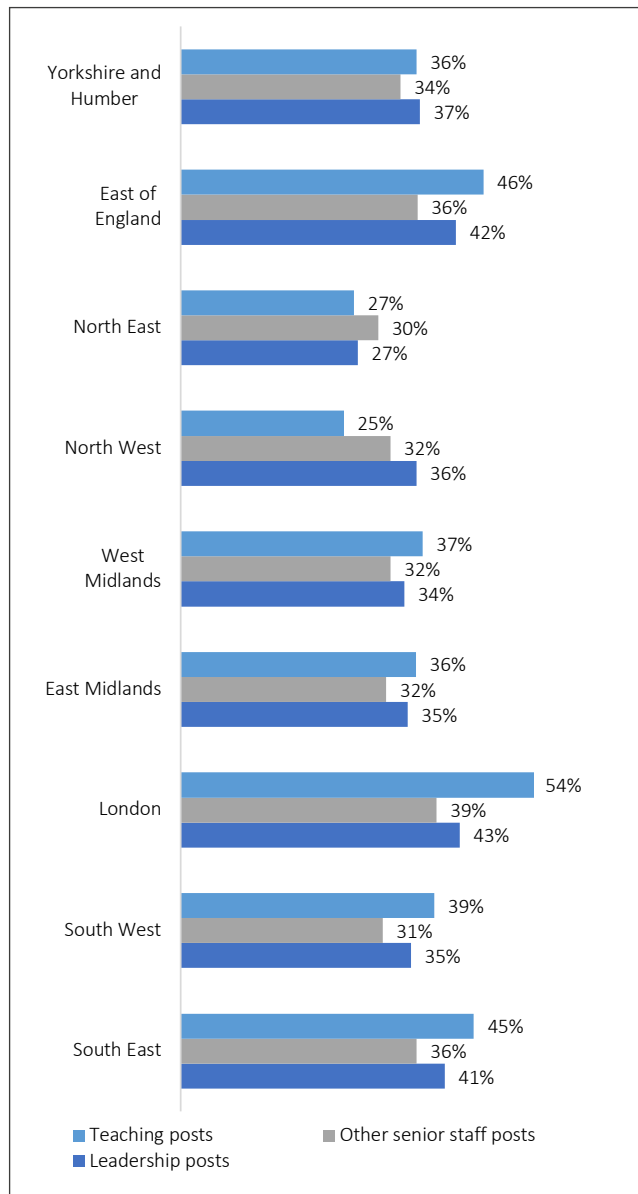


Figure 2, bar chart showing proportion of respondents who reported that recruitment for staff posts is difficult by region

## Factors affecting recruitment

Based on the experiences of governors/trustees, the most significant factors affecting the recruitment and retention of quality staff in schools and trusts are:

1. Workplace culture (65%)
2. Reputation of the school or trust (53%)
3. Managing workload and wellbeing (45%)
4. Continuing professional development and opportunities for professional growth (43%)
5. Opportunities for advancement within the school or trust (29%)

A lesser proportion of respondents reported that offering competitive pay and benefits is a factor (22%), the school/trust's locality (18%) and/or maintaining pay differentials (3%).

## Recruiting senior executive leaders

As seen in figures 3 and 4, SELs leaving their role most often moved onto retirement according to governors/trustees who had recruited a new SEL in the past two years.

For those governing in single schools or federations, this was followed by leaving for another headship or promotion within a trust (28%) while 30% of MAT trustees reported that their previous SEL left for another role within the education sector. MAT trustees were more likely to report that their senior leader (typically as CEO) left with a settlement agreement (15%).

On how they recruited for their SEL's successor, 29% of governors/trustees reported that they had recruited internally through a promotion, 29% had recruited externally with a first time head/CEO and 28% had recruited externally with an experienced head/CEO.



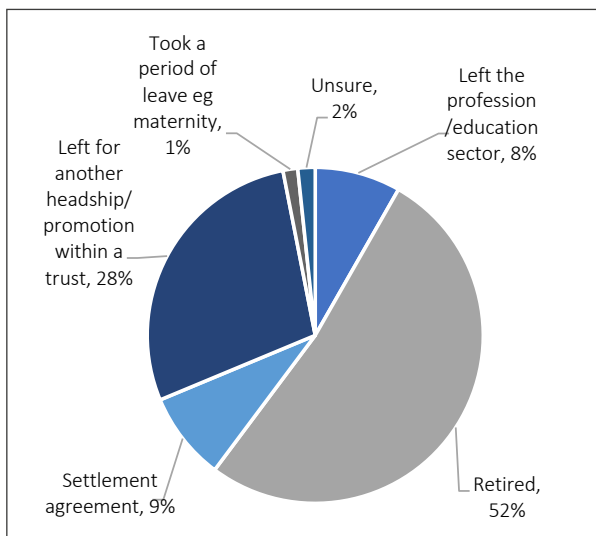


Figure 3, pie chart of respondents governing single schools or federations who had recruited for a new SEL within the past two years and why their predecessor had left

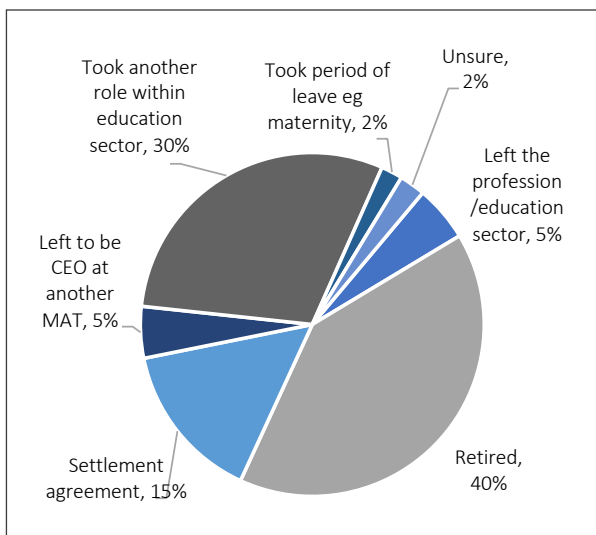


Figure 4, pie chart of respondents governing on MAT boards who had recruited for a new SEL within the past two years and why their predecessor had left

## Supporting and developing leaders

Those who had recruited SELs within the past two years were also asked what aspects of the role their newly recruited senior leader found most challenging, whether they were new to headship or not. The most commonly identified challenges are:

### 01 Organisational management, including management of staff, management of strategy and risk and financial management.

One respondent characterises these areas as “the business elements of the role that are outside the experiences of a classroom teacher”. Some note that while finance was not one of their senior leader’s core strengths, this was exacerbated by the general lack of school funding in general. Others note that members of the board were able to use their professional skills in finance, human resources and management to guide their new senior leader in these aspects of the role, demonstrating the value of a skilled governing board.

### 02 Working in partnership with others and managing stakeholder engagement, particularly parents.

Some respondents note their senior leader struggled with the ‘accessibility’ of the role which left them far more open to criticism and held to a higher level of accountability. A large proportion note that working with parents could prove particularly difficult.

### 03 Implementing change to or improving school culture, particularly embedding this across the whole school community.

Others highlight that their new senior leader struggled to understand this and the governing board supported their leader in getting to know the school/trust ethos.

### 04 Role in school improvement, particularly when taking on an already-struggling school.

For some this included raising attainment and standards to turn around a lower Ofsted inspection grade and improve the school reputation in a bid to drive up the school roll.

Other key but less referenced challenges faced by new senior leaders according to governors and trustees are managing the additional workload and increased level of responsibility, maintaining a work/life balance, dealing with Ofsted inspections, managing behaviour and dealing with the challenges of a limited budget.

## Teacher salaries

In September 2019, in response to rising concerns on recruitment and retention, the secretary of state for education announced that teachers’ starting salaries would be raised to £30,000 by 2022/23. 71% of governors and trustees surveyed support the government’s plans but many, even those in agreement with the rise in salary, question how school budgets will accommodate this. Only 8% surveyed said they oppose the raise while 20% expressed that they were ‘unsure’; this uncertainty was also reflected in respondent’s open text answers.

Some praised the initiative as a method of attracting the best candidates for teaching staff and improving retention. They saw the plan as an overdue acknowledgement of the vital role teachers play in society which, like many public sector jobs prior to the impacts of COVID-19, had gone unnoticed or not fully appreciated.

However, a large proportion of governors/trustees were cautious about the announcement, stating they support the rise in principle but noting their school/trust will struggle to accommodate this rise in pay for newly qualified teachers within their budgets, particularly as this change, in order to maintain pay differentials, would require an additional raise for experienced staff and members of the senior leadership team. Some emphasised this change in starting salary would significantly reduce other areas of the all-ready stretched school budget. As a result of this, many stated that their support was conditional on the government providing additional funding solely for this increased cost.

## Staff workload and wellbeing

Staff wellbeing including workload was reported as the second biggest issue facing governing boards overall (36% of respondents placed it in the top three issues facing their school or trust). This is true of those governing in all types of school and in all regions, however when looking at Ofsted rating, it is the second most important issue for 'outstanding' (38%) and 'good' (36%) rated schools but does not feature in the top three for 'requires improvement' (26%) and 'inadequate' (24%) schools.

Most respondents are confident that their board systematically monitors and addresses issues relating to the workload, wellbeing, and work/life balance of all staff at their school or trust (71%). However, 15% report that their board does not monitor or address these issues while 15% admit that they are not sure.

81% of chairs of governing boards report that their board monitors and addresses staff workload and wellbeing while only 61% of governors/trustees without chairing responsibilities (eg not a chair, vice chair or committee chair) agree. While 16% of those without chairing responsibilities reported that their board does not monitor these issues at all, a higher proportion admitted that they do not know if their board does this (23%) suggesting that chairs have a greater awareness of these issues in their school than others on the board.

Staff governors were much less likely (49%) to report that their board monitors and addresses the workload and wellbeing of staff in their school/trust which implies that some governors and trustees are overconfident in their ability to monitor and address workload and wellbeing issues and/or do not effectively communicate what initiatives are being used with staff.

70% of respondents reported monitoring the results of a staff survey and 27% reported having held a staff consultation within the past year. There is significant overlap between the proportion of respondents reporting carrying out both these methods of engagement and 26% of respondents did not report using any formal method of engaging with staff. A higher proportion of governors/trustees report using methods to engage with pupils (83%) and parents (97%), suggesting that too few governing boards are considering staff when engaging with school stakeholders.

Those who report that their board did engage with staff cited surveys, implementation of workload policies, regular meetings with staff and encouraging candid conversations, standing agenda items at board meetings, monitoring staff turnover, absence and regular reviews of exit interviews as ways in which they do so. Some also noted allowing flexible working for staff, reducing the amount of data requests from the board, and having board members or committees with the responsibility for staff wellbeing or workload.

## 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:

### Staffing

- [Guide to Staffing for Governing Boards](#)
- [DfE resources for reducing teacher workload](#)
- [Managing teacher workload and wellbeing](#)

### Leaders and governing boards

- [Appointments: an overview](#)
- [Headteacher recruitment toolkit](#)
- [Introduction to leadership recruitment](#)
- [Model documents: recruiting and selecting a new headteacher](#)
- [School Leaders and Governing Boards: What do we expect of each other?](#)

Visit [www.nga.org.uk/Knowledge-Centre.aspx](http://www.nga.org.uk/Knowledge-Centre.aspx)

# Finance and funding

## Foreword

Balancing the budget remains the single biggest issue facing schools and trusts. This is the case for respondents from all types of schools, although it was reported most by local authority maintained schools as a top concern (43%), then by stand-alone academies (38%) and lowest for multi academy trusts, raised by 34% of both trustees and those governing at academy level. The only time it was knocked out of first place was by schools that not been graded by Ofsted as good or outstanding, and then raising attainment was the top concern.

More respondents reported that they were able to balance their budgets in the coming year, 63% compared with half in what was then their current financial year. This is likely to be the result of a combination of the increased funding awarded by the Government and measures taken by the trust or school to reduce expenditure.

Schools were still reporting many areas in which spending is being curtailed. Many schools are continuing to make staff redundancies, including two-thirds reporting reducing the number of support staff and a third reducing teaching staff. This is more than last year and the diminishing posts is of course cumulative over a number of years. Half of respondents have reduced spending on buildings and maintenance, again up from 2019. The trend to reduce the number of subjects and qualification offered at secondary schools also continues.

Just over a quarter of schools and trusts responding are using reserves to cover an in-year deficit, but six percent report that they are using a licensed deficit from the local authority or a loan from the ESFA.

**Emma Knights, chief executive, National Governance Association**

## Introduction

One of the core functions of governance is the oversight of a school or trust's financial performance to ensure that public money is well spent. Governing boards therefore play a pivotal role in how funds are maximised in the best interests of all of their organisation's pupils, and have a deep understanding of the state of school finances.

In 2019, the Institute for Fiscal Studies calculated that per pupil spending in England fell by 8% in real terms between 2009/10 and 2019/20 meaning that governing boards and their schools have been managing tighter budgets. In response to mounting pressure from the education sector, including NGA through its Funding the Future campaign, the government announced a £14 billion package for schools, distributed over three years to match per-pupil funding for schools at in line with inflation. This funding package is to be delivered between 2020/1 to 2022/23 bringing budget assigned to schools to £52.2 billion by 2022/23.

Balancing the budget was reported as the biggest issue facing schools according to governors and trustees with 40% of respondents citing this as one of their school or trust's top three issues.

The effects of COVID-19 will no doubt come with its own set of financial challenges, not only for schools facing additional costs but for their communities, meaning school leaders and governing boards will likely have difficult decisions to make in the coming months if not adequately financially supported.

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 for their views on the impact of announced additional funding, the state of current budgets and financial constraints.



# Key findings

Here's what governors and trustees told us about their experience of overseeing the finances of schools and trusts, and their views on relevant education policies.



- 01 Additional funding announced in 2019 will not solve all the issues faced by governing boards but it is still progress. Nearly half (48%) said the funding will make a difference, while just under a third (31%) said the funding is unlikely to make a difference.
- 02 63% of respondents report that their board expects to balance the budget in their school or trust's next financial year, a 13% increase from the proportion of respondents who reported this in 2019.
- 03 The financial position of schools is a varied picture. Only half of governors/trustees report that their school or trust is currently balancing income and expenditure (50%) while over a quarter are in an in-year deficit and drawing on reserves (28%).
- 04 Many schools are continuing to make staff redundant in response to financial constraints with nearly three in five governors/trustees reporting that their school/trust had reduced the number of support staff (67%) and a third reporting that they had reduced their number of teaching staff (32%).
- 05 Spending on buildings and maintenance had decreased for schools and trusts as a direct result of financial constraints according to half of governors/trustees surveyed (50%).
- 06 Secondary schools hit by financial pressures are reducing the subjects on offer for students (40%) and the number of teaching staff (45%), with nearly a third increasing class sizes as a result.
- 07 The practice of asking for parental contributions is not always reflective of the organisation's financial position. 23% of those governing schools building reserves reported that their school/trust asked for parental contributions.
- 08 Not all boards receive advice from the school or trust's business professional. More than one in ten governors/trustees surveyed (13%) report that their organisation's business professional does not provide the governing board with advice on financial performance efficiency, or that they were unaware if they did.
- 09 Despite recent calls to elevate the status of SEND, support for pupils with SEND continues to be hit as a result of financial constraints. In 2020 this was one of the three most important issues facing their school for nearly a quarter of respondents, and 14% said SEND support had been cut because of financial pressures.

