National Governance Association

The independent organisation for school governors, trustees and clerks

Leadership and staffing

School Governance 2020

www.nga.org.uk/governance2020

September 2020

Visible Governance in schools

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.

6,864
respondents engaged with the survey

In this series

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

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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.

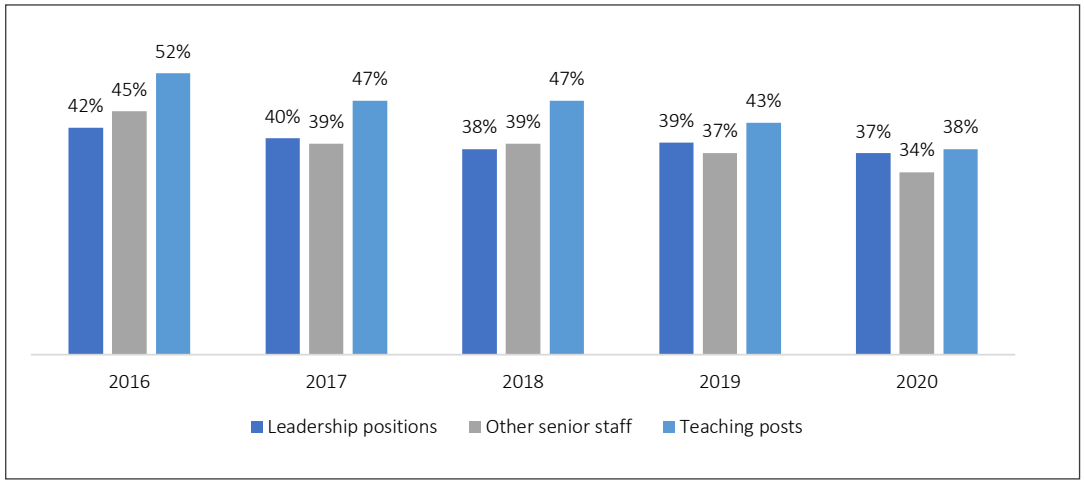

Figure 1, bar chart showing proportion of respondents who agree that recruitment for staff posts is difficult (2016 – 2020)

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.