# Findings

- School funding
- Balancing the budget
- Business professionals
- Financial constraints



## School funding

There was a mixed response to whether governors and trustees feel the announced additional funding would make a difference. 48% of governors and trustees surveyed are somewhat optimistic about the increased funding. 12% said it was 'very likely' that it would allow the organisation's budget to meet the needs of pupils, with a further 37% saying it was somewhat likely.

This leaves almost a third of governors/trustees disagreeing that the funding will have the desired impact, 23% report that this is 'somewhat unlikely' while 8% believe this was 'very unlikely'. The remaining 20% of respondents report that they feel this is 'neither likely nor unlikely'.

There was little variation between those governing maintained schools and those governing in academy trusts as to whether they feel the funding will allow school budgets to meet the needs of pupils (48% vs 50%) but there was some difference by region. As seen in figure 1, a higher proportion of those governing in regions further north report that the additional funding is 'somewhat or very likely' to have a positive effect compared with those governing schools in the south.

Those governing whose schools are already in more sustainable financial positions were also the most likely to believe that the additional funding would make a difference. Only 24% of those governing a school or trust currently using a

	South East	South West	London	East Midlands	West Midlands	North West	North East	East of England	Yorkshire and Humber
Somewhat or very likely (%)	45%	46%	39%	55%	49%	50%	62%	46%	50%
Somewhat or very unlikely (%)	35%	33%	41%	24%	30%	29%	21%	35%	28%

Figure 1, table showing percentage of respondents in each region and to what extent they felt the government's additional funding would enable them to meet the needs of their pupils

### A note on financial position

Where respondents have reported their financial position as 'using licensed deficit from the LA/loan from ESFA', this will be from the LA for maintained schools and from the ESFA for academies within academy trusts.

On questions relating to this section, MAT trustees were asked for an overview of their whole trust's finances.

licensed deficit loan from the LA or a loan from Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) agree the increased funding will allow their school or trust's budget to meet the needs of pupils compared to:

- 31% of those governing schools with 'in-year deficits' (ie drawing from reserves);
- 53% of those governing schools balancing income and expenditure;
- 73% of those governing schools building reserves.

61% of those governing schools reliant on loans report that the additional funding is unlikely to allow school budgets to meet the needs of pupils: this fell to 41% for those with in-year deficits, 21% for those balancing income and expenditure and 15% of those governing schools or trusts building reserves.

## Balancing the budget

There are signs of increased optimism with 63% of respondents expecting their school or trust to be in a position to balance the budget in 2020/21 compared with only 49% of respondents in 2019. Although the reasoning for this is unknown, the 14% increase may be due to a mix of the prospect of increased funding from 2020/21 and the outcome of actions already taken to mitigate financial constraints.

Despite the increase, nearly 40% of governors and trustees either do not believe that they will be able to balance the budget this year (20%) or reported that they are unsure (16%).

When describing their current financial situation, just 6% report that they are currently building reserves, 50% report that they are balancing income and expenditure, and 28% report that their organisation is in an in-year deficit and drawing from reserves. Meanwhile, 6% report that they are using a licensed deficit from the LA or a loan from the ESFA.

The current financial position of respondents' schools or trusts affected whether they expect their organisation to balance the budget in their school or trust's next financial year. Nine in 10 respondents building reserves report that they expect to balance the budget next year (90%), which fell to 85% for those whose schools/trusts are balancing income and expenditure and down to 42% for those in an 'in-year deficit'. Only 18% of those currently using a licensed loan report expecting to balance the budget in 2020/21.

## Business professionals

87% of respondents report that their school or board has a business professional who provides the board with advice on financial performance and efficiency. 8% admitted they do not have advice from a business professional and 5% said they do not know.

There was no difference in both phases and types of school/structure, who were equally likely to receive this advice however, as seen in figure 3, respondents from Yorkshire and Humber, the South East and London are among the most likely to report that the school/trust's business professional provides them with advice while those from the East Midlands, the East of England and the South West are amongst the least likely.

	South East	South West	London	East Midlands	West Midlands	North West	North East	East of England	Yorkshire and Humber
Balancing income and expenditure	48%	48%	43%	57%	45%	52%	59%	51%	51%
In-year deficit ie drawing from reserves	31%	30%	36%	20%	34%	26%	13%	32%	25%
Using licensed deficit from the LA/loan from ESFA	6%	6%	9%	3%	6%	5%	8%	3%	6%
Building reserves	6%	6%	6%	9%	5%	6%	9%	6%	6%
Other	9%	10%	6%	11%	10%	11%	11%	9%	12%

Figure 2, table showing proportion of respondents' financial positions by region

## Financial constraints

When asked what actions their school or trust has taken because of financial constraints, the most common measures undertaken according to governors and trustees were:

1. Reducing the number of support staff (67%)
2. Reducing spend on buildings and maintenance (50%)
3. Reducing the number of teaching staff (32%)
4. Reducing extra-curricular activities (25%)
5. Asking for parental contributions (21%)
6. Reducing class sizes (20%)
7. Reducing support for pupils with SEND (14%)

There was also an increase in the number of respondents who reported undertaking these actions compared with last year as seen in figure 4:

- Reducing the number of support staff (a 15% increase from 2019)
- Reducing spending on building and maintenance (a 12% increase from 2019)
- Reducing extra-curricular activities (a 7% increase from 2019)

Those governing different school phases had different responses to financial constraints as seen in figure 5:

- 40% of those governing in secondary settings and 18% of those governing alternative provisions (AP) or pupil referral units (PRU) reported reducing the number of subjects on offer
- 17% of secondary and 23% AP/PRU governors/trustees reported reducing qualifications on offer
- 70% of secondary and 75% of AP/PRU governors/trustees reported reducing the number of support staff
- 30% of secondary and 33% of special schools reported increasing class sizes
- Primary and nursery schools relied the most on parental contributions (22%)
- 32% of AP/PRU and 33% special school governors/trustees reported reducing spending on extra-curricular activities
- Those governing APs/PRUs (5%) and special schools (9%) were much less likely to report reducing spend on special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)

	South East	South West	London	East Midlands	West Midlands	North West	North East	East of England	Yorkshire and Humber
Respondents whose school or trust's business professional provides advice to the governing board on financial performance and efficiency (%)	91%	90%	90%	86%	86%	86%	84%	84%	84%

Figure 3, table showing percentage of respondents whose board has a business professional who provides advice to the governing board on financial performance and efficiency by region

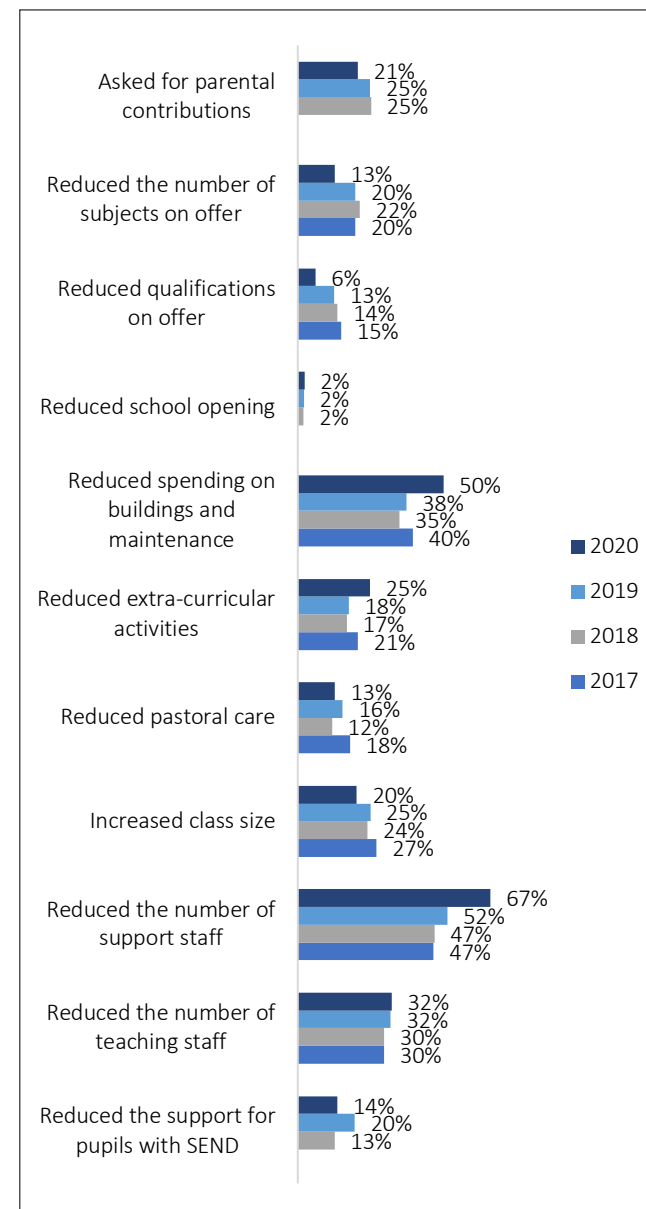


Figure 4, bar chart showing proportion of respondents who reported taking actions as a result of financial constraints (2017 – 2016)

Meanwhile, 22% of governors/trustees said that support for special education needs was one of the three most important issues facing their school(s) and this was higher for those governing special schools (36%).

Those in weaker financial positions were more likely to report acting due to financial constraints, particularly regarding reducing teaching and support staff and spend on buildings and maintenance as seen in figure 6.

- 52% of respondents using a deficit loan reported reducing the number of teaching staff, compared to 36% of those from schools/trusts with an in-year deficit and 28% and 30% of those balancing income and expenditure or building reserves, respectively.
- 79% of respondents using a deficit loan reported reducing the number of support staff, compared to 74% of those from schools/trusts with an in-year deficit and 62% and 53% of those balancing income and expenditure or building reserves, respectively.
- 62% of respondents using a deficit loan reported reducing the spend on buildings and maintenance, compared to 57% of those from schools/trusts with an in-year deficit and 46% and 44% of those balancing income and expenditure or building reserves, respectively.
- One in five governors/trustees governing schools or trusts currently building reserves reported that they still asked for parental contributions as a result of financial constraints, indicating that this has become a normal expectation on parents instead of based on extreme pressure.

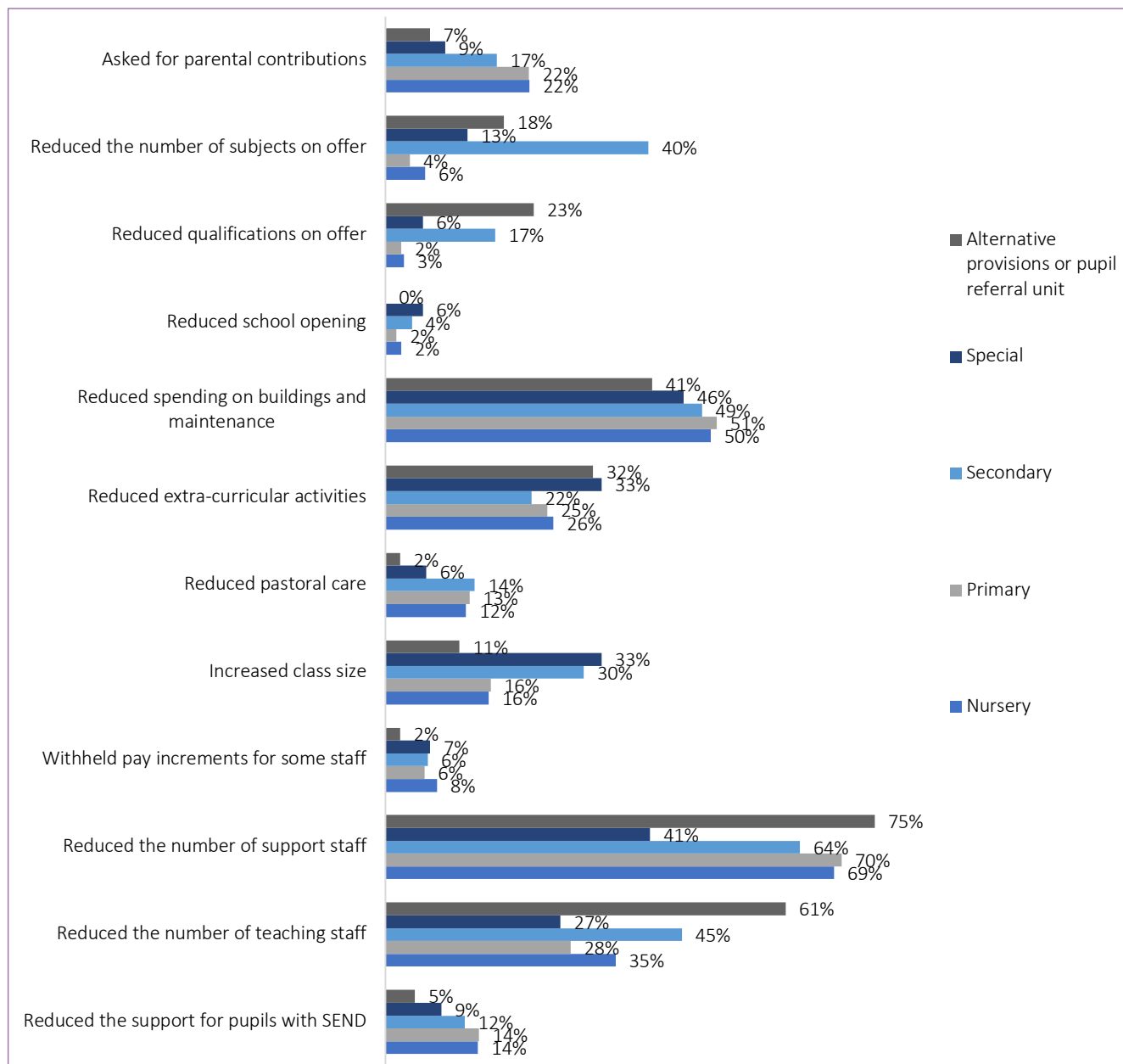


Figure 5, bar chart showing proportion of respondents who reported taking actions as a result of financial constraints by school phase



	South East	South West	London	East Midlands	West Midlands	North West	North East	East of England	Yorkshire and Humber
Reduced the support for pupils with SEND	14%	15%	10%	15%	12%	13%	13%	18%	12%
Reduced the number of teaching staff	30%	34%	36%	32%	29%	31%	40%	33%	35%
Reduced the number of support staff	66%	67%	66%	66%	66%	64%	61%	69%	75%
Withheld pay increments for some staff	7%	5%	7%	6%	9%	7%	4%	5%	4%
Increased class size	19%	24%	17%	22%	21%	16%	23%	22%	26%
Reduced pastoral care	12%	16%	12%	12%	14%	12%	10%	13%	14%
Reduced extra-curricular activities	26%	26%	30%	22%	26%	26%	16%	20%	22%
Reduced spending on buildings and maintenance	53%	58%	46%	50%	52%	51%	43%	52%	37%
Reduced school opening	4%	1%	3%	1%	2%	2%	3%	2%	4%
Reduced qualifications on offer	7%	7%	5%	7%	7%	5%	8%	6%	6%
Reduced the number of subjects on offer	15%	14%	15%	11%	13%	9%	11%	12%	16%
Asked for parental contributions	28%	18%	34%	13%	18%	19%	15%	17%	15%

Figure 6, table showing proportion of respondents who reported taking actions as a result of financial constraints by region

## NGA resources

**nigla** National Governance Association

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- [Financial planning](#)
- [Monitoring monthly expenditure](#)
- [Guidance for effective financial oversight in academies](#)
- [Integrated curriculum and financial planning](#)
- [Questions for governing boards to ask: Finance](#)

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# Governance volunteers

## 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.



# 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%).

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- 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.

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- 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.

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- 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.

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- 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.

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- 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.

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- 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.

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- 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.

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- 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%).

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- 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>

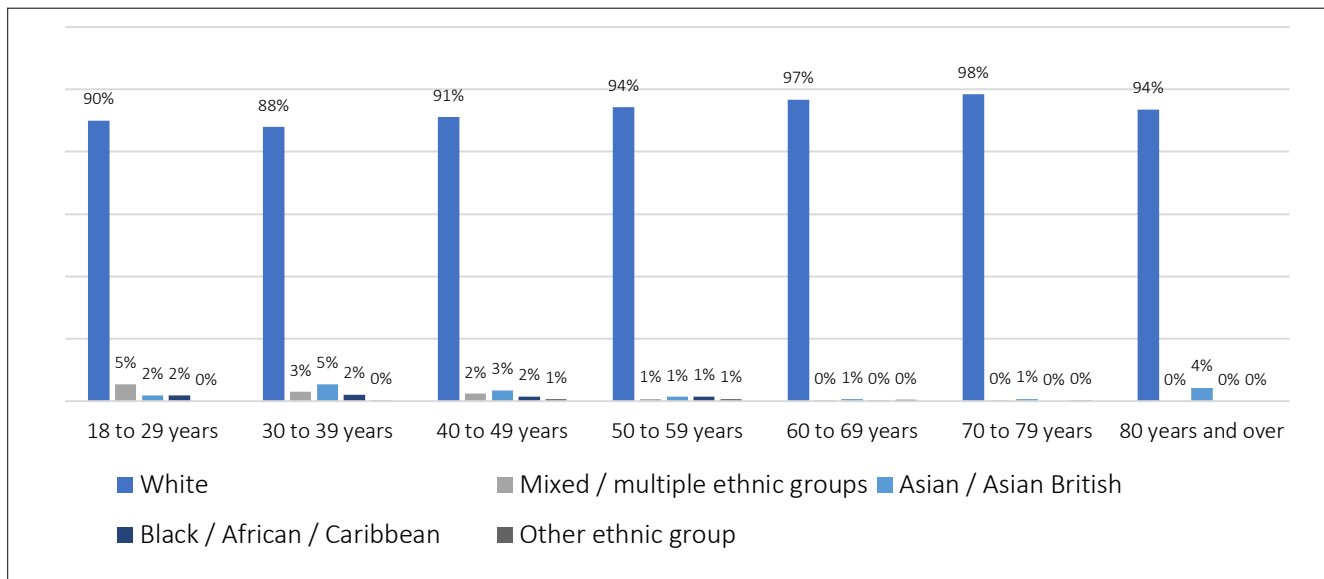


Figure 2, showing ethnicity of volunteers by age group

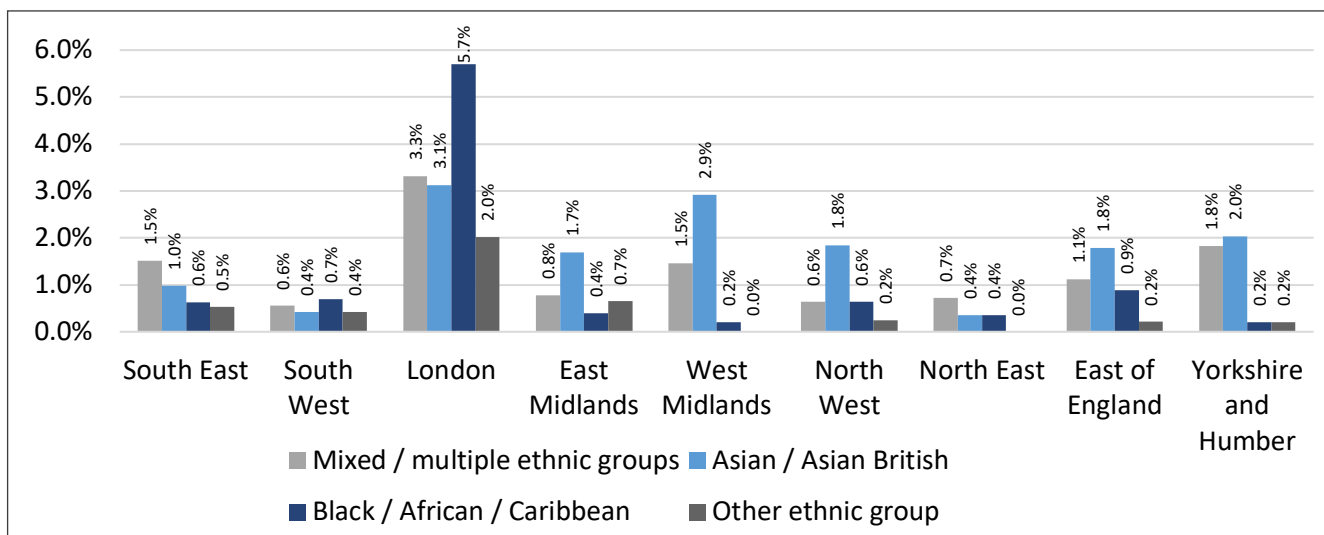


Figure 3, ethnicity of respondents by region

## 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

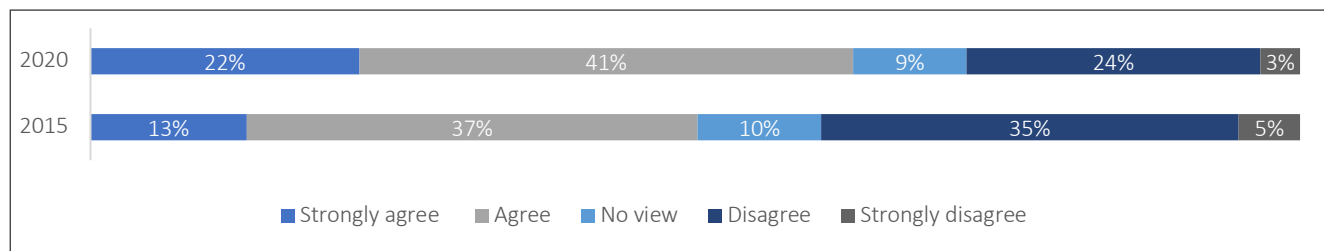


Figure 5, proportion of respondents who agreed it was difficult to recruit to the board (2015, 2020)

	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.

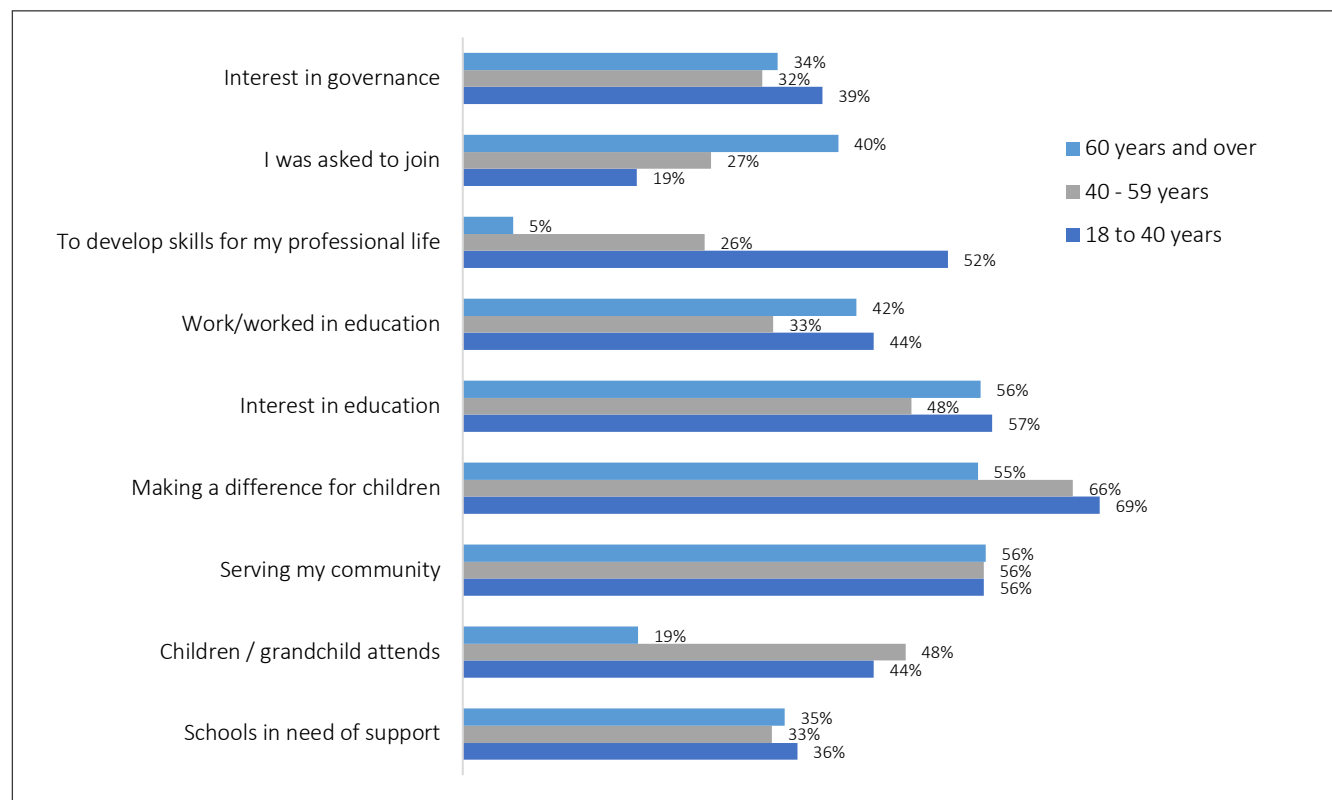


Figure 7, respondents' motivation for governing by different age groups

## Resources for governing boards

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

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# Governance practice

## Foreword

This report contains a good news story. The amount of training and development undertaken by volunteers who are governing is truly impressive. With the huge support of the governance community, we have been making the case to the Government that the role of school governors and academy trustees is important enough to expect those taking up the role to be trained. Magistrates have to do this and so do many others in the voluntary sector from first aiders to CAB advisers. We have not been successful in changing the Government's approach, but the commitment of governance volunteers shines through with nine out of ten of them undertaking training.

There is more work to do to make the case to some and make training manageable and accessible for all, especially for those in full-time work. Three-quarters of all respondents have accessed on-line learning, which in these Covid-19 times is perhaps not quite as surprising as it otherwise would have been.

The survey was open in the first half the summer term, when boards were in the process of moving to remote governance. All NGA's work shows that by and large, with a few teething issues, this transfer from boards meeting in person to virtually has been achieved remarkably well and is a testament to their adaptability.

I remain in awe of the hours given by volunteers to their schools and trust, but it is sobering that one quarter of respondents say that the expectations are not manageable given their professional and personal commitments. This is an issue NGA will not be overlooking in the coming year.

**Emma Knights, chief executive, National Governance Association**

## Introduction

Governing boards provide strategic leadership and accountability in schools and trusts, monitoring and evaluating the progress schools make and providing a source of challenge and support for the executive leader.

All governance roles come with significant responsibilities but despite the substantial nature of the role, induction training is not mandatory. However, governance training and development is heavily encouraged for both new and experienced governors and trustees in the Department for Education's Governance Handbook, as a means of ensuring that governance knowledge and skills on the board are developed on an on-going basis.

Good chairing and good clerking are two of NGA's eight elements of effective governance. In the autumn term, NGA will produce a more detailed report on the role of chairs and the importance of investing in their recruitment and development. Clerks, the governance professionals who advise and service the board, are key to improving governance practice. In early 2021 NGA will add to this data by carrying out a survey of school clerks and other governance professionals in academy trusts.

The annual school governance survey has been running for ten years and is the largest survey of its kind. This year respondents were asked about the manageability of the role, their views on chairing, and what governance training and development they had undertaken. Several aspects of governance practice which we usually cover were not included this year, since in winter 2019 these had been covered by a National Foundation Educational Research survey commissioned by the Department for Education. We expect this to be published shortly and did not want to duplicate the work, but for the sake of completeness we do refer to our previous findings on page 29.



# Key findings

Here's what governors and trustees told us about the manageability of the role, recruiting a chair, the role of their clerk and their approach to training and development.



- 01 Three quarters of governors/trustees surveyed agree that their governance role is manageable around their professional and personal commitments. However, chairs and those in full time employment were less likely to report that it is manageable.
- 02 While just over a third of respondents overall say recruiting a chair is difficult, this rises to almost a half of senior executive leaders who said this was the case.
- 03 Part of the difficulty in recruiting good chairs and vice chairs may come from the unwillingness of others on the board to step forward into the role: 57% of governors and trustees without any chairing responsibilities say they would not consider chairing their board in the future while over a third of chairs say that they took on the role as no one else wanted to (36%).
- 04 93% of respondents agreed that relevant high-quality induction training should be mandatory for new governors and trustees, a figure that has remained consistent across the ten years of the annual school governance survey. When first asked in 2011, 90% agreed.
- 05 Over nine in 10 governors/trustees surveyed said they had undertaken some form of training or development for their governance role. This varied by role, with 96% of chairs and vice chairs reporting having undertaken some form of training compared to 88% of those who held no chairing responsibilities.
- 06 A quarter of those who were new to the role, recruited in the past 12 months, had not yet undertaken any training for their role.
- 07 Despite the professional nature and importance of the role, assessing the job performance of clerks is not yet widespread practice. 64% of chairs said that their clerk received an appraisal, while 49% of vice chairs and 37% of other governors and trustees said the same, suggesting that knowledge of appraisals taking place is not consistent within boards themselves.
- 08 How clerks are employed impacted on whether governors and trustees say they receive advice on governance, constitutional and procedural matters. 94% of those with a clerk employed through the LA or another service provider said they did compared to 82% of those whose clerk had another role in school.
- 09 During the national lockdown in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the majority of governing boards (68%) continued to meet via web-based video conferences, with boards consolidating their way of meeting as the weeks passed. Over the course of the survey there was a consistent weekly rise of participants reporting meetings by video conferences.
- 10 E-Learning is second most popular form of governance training and development, only preceded by face-to-face training with external providers.

# Findings

- Manageability of the role
- Chairs recruitment
- Clerks and governing boards
- Training and development
- Governing during Covid-19
- Governance practice over the years



## Manageability of the role

Three quarters of governors and trustees surveyed believe that their governance role is manageable around their professional and/or personal commitments (76%). Only 17% said that they disagree.

However, just under a quarter of chairs of governing boards feel that their governance role is unmanageable (24%) compared to 16% of vice chairs and 13% of other governors and trustees. For senior executive leaders (SELs) performing ex-officio governance roles (eg headteachers,

executive heads, CEO), 23% of those surveyed say that their governance role is unmanageable around their professional and personal commitments.

The age profile of respondents also affected their perception on the manageability of the role, as seen in figure 1. The youngest governors and trustees, aged under 30, and the oldest, aged 60 and over, were the most likely to find their role manageable while governors/trustees between 30 and 59 were the least likely to report that they find their governance role manageable.