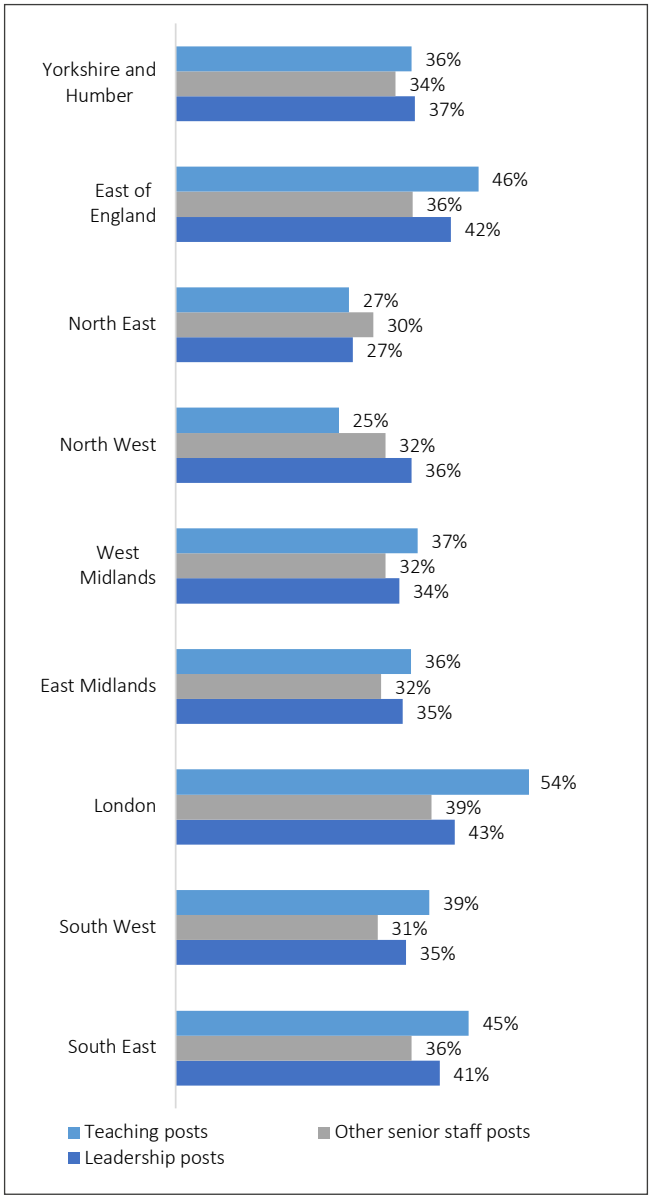

Figure 2, bar chart showing proportion of respondents who reported that recruitment for staff posts is difficult by region

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.

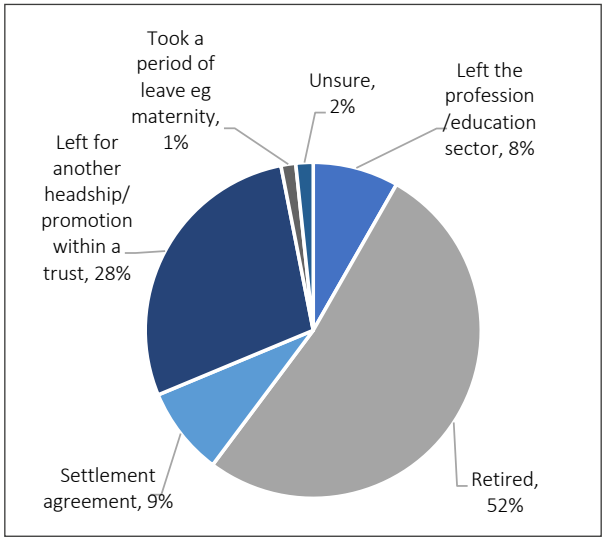

Figure 3, pie chart of respondents governing single schools or federations who had recruited for a new SEL within the past two years and why their predecessor had left

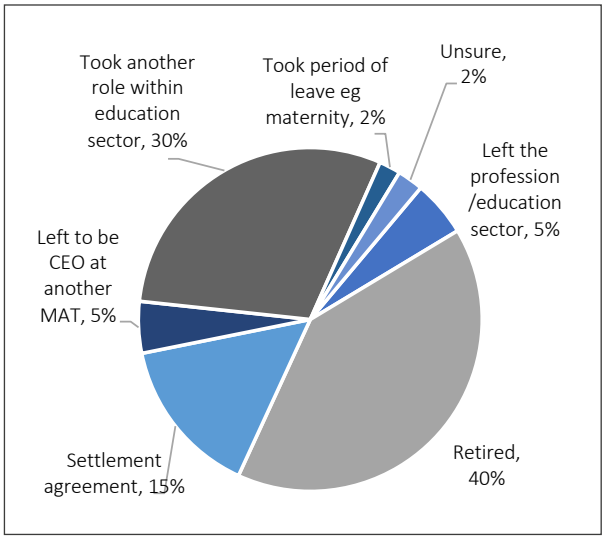

Figure 4, pie chart of respondents governing on MAT boards who had recruited for a new SEL within the past two years and why their predecessor had left

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 conservations, 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

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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

Methodology

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

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

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

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

About us

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

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

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

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

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Access at least £1,000 of Department for Education funding to support your governing board's development through NGA's Leading Governance programmes. Programmes include development for chairs, clerks, and boards and provide opportunities to develop skills and confident governance.

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n|g|a GOLDline

The NGA Advice Service

Independent and confidential advice for GOLD members

Our advice team is available to deal with any queries you may have, big or small. We provide advice on matters relating to: governance roles and responsibilities; admissions; exclusions; complaints; constitution of the board; conflicts of interest; multi academy trusts; and education law.

www.nga.org.uk/GOLDline