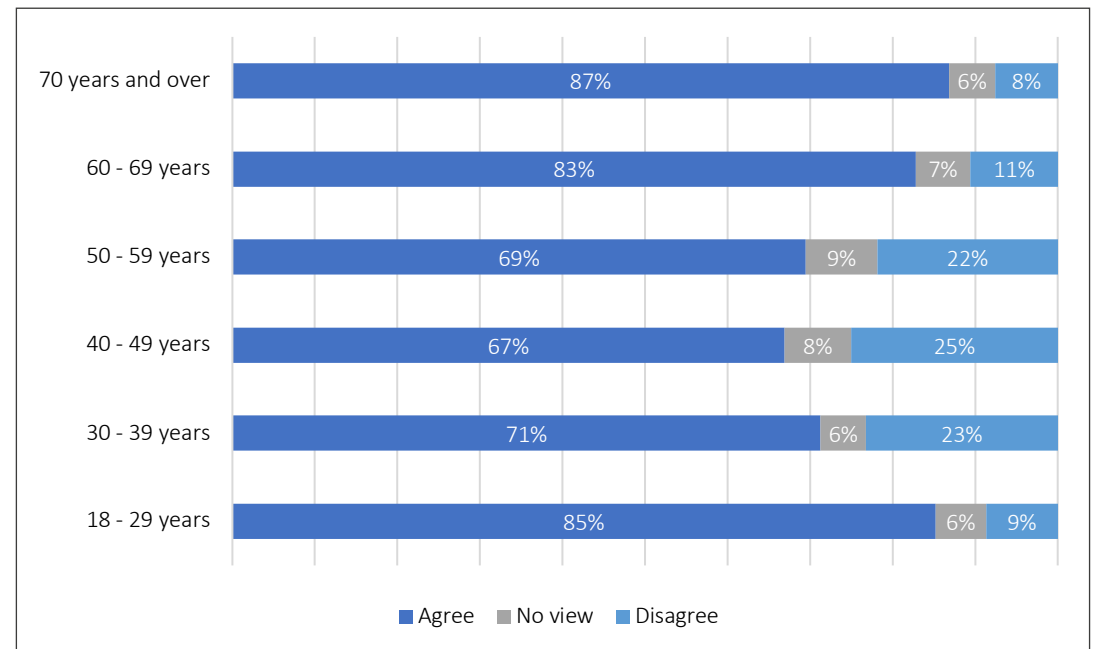


Figure 1, respondents and extent to which they agree or disagree that their governance role is manageable around their professional and/or personal commitments by respondent age

Those who are retired were also more likely to report that their governance role is manageable compared with those in employment which may explain why older governors/trustees also found their role more manageable. 86% of retirees agree that the role is manageable around their personal and/or professional commitments compared to 76% of those employed part-time and only 68% 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 (82%).

Over half of those who think that their governance role is unmanageable also say that they have considered or are considering resigning from their post (55%). This applied to only 18% of those who feel their governance role is manageable.

Among the reasons for considering resignation were inadequate time to perform the role (24%), a change in circumstance (14%) and that the role is too demanding (10%). Only 5% of governors/trustees who had considered or were considering resigning reported that this was due to them feeling they do not have the right skillset for the role.

Many respondents who were considering resigning also gave an 'other' response (47%) and those that elaborated on their answer reported that they wanted to give way to refresh the board or that they had served their full term and were looking to step down. A minority also reported that they felt their role was not appreciated or they did not feel they were making a real difference.

## Chairs recruitment

Overall, 35% of governors/trustees agreed that their board finds it difficult to attract a good chair and vice chair. However, looking at the responses from current chairs only, 43% say that chair recruitment is difficult and 46% of senior executive leaders (SEs) also said chairs recruitment is difficult.

Meanwhile, a third of other governors/trustees without any chairing responsibilities reported the same (30%).

Despite fewer non-chairing governors/trustees reporting that it is difficult to recruit for the position of chair, 57% of these respondents said they would not consider chairing their board in the future with only a third of governors/trustees reporting that would consider it (28%). Only 2% of those surveyed reported that they had agreed to become chair in the future as part of a succession plan while 13% reported that they are unsure. Though a high proportion of chairs are retired, those who were retired but currently not chairing were less likely to say they would consider become chair compared with those who were employed (27% vs 31%).

A quarter of chairs (25%) were appointed as part of an agreed succession plan however a higher proportion (36%) stepped up 'as no one else wanted to take on the role'. When asked why they had taken on the role, existing chairs commonly reported that:

- 'I felt I had the right skillset for the role' (51%).
- 'I wanted to take on the challenge' (40%).
- 'I had previous experience as a vice chair/committee chair' (40%).
- 'I had been chair of governors/trustees at another school or trust' (15%).

Other reasons given for becoming chair include the previous chair suddenly stepped down (eg due to relocation or personal reasons), to retain skills after retirement or that they were asked to chair either by their SEL, the LA, their clerk or their outgoing chair. Some also stated that they were the most experienced volunteer on the board at the time or that they had an education background from their professional life.

Only 4% of chairs reported that they use a co-chairing model where two individuals share the role of chair, suggesting this model is underutilised.

## Clerks and governing boards

Most governing boards obtain the services of a clerk/governance professional through their LA or a similar service provider (42%). Fewer respondents reported that their board's clerk has another role in the school (20%) or that they were employed directly by the trust (15%) while 5% admitted they did not know. Only 1% of respondents said their board did not have a clerk, despite 2013 regulations requiring all LA maintained schools governing boards to have appointed a clerk and the Academies Financial Handbook requiring academy trusts to do the same.

88% of governors/trustees reported that their clerk was able to provide the board with advice on governance, constitutional and procedural matters. This did vary by employment type with a higher proportion of respondents whose clerks employed through the LA or another service provider reporting that they provided this (94%), compared with 89% of freelance clerks, 88% of clerks employed through the trust and only 82% of those whose clerk had another role within the school.

Overall, 37% of respondents said that their clerk receives an annual appraisal with all other respondents either saying they did not (13%) or they were unsure whether they did (40%). Looking at those in board leadership roles, 64% of chairs said that their clerk received an appraisal, while 49% of vice chairs said the same. Despite the professional nature and importance of the role, assessing the job performance of clerks is not yet widespread practice or consistently understood within boards.

Of those that reported that their clerk did receive an annual appraisal, a majority said that this was conducted internally by either the governing board or staff members (57%) compared to externally by the LA or third-party provider (43%).

When asked who conducts the appraisal, there was a mixture of responses with 39% reporting that this is done by the chair or vice chair, 24% reporting that it was conducted by an SEL and 21% reporting that it was both the chair and an SEL.

The factors that were looked at when appraising their clerk, according to governors and trustees, are:

- Objectives (for the past and coming year): 77%
- Progress and development (including CPD): 70%
- Contribution to the wider governance of the school/trust (61%)
- The accuracy of the job description considering the current duties being carried out (59%)
- Pay and remuneration in relation to hours worked (52%)

## Training and development

Overwhelmingly, respondents agreed (37%) or strongly agreed (56%) that relevant high-quality induction training should be mandatory for new governors/trustees.

Over nine in 10 governors and trustees reported that they had undertaken some form of training or development for their governance role (93%). This did vary by role, with 96% of chairs and vice chairs reporting having undertaken some form of training compared with 88% of those who held no chairing responsibilities on the board. This does not vary by type of school, so trustees were just as likely as governors to make time for development.

Newer recruits were the least likely to have undertaken training with a quarter of respondents recruited within the past 12 months reporting that they had not undertaken training for their role (25%), seemingly contrary to the consensus that induction training is important, even if not mandatory. Age also affected whether respondents reported undertaking training with 94% of governors/trustees aged over 40 undertaking training compared with 85% of those under 40.

Yes, the clerk has an annual appraisal	Clerk has another role in school	Employed by the trust	Employed through the local authority or other service provider	Freelance (self-employed) clerk
Internal	97%	83%	19%	94%
External	3%	17%	81%	6%

Figure 2, table showing proportion of respondents whose clerks receive an internal or external appraisal by employment type

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

1. External face-to-face training (eg through local authority, NGA, national leader of governance) (85%)
2. Online (eg an e-learning module or webinar) (75%)
3. Internal face-to-face training (eg through clerk/governance professional, school leader or another member of the board) (63%)
4. Attended a conference (45%)
5. Department for Education-funded development programmes for chairs and boards (23%)
6. Mixed methods (a mix of online and face-to-face) (20%)
7. Facilitated external review of governance (ERG) (19%)

Retired governors/trustees surveyed were more likely to report that they had undertaken training than governors/trustees who were employed or self-employed. 93% of part-time employed governors/trustees reported that they had undertaken training or development activities for their role as a governor/trustee which fell to 89% for those in full-time employment.

Age also affected whether respondents reported undertaking training with 94% of governors/trustees aged over 40 undertaking training compared with 85% of those under 40.

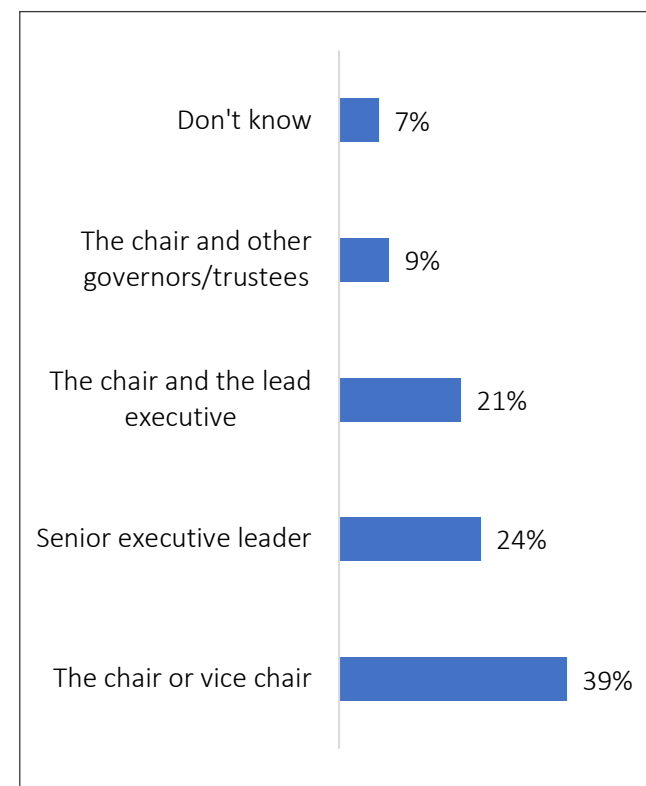


Figure 3, bar chart showing who conducts respondents' clerks' annual appraisals

This may be due to less flexible work commitments as 64% of governors/trustees aged under 40 reported being in full-time employment compared to only 39% of those 40 and over.

Those under 40 were less likely to undertake all of these forms of training compared with those over 40, and most notably, were less likely to attend face-to-face internal training (51% vs 64%), face-to-face external training (78% vs 86%), DfE funded development programmes (15% vs 24%) and conferences (26% vs 47%). Online training saw the smallest variation by age with only a 1% difference between those under and over 40.

Staff governors and ex-officio members of the board (heads and chief executives) were the least likely to have undertaken training and development for their role as a governor or trustee in the last year, but even 77% and 79% respectively had done.

The most popular training topics undertaken were safeguarding, chairing, Ofsted, recruitment, induction training and finance.

## Governance practice during the Covid 19 pandemic

The survey took place during the national lockdown in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent partial closure of schools which began on 23 March 2020. As the survey was open between 21 April and 26 May, it provides a snapshot of governing during the lockdown. Because of this, there is some variation in the responses given by virtue of the date respondents filled it in, with many boards continually reviewing and adapting their practice during those initial months of the pandemic. Our joint research with Ofsted on 'Governing in unprecedented times' also examines this topic in more detail.

When asked how their board was meeting, the majority (68%) said they continued to meet via web-based video conferences while the second most popular response was 'don't know or yet to decide', which is a reflection of the time period during

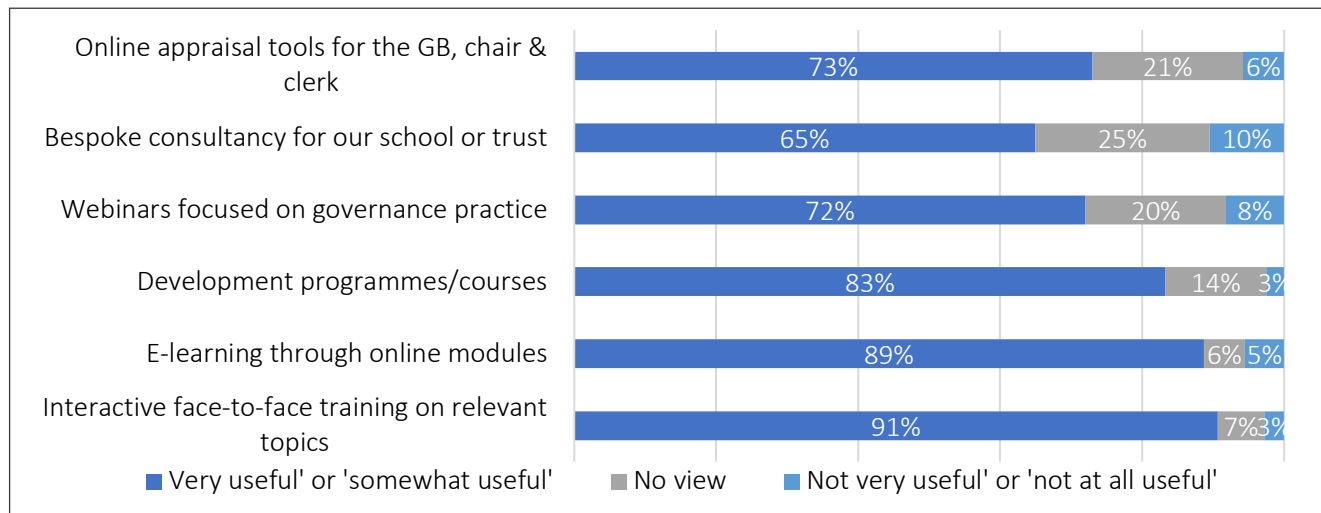


Figure 4, bar chart showing which governance training and development opportunities would be the most useful to respondents

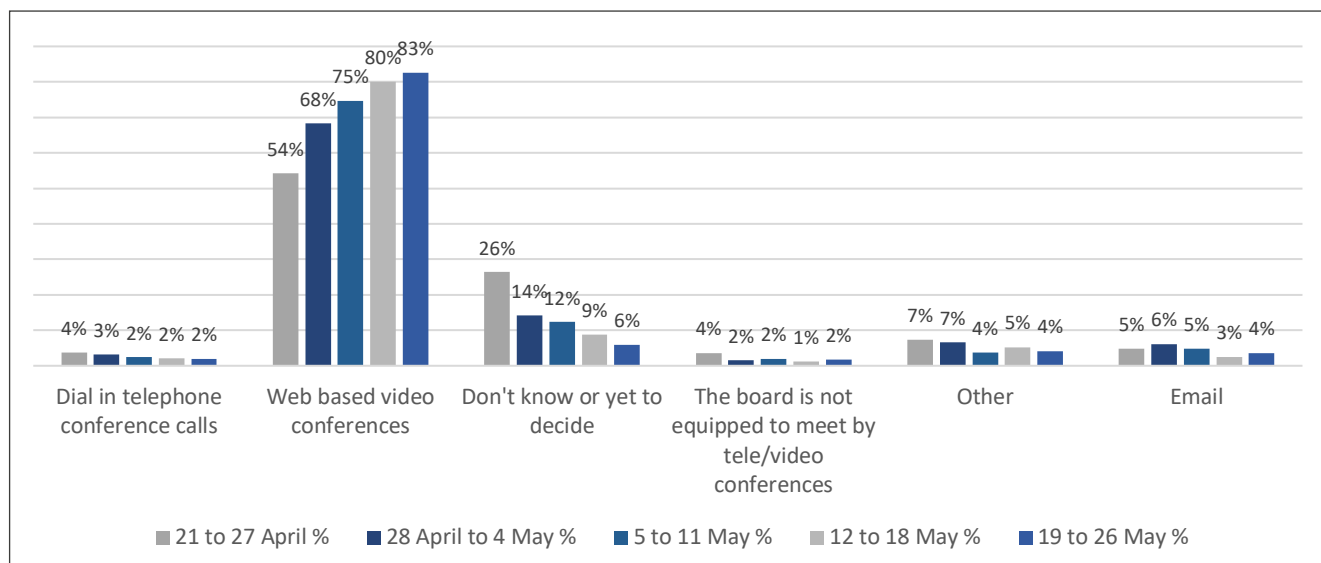


Figure 5, showing how boards continued to meet during lockdown

which this information was collected. A significant number of 'other' responses noted 'email' as the way that their board continued to meet.

In week one of the survey being open from 21 to 27 April, only 54% gave 'web-based video conferences' as their response while 26% said they didn't know or were yet to decide. Over the course of the survey, boards begin to consolidate their way of meeting as shown by the consistent weekly rise of participants reporting meetings by video conferences while the percentage of those who were unsure or yet to decide steadily declines. There is also a slight decrease in all other methods as shown in figure 5.

The four most popular responses detailing how governors and trustees have supported their senior leaders were:

- 1. Emails** – sending emails and messages of support to the SEL predominantly and other staff members in some other cases, most characterised their messages as 'supportive' and when sent to wider staff, these were usually messages of thanks to boost staff morale. Some noted that they limited their engagement with senior leaders to emails mostly to allow SELs to deal with pressing operational matters.
- 2. Telephone calls** – again usually to the head teacher or wider SLT, some phoned other staff members and many of these calls were also noted to be to offer support or praise to staff members.
- 3. Attending online meetings** – this included not only full governing board meetings and committee meetings but also SLT and/or other staff meetings.
- 4. Conducting wellbeing checks or initiatives for staff** – this includes phoning staff members and SELs to check on their wellbeing and/or implementing well-being initiatives such as counselling, employee support assistance programmes and sending gifts.

## Governance practice over the years

Governance practice varies from board to board but there is a wealth of shared practice that transpires school structures, phase, type and geographical setting. There has also been significant changes over the years in the way governing boards seek to improve how they operate. A number of themes that have consistently been explored across the lifetime of the annual governance survey were not covered in 2020, but below is a snapshot of how practice has evolved over time.

### Skills audit

A consistently popular method of improving practice over the years is the use of a skills audit. This has increased gradually over time, from 72% of respondents in 2012, and is now well embedded in most governing boards' practice with 87% saying they used a skills audit in 2019. The last time we asked respondents about how they use the skills audit in 2018, the top uses were recruitment (56%), assigning governors or trustees to committees (54%), training (45%) and succession planning (45%). While the use has increased, in 2019, 13% of respondents said it wasn't useful, with a further 13% saying they either didn't use one or were not sure.

### Code of conduct

In 2019 just 61% said they had agreed a code of conduct that year, while in 2013, 84% answered yes to their governing board having a code of conduct. It is worth noting the slight change of wording, with the decrease in use possibly reflecting the frequency of review, with some schools/trusts simply not going through the process of reviewing their code of conduct every year, but may still have one in place.

## Performance management of governors and trustees

Consistently the least commonly pursued initiative over the years has been practice of performance managing governors or trustees in their role. In 2019, 13% of respondents said this was something they did. Although low, this is a considerable increase on the 4% of respondents when we first asked the question in 2012, indicating that this is something that more and more governing boards are beginning to think about.

### Internal self-review

While there was a big jump in the number of boards conducting internal self-review in 2019, increasing to 88% from just under 60% in 2017, there was also an increase in those not finding it useful jumping up from 4% in 2017 to 36% in 2019. So there is still a long way to go before the practice seemingly contributes to universally improved practice.

### Size of board

Over the years the size of governing boards has reduced. While in 2013, 17% of respondents to the survey reported having ten or less individuals on their board, in 2017 this had risen to 37%, and up to 40% in 2019, showing a consistent upwards shift to smaller boards. Part of the reduction in size of governing boards was driven by the Department for Education regulating the constitution of maintained schools' governing bodies and more recently by the increasing number of multi-academy trusts (MATs), as survey responses indicate that MATs tend to have smaller boards. At the opposite end of the scale, single academy trusts tend to have the largest boards, with 18% having 16 to 19 trustees and a further 6% having 20 or more in 2018.

## Committees

An increasing proportion of boards are governing with fewer or no committees, with just 2% of boards having no committees in 2013, compared to 14% in 2019. In 2019 the average number of committees was between two and three per board. This varies a little by type of board; MATs on average have the least trust board committees (two per board) and single academy trusts have the most (three per board). While 21% of respondents said they had five or more committees in 2013, this had dropped to 9% in 2019.

## Resources for governing boards

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Association

### KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

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

- [Eight elements of effective governance](#)
- [Chair's role description](#)
- [Co-chairing](#)
- [Preparing your board for the future](#)
- [Clerk's job description and person specification](#)
- [Developing your clerk: annual appraisal](#)
- [The clerk and governing body meetings](#)
- [COVID-19: Ensuring continuity and making plans for recovery](#)

The Knowledge Centre also has two dedicated sections for [clerking](#) and [chairing](#) with articles, guidance and helpful tools for those in these roles.





# Governing in a multi academy trust

## Foreword

Just over 40% of volunteers involved in school governance are now governing academies, and the lion's share of them (over 80%) are within multi academy trusts (MATs). This report demonstrates once again that volunteers governing MATs as trustees or at academy level, by and large responded in the same way to the extensive set of questions on our 2020 survey as those governing a single academy trust or a local authority maintained school. They have very similar demography, the same motivations, and largely the same experiences, views and concerns.

There are five other reports in this survey series where we mention differences by school structure and phase, but the main differences manifest themselves between regions. This survey cannot provide robust local data, and we know that every school and trust has its own story, but there are themes emerging. We wrote about these topics last year in *Moving MATs forward: the power of governance*, but this report adds to the evidence base.

Although balancing the budget is the concern mentioned by more MAT trustees and academy committee members than any other issue, the percentage of those in MATs (34%) choosing it is lower than the 43% governing maintained schools. This is significant as we have captured the first inkling that the advantages of financial management across one organisation with a group of schools may have materialised, at least for some. This is confirmed by the finding that just over half of MATs with 10 or fewer schools who plan to grow have taken financial advantages into consideration. Over the past decade there have been many inconclusive discussions about whether there is an optimal size for a MAT.

The big challenge in governing a MAT is not charity and company law – charities have been around a very long time and there is much experience and resources (including NGA's!) – but in knowing how much the trustees and the executive should delegate to academy level and how much the board of trustees must see

and decide for themselves. Over the years the role of academy committees has been widely debated with some predictions of their demise, but in 2020 we see their existence in almost all MATs with 10 or under schools, but with 11% of larger MATs going without academy level governance.

Most of those governing at academy level were positive about their MAT and the way their voices were heard by their trustees. Overall communication between the layers of governance appears to be improving, but there are still too many relying on individuals governing at more than one layer to be that conduit of information. This is not a healthy model and can introduce conflicts of interest.

There is also some progress with those at academy level understanding that the MAT is one organisation and accepting that resources may be shared across the trust.

Executive pay decisions taken by boards of trustees in both single academy trusts and MATs has been another controversial issue, and this survey demonstrates that boards are not consistently looking beyond basic salary and considering the whole cost of the package, nor are many boards considering the differentials with other members of staff.

We know from NGA's extensive work with MATs that in some organisations governance is working extremely well, but in many that process of reviewing governance still needs to be taken seriously. There is much practice to learn from, and as with governance in all sectors, it is the people, their understanding of the role and responsibility, their commitment, their behaviours in and outside meetings, and the strength of their relationships amongst the board and with senior executive leaders that make the difference.

Emma Knights, chief executive, National Governance Association

# Introduction

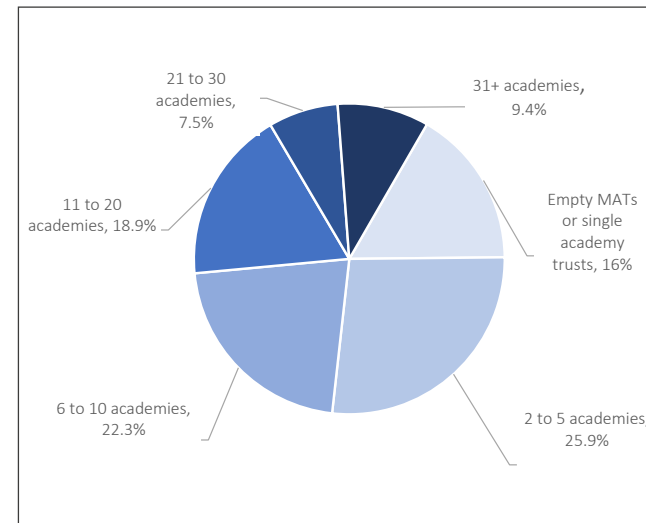
Over the past ten years many schools in England have converted to academy status and increasingly belong to multi academy trusts (MAT). 43% of state funded schools in England are academies (including free schools, studio schools and university technical colleges), consisting of 78% of secondary schools and 36% of primary schools. This means that currently 53% of pupils studying in state-funded schools in England are in academies and free schools. 84% of those academies are now part of a multi academy trust of two or more trusts (MAT).

This has significant implications for governance. Academy trusts must have a board of trustees who also act as company directors and are accountable in law for all decisions about their academies. Through a scheme of delegation a MAT board delegates key responsibilities to academy committees, also known as local governing bodies, which may be in place for one or more schools within the trust. NGA tries to avoid the term 'local governing bodies' as it can be perceived as suggesting the school tier of a MAT's governance structure is equivalent to governing a standalone maintained school while, in fact, those governing at local level only make the decisions delegated to them by the trust board.

This can sometimes mean they may hold no decision making powers at all. The way this is done in MATs differs, and this report sheds some light on local governance within MATs.

The annual school governance survey has been running since 2011 and is the largest survey of its kind. The respondents include 1,862 trustees of which 765 govern in single academy trusts and 1,097 on MAT boards. Between them the trustees of MATs were responsible for a maximum of 7,000 state schools. In addition, there were 799 respondents who governed on an academy committee within a MAT, although as the survey is anonymous we do not know whether they are at the same trusts to our trustee respondents. This report focuses on the answers from respondents governing in MAT settings, including those at trust board level and those on academy committees.

As well as the questions asked of all governors and trustees, MAT and academy committee respondents were also asked about local governance and the role of trust members, communication between the layers of governance of the MAT, perceptions of being within a MAT, how trust boards determine CEO pay their views and experiences on MAT growth.



## Number of academies and pupils in academies, 2015/16 to 2019/20

		2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Number of schools	Academy	5,425	6,345	7,469	8,398	9,041
	LA Maintained	16,552	15,639	14,527	13,606	12,988
Headcount – total	Academy	3,017,849	3,386,775	3,794,964	4,157,953	4,421,118
	LA Maintained	4,958,662	4,699,037	4,358,261	4,080,856	3,892,370

# Key findings

Here's what MAT trustees and academy committee respondents told us about their governance structures, their experiences of governing in a MAT and their views on the future of their MAT.

- 01 Balancing the budget is the biggest issue facing MAT trustees and academy committee members, but it is significant that the percentage of those in MATs choosing it (34%) is lower than the 43% of those governing maintained schools.

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- 02 Local governance arrangements are an integral part of MAT governance structures: 87% of MAT trustees overall report having a local tier of governance for schools within their MAT. But while just 2% of MATs with 10 or fewer academies said they didn't have local academy committees in each school, this increased to 11% for MATs with 21 academies and over.

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- 03 A considerable yet reducing number of MATs still rely on overlapping layers of governance in which people serve on more than one layer for communication purposes: 54% of MAT chairs report also being a member of their trust and 33% of other non-chairing trustees say the same. One third of MAT trustees also reported that some trustees on the board also govern at local level.

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- 04 An increasing number of academy committee members are positive about their MAT, with 73% of those governing at local level agreeing that their voices were heard by executive leaders and trustees in the decision making process, compared to 57% in 2019. Academy committee members of schools graded 'outstanding' and 'good' by Ofsted reflected even more positively on their MAT.

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- 05 Nearly half of individuals on local tiers of governance support the idea of sharing resources with other schools within the MAT (49%).

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- 06 The factors least likely to be used to determine executive pay are pension costs and benefits (17%) and the ratio between the highest and lowest paid in an organisation (15%), demonstrating that a consistent picture of looking beyond basic salary and considering the whole cost of the package has not yet emerged.

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- 07 Over half of MAT trustees report that their board plans to increase the number of academies within the MAT (53%), while a third were unsure (34%) and only 13% reported they definitely were not planning to expand their MAT.

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- 08 Half of trustees whose MATs were planning to increase the number of academies cited finance and resourcing as a reason for expansion (48%), with those governing smaller MATs almost twice as likely to report this motivation than those governing larger MATs.

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- 09 Interest in joining a MAT from those governing schools who are currently not part of one is low compared to previous years. 75% of maintained schools and 58% of single academy trusts had either decided against joining a MAT or not considered joining one in the last year.

# Findings

- Governance structures and communication
- Perceptions of being within a MAT
- Determining senior executive leader pay
- MAT growth and perceptions on academisation

## Governance structures and communication

Local governance arrangements remain an integral part of MAT governance structures with 87% of MAT trustees reporting having a local tier of governance for schools within their MAT. Nine in 10 respondents had an academy committee for each school within their MAT with only one in 10 utilising a cluster/hub model with academy committees serving multiple schools. However, this was a more common trend for larger MATs, with 11 academies and over as shown in figure 1.

The fact that some trustees were unsure of their governance at local level is concerning, and indicates that a more comprehensive induction which covers the scheme of delegation is needed.

In regard to how they communicate between tiers of governance across the organisation, MAT trustees reported using varying practices:

1. Internal briefings (eg newsletter) for those governing/in management: 55%
2. Consistent clerking (using the same clerk for communication): 52%
3. Trustees sitting/governing/observing at a local level: 50%
4. Regular cross-MAT network events: 46%
5. Trustees who are also members of the trust: 32%
6. Executives who are also trustees and/or members: 29%
7. A governance manager/professional to co-ordinate governance: 28%

As shown in figures 2 and 3, there is also some correlation between how trust boards communicate with other tiers and their size.

	2 to 5 academies	6 to 10 academies	11 to 20 academies	21 academies and over
Academy committees for each school	87%	80%	69%	68%
Cluster/hub committees for groups of schools	6%	10%	14%	11%
No local committees	2%	2%	8%	11%
Unsure	5%	7%	8%	10%

Figure 1, table showing proportion of MAT trustee respondents with local governance structures by MAT size

Those governing in larger MATs reported using more formal communication channels such as internal briefings, cross-MAT networks and the employment of a governance manager or professional to co-ordinate governance across the organisation. Meanwhile, trustees of smaller MATs typically relied upon overlapping layers of governance (eg those governing at local and trust board level and trustees/executives who are also members of the trust).

Some MAT trustees reported that they were members of their trust as well, particularly chairs of the board with 54% of MAT chairs reporting that they were members compared to 33% of non-MAT chairs. This shows that lines of accountability in MAT governance continue to be blurred, which can and does negatively impact transparent decision making as well as creating governance workload issues.

## Perceptions of being within a MAT

Viewing the MAT as a single organisation is one of the major hurdles for the sector. Failure to create a ‘one organisation’ mentality can undermine the authority of the executive team and trust board and can lead to misunderstanding surrounding who is accountable and in charge of individual schools. Respondents governing at academy committee level were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with various statements about their MAT. Respondents had more mixed views on their MAT’s stakeholder engagement and communication across those involved in governance.

- 73% agreed or strongly agreed that their voices are heard by executives and trustees in the decision-making process;
- 71% agreed or strongly agreed that they were happy with the current level of responsibilities delegated to them by the board of trustees;
- 64% agreed or strongly agreed that their MAT was effectively engaged with parents and the wider community;
- 58% agreed or strongly agreed that communication between the local and trust level is effective and managed well.

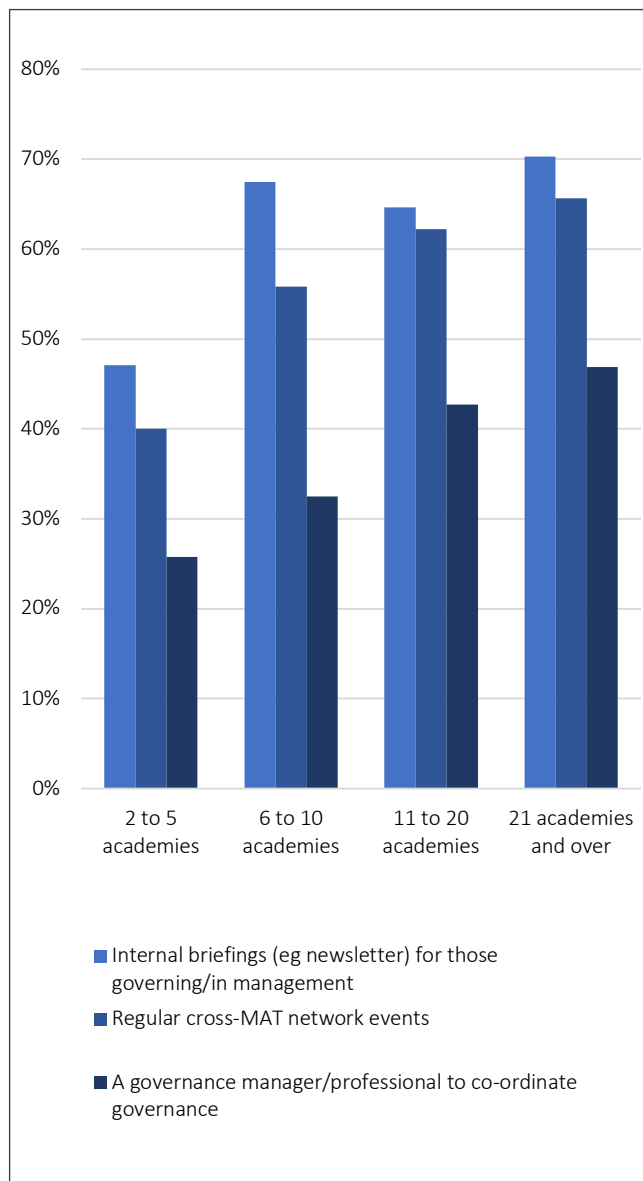


Figure 2, communication methods which largely increase in usage by an increase in MAT size

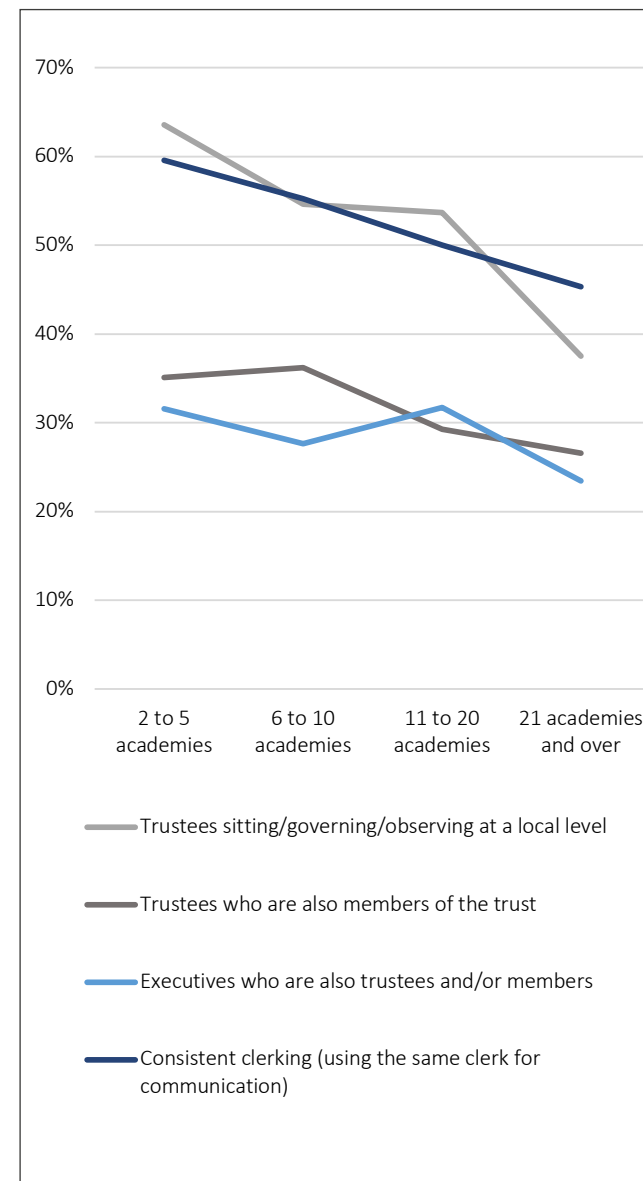


Figure 3, communication methods which largely decrease in usage by an increase in MAT size

More respondents support the idea of sharing their individual school's resources across the MAT than oppose it. Nearly half of respondents are in favour of pooling resources with other schools within the MAT (49%), whereas only 28% oppose it and 23% have no view.

There was also variation in the views of those governing schools with differing Ofsted grades, with academy committee members governing schools graded 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate' considerably less likely to reflect positively about their MAT as seen in figure 4. There was a steady decline, for example, in the proportion of respondents who agreed their voices were heard with 75% of respondents from 'outstanding' schools agreeing that their voices were heard, falling to 73% of 'good' school respondents, down to 69% for 'requires improvement', school respondents and to 58% for those governing 'inadequate' schools. Stakeholder engagement by the MAT was also viewed less positively with only 42% of respondents governing in 'inadequate' and 58% from 'requires improvement' schools agreeing that their MAT was effectively engaging with parents and the wider school community compared with 64% of respondents from 'good' schools and 67% from 'outstanding' schools.

## Determining senior executive leader pay

Nearly three quarters of MAT trustees reported that they decide their senior lead executive's (SEL) pay based on the performance of the lead executive (72%) while, despite trusts not having to legally adhere to the document, many reported using the School Teachers Pay and Conditions document (STPCD) (63%). Just over half reported considering the trust's ethos and vision (52%), benchmarking with other similarly sized MATs (51%) and organisational affordability (51%) in their decision. The factors least likely to be used are the pension costs and benefits (17%) and the ratio between the highest and lowest paid in their organisation (15%).

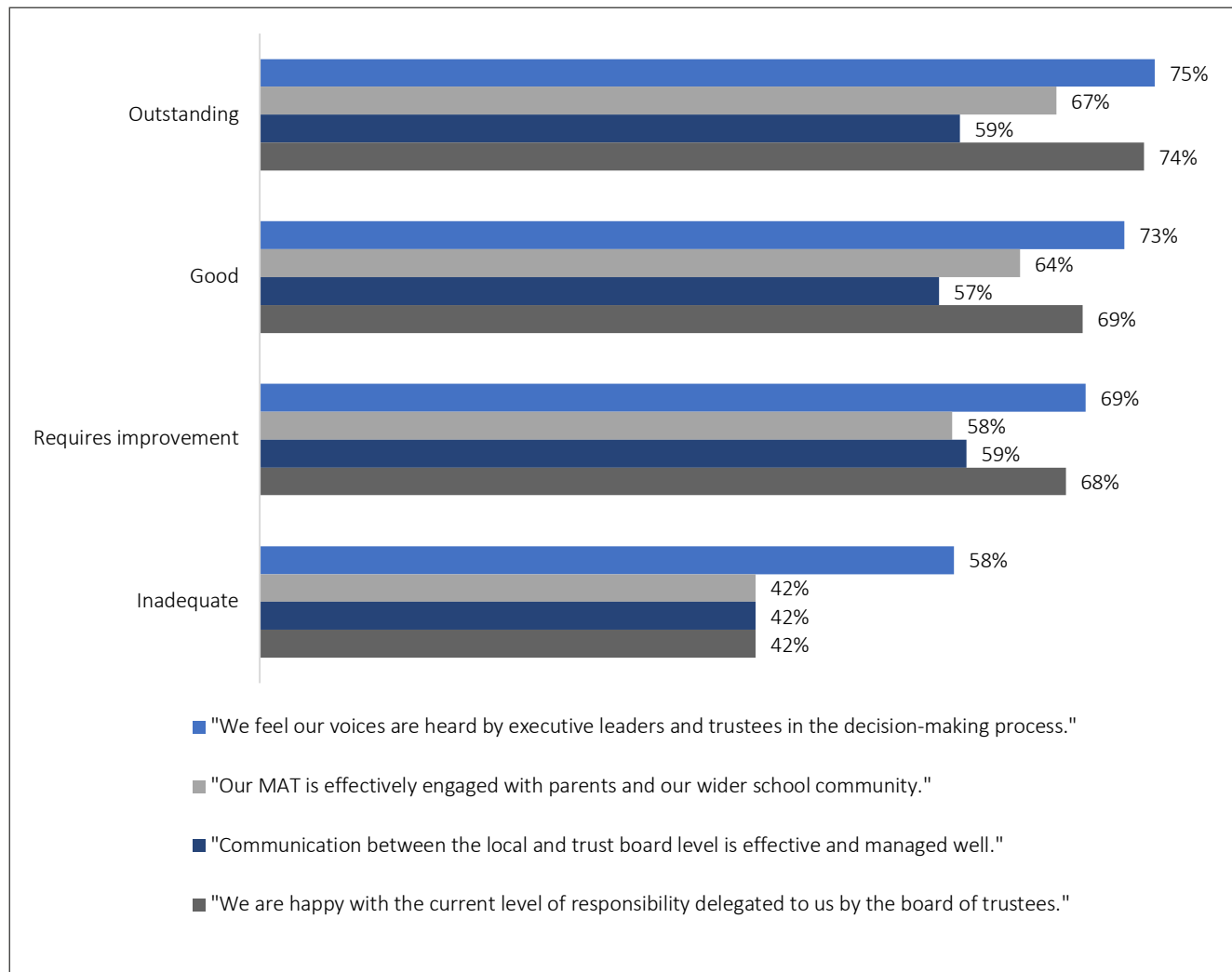


Figure 4, bar graph of proportion of academy committee members agreeing with statements about their own MAT

As seen in figure 5, the STPCD was more likely to be used by MAT trustees with 10 academies and fewer compared with those in MATs with 11 academies or more while trustees of smaller MATs were also more likely to benchmark with MATs of similar sizes and make their decision based on the performance of their lead executive. Larger MATs were also more likely to take into account organisational affordability than smaller MATs.

## MAT growth and perceptions on academisation

Over half of MAT trustees surveyed report that their board is planning to increase the number of academies within their MAT (53%) while a third reported that they were unsure (34%). Only 13% of MAT trustees reported that they were not planning to expand their MAT.

Meanwhile, 42% of respondents report that their MAT had grown in size within the last year and those that reported this were also more likely to report planning to increase again in the near future than those who had not expanded their MAT in the past year (64% vs 54%).

Those governing in smaller MATs were more likely to report that they planned to expand their MAT further than those governing in larger MATs as seen in figure 6.

Among the reasons given for wanting to increase the number of academies within their MAT, trustees said:

1. Improving outcomes for more pupils: 73%
2. Growth is part of the trust's strategy: 63%
3. Finances and resourcing: 48%
4. Wanting to reach an 'optimal' size: 48%
5. There are suitable schools who wish to join: 43%
6. Asked to expand by the regional schools' commissioner (RSC) and/or Department for Education (DfE): 18%

	Under 5 academies	6 to 10 academies	11 to 20 academies	21 academies and over
The School Teachers Pay and Conditions document	78%	68%	65%	59%
Benchmarking with other MATs of a similar size	59%	58%	58%	41%
The ratio between the highest and lowest paid in the organisation	18%	17%	21%	7%
Organisational affordability	58%	58%	57%	62%
Pension costs and other benefits (eg health care, cars etc.)	20%	20%	16%	14%
Performance of the lead executive	86%	82%	74%	66%
The trust's ethos and vision	60%	63%	53%	59%

Figure 5, table showing how MAT trustees determine SEL pay by size of respondent's MAT

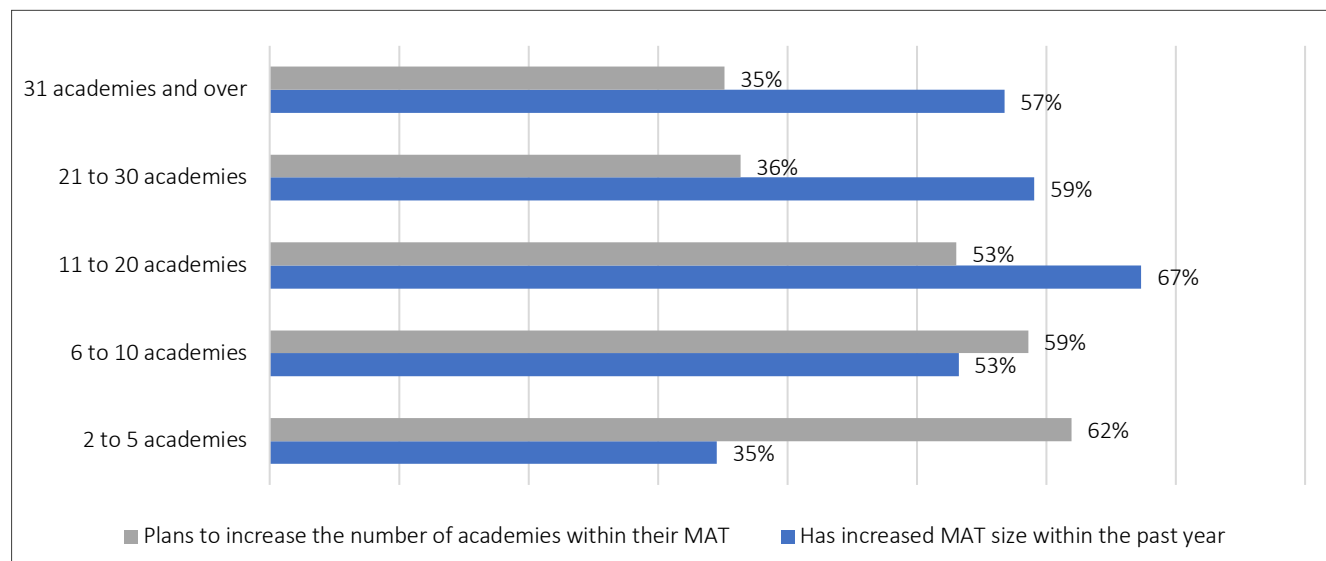


Figure 6, proportion of respondents governing in MATs of varying sizes and whether they planned to expand and/or had expanded within the past year.

The size of a respondent's MAT seemed to affect their reasoning behind preferring expansion. Figure 7 shows a considerable difference with those governing MATs with 10 or fewer academies almost twice more likely to report finances and resources as a reason compared with those governing MATs with 11 academies and over. Trustees of smaller MATs were also more likely to report not having reached their 'optimal' size as a reason for expansion and that growth was part of the trust's strategy than those governing larger organisations.


Local authority maintained school governors and single academy trustees demonstrated a lack of interest in joining a MAT with over half of those surveyed reporting that their school had not considered joining a MAT (54%) while those that had considered joining a MAT rarely reported following this action through. Over three quarters of respondents whose schools had considered joining a MAT reported that they had ultimately decided against it (77%) up from 70% in 2019.

Of those who gave 'other' responses (15%), the most common response was they were considering joining a MAT but had not reached any conclusive decisions or that it was an open agenda item but was not something they were actively pursuing. A small proportion of respondents reported that they wanted to form their own MAT with schools within their area.

	5 academies and under	6 to 10 academies	11 academies and over	21 academies and over
Improving outcomes for more pupils	76%	78%	63%	73%
Growth is part of the trust's strategy	76%	54%	41%	58%
Finance and resourcing considerations	55%	51%	29%	23%
Wanting to reach 'optimal' size	55%	50%	25%	27%
There are suitable schools which wish to join	35%	54%	51%	62%
Asked by the RSC and/or DfE	19%	16%	27%	12%

Figure 7, table showing how reasons for wanting to increase size of MAT is affected by MAT size

## Resources for governing boards



**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:

**Guidance**

- [The governing board's role in academy conversation](#)
- [21 key questions a MAT board should ask itself](#)
- [Academy trusts: the role of members](#)
- [Guidance on schemes of delegation](#)
- [Trustee role description and person specification](#)
- [Guidance on executive pay](#)
- [Process for changing articles of association](#)
- [Governance professional role description](#)

**Research**

- [Moving MATs forward: the power of governance](#)
- [MAT case studies: lessons learnt by multi academy trusts](#)
- [Time to chair? Exploring the time commitments of chairs of multi academy trusts](#)

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# Pupils, communities and accountability

## Foreword

A governing board volunteers to act as custodian of schools and trusts in the interests of pupils, contributing to the community. This report underlines that purpose of governance: to ensure the best possible education so that our young people are able to flourish and take their place in both the community, both local and global. Schools are however sadly finding themselves needing to mitigate the disadvantages in their communities, increasingly providing basic provisions and services.

Governance is coming of age with just over half of the organisations setting their vision and strategy in a truly collaborative process between the board, school leaders and stakeholders. We still have further to improve as 10% were not involved at all, despite this being the board's first core function, but this is now at a tipping point. Furthermore the vision and strategy is reported to influence the curriculum offer more than anything else, including Ofsted, performance measures or funding. This is quite an achievement, and could be the dawning of more intelligent accountability, with key decisions taken at board and trust level, rather than on high, and after listening to stakeholders.

Engagement with stakeholders is improving, although there is still further to go. Stakeholder engagement and stakeholder involvement in school life has never been of more importance given its impact on education disadvantage and social mobility, affecting not only pupils but school communities as a whole.

Governors and trustees do not believe that the role of the governing board is well understood by many in society. NGA intends to play our part with the Visible Governance campaign to spread the knowledge of governance, not only to value the committed volunteers but also to encourage others to come forward

**Emma Knights, chief executive, National Governance Association**

## Introduction

Schools are at the heart of their communities, as has been emphasised by the COVID-19 pandemic. Every governing board, no matter the type, educational phase or size of the organisation must ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction. As part of this, governing boards champion the needs of all pupils, working closely with senior leaders to develop a strategy, that serves the best interests of all the children and young people within the school or trust. Alongside ambitious vision setting, governing boards are responsible for the values that guide the culture of the organisation; values which speak to and impact every member of the school or trusts community. and listen to what it is saying.

As strategic leaders accountable to stakeholders for the performance of all pupils, governing boards need to understand the needs of the pupils, their families and the community: the fourth core function of governing boards is to ensure that stakeholder voices are heard. Governing boards should look outwards to their communities as well as inside the school gate, helping cement the understanding and the links between schools and those communities.

The annual school governance survey has been running since 2011 and is the largest survey of its kind, this year achieving 6,864 responses. This year, governors and trustees were asked for their views and experience on a range of topics relating to pupil success and wellbeing, their school/trust's vision, strategy and ethos, accountability and stakeholder engagement along with of course, the impact of coronavirus as experienced by the end of May. As governing boards listen to their pupils, one issue they have heard their pupils passionately talking about is environment and sustainability, as an issue that young people are prioritising, so this year is also the first year we have asked specifically about environment and sustainability in the survey.



# Key findings

Here's what governors and trustees told us about how they support disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, their approach to strategy and stakeholder engagement and their views on accountability.



- 01 Almost three quarters of school governors and trustees believe that cuts to local authority services have had an adverse effect on their school (74%), an increase of 28% of respondents from 2015.
- 02 Over half of governors/trustees report that their school(s) provide additional services for disadvantaged families (54%), most commonly providing assistance for purchasing and/or washing school uniform (37%), and giving advice on income and benefits (24%).
- 03 The proportion of respondents reporting that their school/trust provide meals outside of term time was more than three times higher than 2019 (13% compared to 4%), while the proportion of respondents reporting the provision of food banks had more than doubled (17% compared to 8% in 2019).
- 04 COVID-19 has led to schools providing additional services to families of disadvantaged pupils. Over a third of respondents (36%) reported providing food via a collection or delivery service when asked how their school or trust was providing support to disadvantaged pupils during the pandemic.
- 05 Support for pupils with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) was one of the three biggest challenges facing their school for nearly a quarter of respondents. However, there were varying practice in how boards monitor and elevate the status of SEND in their school with those governing in mainstream settings less likely to engage with key stakeholders when shaping their provision for these pupils.
- 06 Less than half of governors and trustees believe that the inspection system has a positive impact on the school system (47%) despite most governors and trustees believing that their most recent Ofsted inspection gave a fair and accurate picture of their school (80%).
- 07 The organisation's vision and strategy is the most influential factor in the design and provision of the curriculum across all education settings, ahead of Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework, performance measures, government policy and funding constraints.
- 08 Almost half of governors and trustees (44%) surveyed report that their board had taken action in relation to climate change.
- 09 60% of respondents would support the introduction of ensuring effective engagement with stakeholders as a fourth core function for governing boards with only 9% opposing its inclusion.
- 10 Monitoring the results of surveys as a form of stakeholder engagement has risen in the past year – from 56% to 70% for staff surveys, from 59% to 69% for pupil surveys and from 73% to 86% for parent/carer surveys.
- 11 Many governors and trustees do not feel their work is seen or valued. Less than one in five governors/trustees believe that the general public understands and values the role and contribution to schools (18%), while only two in five believe that parents have a good understanding of the governor/trustee role (40%).

# Findings

- Pupil wellbeing
- Ethos, vision and strategy
- Greener governance
- Accountability and Ofsted
- Governing boards and stakeholders

## Pupil wellbeing

### The wider role of schools

Over half of respondents report that their school or trust provides additional services for families in need (54%). This marks a small but notable increase from the past few years with 49% of respondents reporting providing an additional service for families in 2018 and 51% reporting the same in 2019.

The types of services provided, however, remain largely consistent with the most to least common services provided being:

1. Financial support purchasing school uniforms and/or washing school uniforms: 37%
2. Advice about income and benefits: 24%
3. Food banks: 17%
4. Meals outside of term time: 13%
5. Emergency loans: 2%

There was also a notable increase in respondents reporting that their school offers an enhanced food provision; in 2019, only 4% of those surveyed reported that their school provided meals outside term time, this rose to 13% in 2020 and 17% reported providing food banks

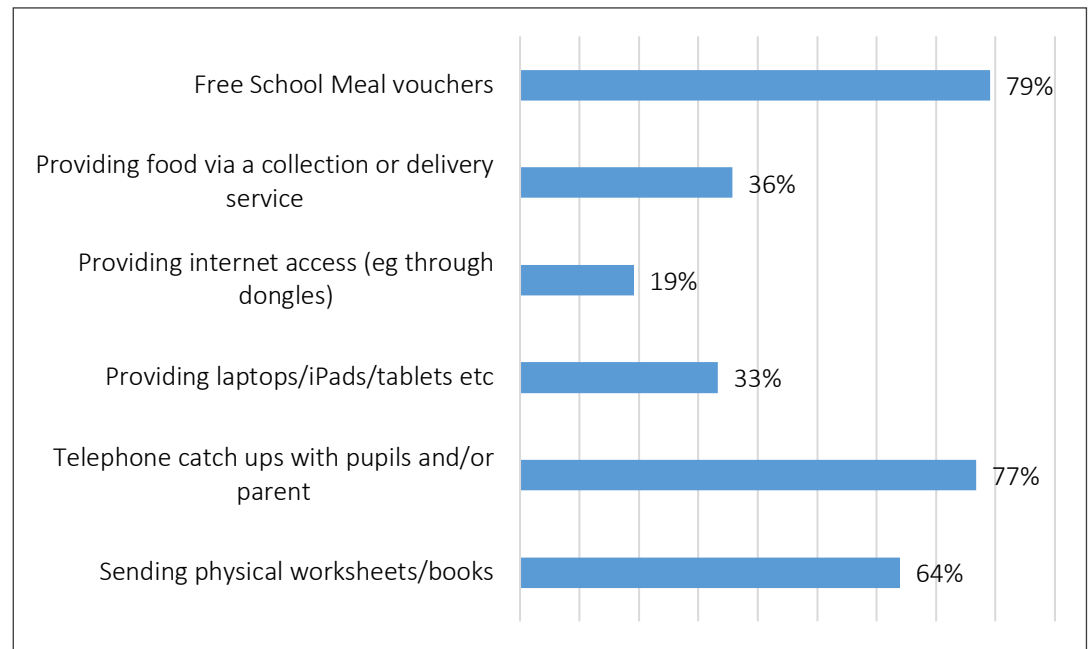


Figure 1, bar chart showing how respondents reported their school or trust was supporting disadvantaged pupils during lockdown

compared with only 8% in 2019. It is likely the wider impact of COVID-19 and the extension of the free school meals programme outside of term time has in part led to these findings.

Almost three quarters of respondents (74%) agreed that cuts to local authority (LA) services had had an adverse effect on their school(s), an increase of 28% of respondents compared with respondents in 2015. Those in non-academy settings were much more likely to agree, with 81% of LA maintained school respondents agreeing, compared to 65% in academy committees, 64% in single academy trusts, and 61% of MAT trustee respondents.

Nearly one in five respondents reported that one of the top three issues facing the school(s) they govern was broader services for children (eg health services, mental health support) (19%). In terms of the school's role in these providing wider services, a majority believe that schools should play a key role in the provision of wider children's services in their local area (60%). This marks a small decrease from 10 years ago when 67% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this.

## Impact of COVID-19

As seen in figure 1, when asked how their school or trust was supporting disadvantaged pupils during the pandemic, free school meal vouchers were the most commonly cited offer of support reported by four in five governors/trustees (79%). This was followed by telephone catch-ups for pupils and/or parents (77%), sending physical worksheets/books (64%) and providing food via a collection or delivery service (36%).

The most consistently referenced challenge for respondents' schools and trusts during April and May when the survey was conducted were concerns over the provision for, and effects of lockdown on, vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils, with 1053 mentions. These largely focused on the lack of resources for e-learning, a widening of the attainment gap

for disadvantaged pupils, safety (in their own home) and the difficulty of keeping in contact with parents and carers of disadvantaged pupils, and food.

On a similar point, responses mentioned free school meals (FSM) as a challenge, especially in the early phases, noting the amount of additional work it required of staff ("the FSM vouchers have been far too time consuming") and the poor accessibility ("dealing with the school meal vouchers scheme. A major headache to set up. Extra costs incurred. When will they be reimbursed?").

A large proportion of respondents also raised the issue of safeguarding and concerns of safety for the whole school community, both those in the school building and those learning and teaching remotely.

Another significant challenge reported by governors and trustees was the engagement, or lack of engagement, from parents and pupils. Several respondents were concerned about the lack of contact from pupils and parents in relation to reporting on home-learning while some raised concerns about parents' ability to engage with their child's learning while dealing with their own unique challenges posed by the pandemic.

Other recurring themes included loss of educational momentum and the inequality of learning experiences. Many governors and trustees noted that the loss of learning was impacting their schools' momentum with regard to learning and curriculum. This was due to the disparity between the experiences pupils have/had learning at home with potentially long-lasting impacts which would extend beyond the period of lockdown.

Other cited challenges included the financial implications through loss of income from wraparound care or lettings and future unknown financial uncertainties and mixed messages from central government and local authorities and the general uncertainty regarding the future.

## Supporting pupils with SEND

22% of governors and trustees surveyed report that support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is one of the three top issues facing the school(s) they govern. A higher proportion of respondents governing special schools placed this as one of their top concerns (36%). This was followed by those in nursery settings (26%), primary settings (23%), alternative provisions (20%) and 16% of those governing in secondary settings.

Governors and trustees indicated methods their board uses to elevate the status of SEND provision in their schools.

1. A SEND governor/trustee liaises regularly with the school's SENCO and keeps the board informed: 87%
2. SEND provision is evaluated effectively alongside other priorities in its development plan: 79%
3. Ensures every member of the board is made aware of SEND matters: 78%
4. Monitors the SEND funding the schools receives (eg in a similar way as pupil premium funding): 67%
5. Ensures that pupils, parents and carers are actively involved in the assessment and decision-making process for pupils with SEND at all stages: 60%
6. One of the board's committees has the responsibility of liaising with the SENCO and keeps the board informed: 49%

Practice did vary by educational phase and setting as seen in figure 2, with those governing in special and alternative provision settings particularly more likely to take a whole board approach than placing this responsibility with one member of the governing board. 84% of governors/trustees in special schools reported that every member of the board is made aware of SEND matters and 94% of those governing in alternative provision settings. Respondents in these settings were also more likely to report that others such as pupils, parents and carers were actively involved in the assessment and decision-making process.

## Exclusions

Most governors and trustees surveyed had not sat on a governing board panel to review a permanent exclusion (66%) while those who had were most likely to have performed this task multiple times. 60% of governors and trustees who had been on a permanent exclusion panel had performed the role more than once. This was higher for those governing in secondary settings who typically have more pupils and therefore higher exclusion rates.

Of those who had sat on a panel to review an exclusion, 22% of governors and trustees reported that the panel had reinstated a pupil while 78% said they had not.

## Ethos, vision, and strategy

When asked to what extent their governing board was involved in the design of their school or trust's vision or strategy, nine in 10 governors and trustees indicated that they were either 'very involved' in a collaborative process between the board, school leaders and stakeholders (51%) or 'involved to an extent' in which vision and strategy is discussed but school leaders had a stronger influence (40%). However, 8% of governors and trustees reported being 'hardly or not at all involved' with the board performing a monitoring role while 2% admitted being unsure.

## Greener governance

When asked whether their governing board was doing anything in relation to climate change or environmental sustainability in their school, over two in five (44%) reported that their board had acted compared to 31% who reported that they had not. A quarter of those surveyed reported being unsure. When asked to expand upon the initiatives their board had launched, the most common responses were:

- Recycling including; recycling initiatives or improving recycling provision (eg approving the purchasing on recycling and compost bins), replacing playground

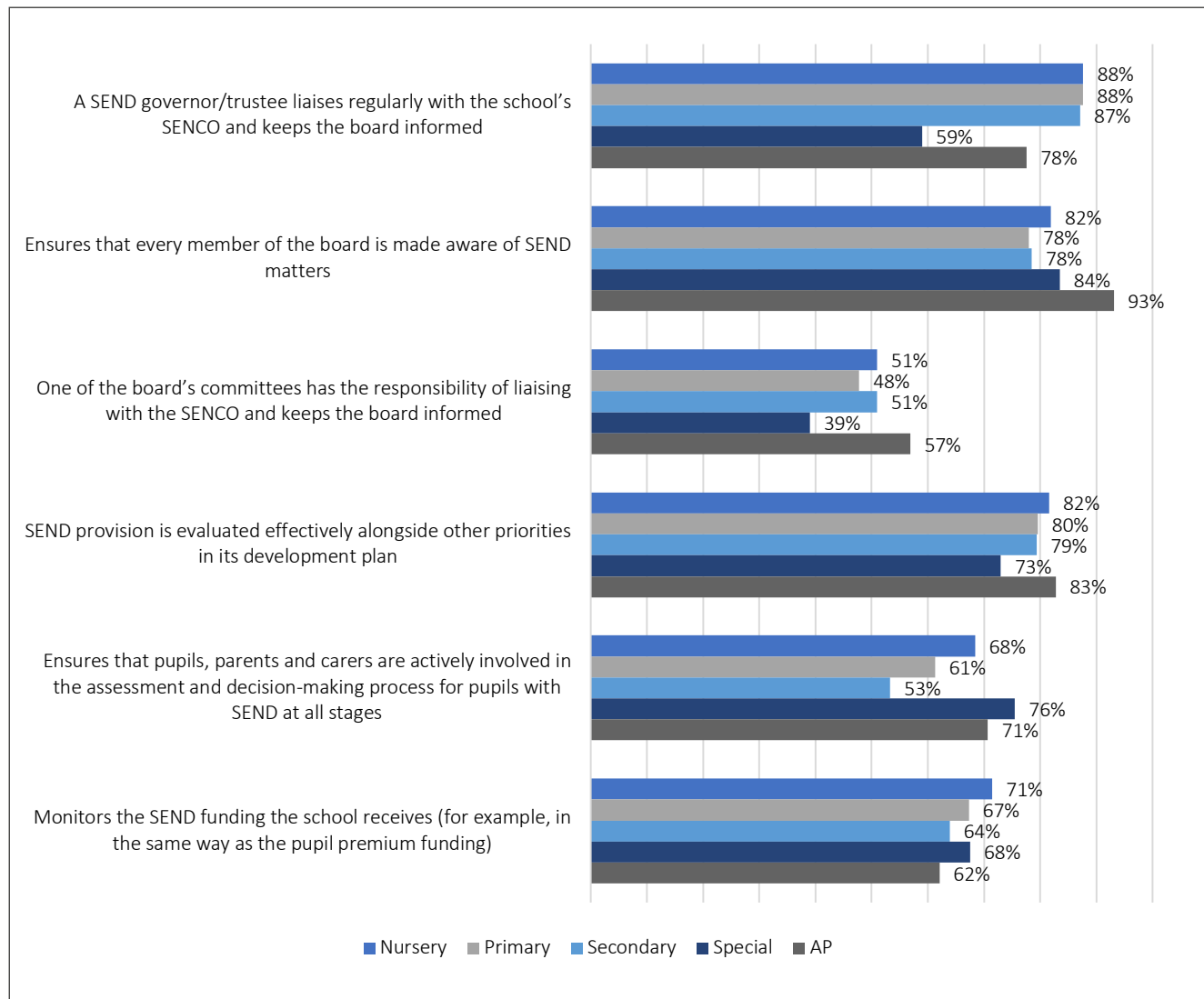


Figure 2, bar chart showing how respondents reported their board monitors and elevates the status of SEND in their school/trust

equipment with wooden or recyclable plastics, implementing a 'recycling and waste' policy encouraging recycling awareness and projects led by students/pupils on recycling such as eco clubs. A handful of respondents noted having a governor as an 'eco-link' to their school's environmental clubs/groups.

- Becoming more energy efficient; changing lighting in the school, reviewing provision of energy suppliers in search of 'greener' suppliers, replacing old windows to reduce the need for heating, installing solar panels. Many respondents also noted the financial benefit of becoming more energy efficient.
- Embedding climate change/sustainability into the curriculum to engage the school community on the impact of climate change. Some respondents noted 'outdoor learning' provision as a method of integrating the topic of sustainability into the curriculum.
- Other methods mentioned including phasing out the use of single plastics or becoming plastic free, ensuring that new builds are eco-friendly and energy efficient, using electronic board papers instead of physical ones and planting trees.

## Curriculum

Over a quarter of governors and trustees reported that ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum was one of the biggest challenges facing the school(s) they govern (28%). Governors and trustees were also asked to rank which factors were influential in the design and provision of the curriculum. Overall, respondents reported that the most to least influential factors were:

1. The organisation's vision and strategy
2. Changes to Ofsted's inspection framework
3. Performance measures
4. Changes to government policy
5. Funding constraints
6. Difficulties recruiting staff for certain subjects.

Board type and school phase did not impact the most and least influential factors and governors/trustees regardless of setting consistently placed their organisation's vision and strategy as the most influential factor. As seen in figure 3, secondary and alternative provision governors/trustees were more likely to report that funding constraints had impacted their curriculum compared with changes to Ofsted's inspection framework.

## Accountability and Ofsted

The vast majority of respondents agreed (54%) or strongly agreed (26%) that their most recent Ofsted inspection gave a fair and accurate picture of their school (80%) while just over one in ten disagreed (8%) or strongly disagreed (3%).

Despite most governors and trustees saying that their most recent Ofsted inspection gave a fair and accurate picture of their school, respondents were mixed about the overall impact of the inspection system on schools: 47% agreed or strongly agreed that the inspection system had a positive impact while 37% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Those who viewed their most recent Ofsted as unfair and inaccurate were more likely to disagree that the inspection system had a positive impact (73%). Meanwhile 54% of those who agreed that their most recent Ofsted was fair and accurate said that they also agreed that the inspection system had a positive impact on schools.

	Nursery	Primary	Secondary	Special	Alternative provision
#1	Organisation's vision and strategy	Organisation's vision and strategy	Organisation's vision and strategy	Organisation's vision and strategy	Organisation's vision and strategy
#2	Changes to Ofsted's inspection framework	Changes to Ofsted's inspection framework	Funding constraints	Changes to Ofsted's inspection framework	Funding constraints
#3	Performance measures	Performance measures	Performance measures	Funding constraints	Organisation's vision and strategy
#4	Changes in government policy	Changes in government policy	Changes to Ofsted's inspection framework	Changes in government policy	Changes in government policy
#5	Funding constraints	Funding constraints	Changes in government policy	Performance measures	Performance measures
#6	Difficulties recruiting staff for subjects	Difficulties recruiting staff for subjects	Difficulties recruiting staff for subjects	Difficulties recruiting staff for subjects	Difficulties recruiting staff for subjects

Figure 3, table showing which factors were the most and least influential on curriculum design of respondents' schools by school phase

## Governing boards and stakeholders

### Stakeholder engagement

The most popular method of engaging with stakeholders was through monitoring the results of surveys: the three most reported stakeholder engagement strategies were parent/carer surveys (86%), staff surveys (70%) and pupil surveys (69%). Surveys have increased in usage across the past five years, as shown in figure 4, while other methods of engagement such as observing the pupil/student council, contributing to the school newsletter/bulletin and holding staff consultations have fallen considerably in use.

Breaking these results down by stakeholder group shows that governing boards are not engaging with all groups equally. While 97% of governors/trustees reported that their board engages with parents, this fell to 83% for engaging with pupils while only 74% had engaged with staff. While how respondents are engaging with stakeholders appears mixed, 60% said they would support the introduction of ensuring effective engagement with stakeholders as a fourth core function for governing boards.

### Stakeholder perceptions of the role

Governors and trustees believe that stakeholders have a mixed understanding of their governance role, as seen in figure 5. While 92% of governors and trustees believe that senior leaders at their schools accurately understand and value their role, this fell to 78% for other members of school staff and only just over half felt that the wider education sector has an accurate understanding (53%).


Meanwhile only two in five respondents believe that parents have a good understanding of the role of governing boards (40%) which falls to just under a third for pupils within their school(s) (32%). A similar proportion agreed that other organisations such as employers and universities understood the role, despite these organisations being key to governance recruitment while the general public were seen as the group

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Monitoring results of a parent/carer survey	70%	73%	78%	73%	86%
Monitoring results of a pupil survey	52%	56%	61%	59%	69%
Monitoring results of a staff survey	51%	47%	59%	56%	70%
Met with or observed pupil/student council	71%	54%	54%	49%	49%
Invited pupils to attend governing board meetings	25%	20%	20%	18%	22%
Contributed to school newsletter/bulletin	61%	53%	53%	52%	47%
Attended parents' evenings	65%	59%	60%	57%	60%
Updated parents via the school website	69%	62%	62%	56%	56%
Held a staff consultation	77%	42%	47%	45%	27%
Held pupil focus groups	26%	18%	17%	16%	22%

Figure 4, table showing methods of stakeholder engagement across the years (2016 -2020)

that least understood and valued governance roles with less than one in five believing the public to have an accurate understanding or valuing their role (18%).

## Resources for governing boards



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:

- [Exclusions – guidance for governing boards](#)
- [Curriculum](#)
- [Being strategic: a guide for governing boards](#)
- [Creating a school vision](#)
- [SEND](#)
- [Questions for governing boards to ask: behaviour](#)
- [Questions for governing boards to ask: curriculum](#)
- [Questions for governing boards to ask: engaging parent](#)
- [COVID-19 recovery](#)
- [Parental engagement: a guide for governing boards](#)
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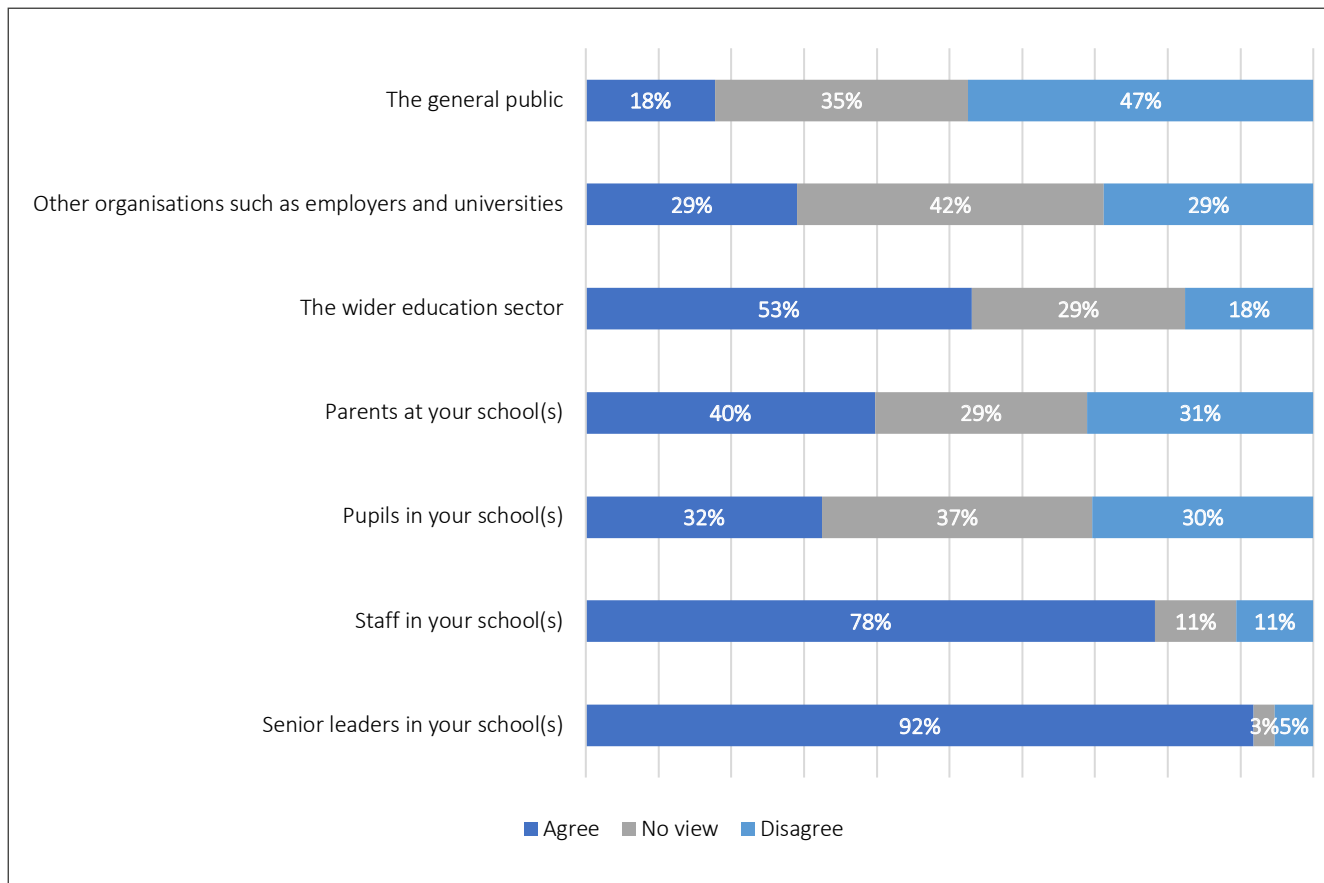


Figure 5, bar chart showing whether respondents agree or disagree their role is accurately understood and valued by different groups



# Methodology

The findings within this report are the results of a survey conducted between Tuesday 21 April and Tuesday 26 May 2020 through the online surveying website SmartSurvey. The survey was open to all governors, trustees, and academy committee members (often also called local governors) of state-funded schools in England and was distributed largely NGA's membership channels. We are also grateful to the partners, including local authorities and local governance associations, that distributed the survey through their own networks.

## Representativeness

While the survey obtains a large number of responses, it is still a relatively small sample of the total school governance population and relies on self-reported data from self-selecting participants, although the survey is completely anonymous to encourage individuals to share their thoughts and opinions freely. However, there are markers which indicate that the distribution of respondents and their school setting broadly matches the national picture by school phase, type, structure, and region.

As can be seen in figure 1, survey respondents of different school structures are closely in line with the proportion of local authority-maintained schools in England and academies within single or multi academy trusts while figure 2 shows survey there is largely proportional distribution across those governing in different phases. However, those governing in nursery settings are overrepresented and there is slightly

higher proportion of respondents governing in secondary settings and a slightly lower proportion of respondents governing in primaries compared to school distribution nationally. Survey respondents in all nine English regions are represented and are predominantly in line with the regional spread.

With regard to respondent type, the survey is skewed towards chairs of governing boards with just under a third of respondents reporting that they are chair or co-chair of their governing body (30%). 13% of respondents reported that they were vice-chair of their board while 54% were other governors/trustees. 3% of respondents reported that they were in ex-officio roles on their governing board (eg a senior executive leader). There was also a broad range of perspectives offered by those new to school governance and more experienced governors/trustees with 33% of respondents having governed for under two years while 27% had been governing for over eight years.

As the survey was dispersed predominantly through NGA's channels, 75% of respondents reported that they were members of NGA. Respondents governing academies within trusts (including single and multi academy trustees and academy committee members) were slightly more likely to report that they were NGA members than those governing in LA maintained schools (78% vs 73%). However, the views of NGA members and non-members are largely similar on of the majority of issues.

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

Figure 1, percentage of school structures within England compared with proportion of survey respondents within each structure

	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%

Figure 2, percentage of school within English regions compared with proportion of survey respondents within each region

	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%

Figure 3, percentage of schools of different phases and type compared with proportion of survey respondents within each phase/type

# 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.

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**Independent and confidential advice for GOLD members**

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