Education and Employers

Governing Our Schools 10 years on

What has changed in school and trust governance?

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Forewords

Dominic Judge, Director of Governance Programmes, Education and Employers

Over ten years ago Business in the Community (BITC) published their landmark report 'Governing our Schools'. The report was written by BITC's Director of Education Nick Chambers and his team for the National Council for Educational Excellence, which at the time was looking at how to make employer engagement in education easier and better for everyone involved.

It was a timely and insightful look at the state of school governance in 2008 and many of its recommendations still apply in education today. Fast forward ten years to 2018/19 and there has been a seismic shift in schools and academies, raising a wide range of new and continuing issues for the future of governance in our increasingly diverse schools and communities. This study aims to take a comparative look back at the main trends in governance arising over the last decade in England's schools and reflects on what they might mean for educationalists, stakeholders and policy makers into the next decade.

The report has been undertaken by the research team at Education and Employers and has drawn on interviews undertaken with a wide range of knowledgeable stakeholders currently undertaking and representing school and academy governance. It has been kindly funded by our main corporate sponsor Bank of America and there continues to be much to learn from looking at improving governance across the education, charity and corporate sectors. All three sectors have a strong commitment to ensuring UK society thrives and that schools bring through a generation of well-educated, resilient and employable young people. It is clear from this report, that employers of all sizes support school governance and recognise the chance it brings to make a civic difference in local communities and to develop staff professionally and personally.

The commitment of employers has been very evident in the Inspiring Governance recruitment service, run by the Education and Employers charity in partnership with the National Governance Association and funded by the Department for Education. Inspiring Governance aims to recruit more skilled volunteers into school and academy governance. We would like to thank all employers who support and encourage their staff/members to govern; from blue chips to small and medium enterprises, charities to the self-employed, universities, hospitals, local authorities and the civil service through to schools and academies themselves. Schools could not function without your civic altruism.

The importance of working collectively to get school governance right should not be understated as, whilst it is often harder to prove the link between effective governance and school performance, organisational failure almost **always** reflects a failure of governance. This link between failure of governance and failure of the organisation is true in education, charities and companies. Our hope at Education and Employers is that **this 10-year** comparison piece stimulates thought and debate around the trends over the last decade and that it sits alongside the relentless day after day, week after week work undertaken by stakeholders and policy teams to improve school governance for the next generation.

Dominic Judge
Director of Governance Programmes
Director of Education and Employers Charity

Emma Knights OBE
Chief Executive, National Governance Association

The National Governance Association is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and clerks of state schools in England. We are an independent, not-for-profit charity that aims to improve the educational standards and wellbeing of young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. We are expert leaders in school governance, providing information, advice and guidance, professional development and e-learning. Ten years ago, we were a very new organisation.

It is pleasing that the report concludes that the different roles and responsibilities of governors and trustees are now much clearer. Governors and trustees are much more informed and knowledgeable about their role, have a heightened sense of responsibility and are more focused on school strategy than they were ten years ago. This is progress.

Given the development of multi academy trusts, it is inevitable that over the past decade the roles and responsibilities of governors and trustees have not been simplified, but in some cases become more complex. Governing schools is not simple; it is never going to be. Achieving the right balance of support and challenge for school leaders is an art. I am pleased the report recognises the importance of the role of clerk to the governing board.

NGA supports the volunteers that are matched with schools through Inspiring Governance. This report from Education and Employers underlines in triplicate the importance of quality induction, and also ongoing development and support, for those who govern our state schools. It was interesting that making induction training mandatory was one of the few areas where there was clear and unified agreement from all interviewees. This too is what the NGA finds in our extensive annual governance survey. The Department for Education is currently reviewing its support for the governance community, and I very much hope this message is heard in the corridors of power. Funding should be found for this, and not rely on whether an individual school or trust understands its importance. Magistrates are not allowed on the bench until they have been trained, and there are numerous other examples within the voluntary sector of mandatory training. Surely the oversight of our schools deserves the same.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have volunteered over this past decade and those who continue to do. Thank you for your contribution, your enthusiasm, your tenacity. At any one time there are a quarter of a million people donating their time and skills for the benefit of pupils, and every year we will need to replace those who move on with new recruits. That is healthy. We need to ensure boards are strong and diverse, a team of people who between them bring a diverse range of knowledge, experience, perspectives and skills. We have been heartened by the reception of our two joint campaigns: Everyone on Board aiming to increase the diversity of ethnicity and age, and Educators on Board to encourage educationalists to share their expertise by volunteering at another school or trust. The support of their employers is invaluable.

We do need to take note that interviewees felt that increasingly, new and existing governors are put off from volunteering due to the increasing pressures of the role and perceived negative press that governance receives when linked to school failure. Of course we cannot return to the days when some were not entirely honest with potential volunteers in order to entice them to take on this responsible role. Instead we need to re-double our efforts to shout about the many benefits to those who volunteer as well as to the communities they serve. NGA intends to continue to do this throughout the coming decade, and take every opportunity to celebrate the work done by governors and trustees

Emma Knights OBE
Chief Executive, National Governance Association

Amanda Mackenzie OBE
Chief Executive, Business in the Community

The power to drive change is in our hands and young people today
are more aware of that now than they've ever been. They want to see
companies with a social purpose, taking responsibility beyond their bottom
line and making a difference in their communities. They care about their
futures and they deserve proof that we do too.

It's a stark reality that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are half
as likely to get crucial GCSE grades than their wealthier peers; that's a huge
amount of talent going to waste because they're fighting a constant uphill
battle. We must give them a fair chance of thriving because without these
children reaching their full potential society misses out on a whole generation
of talented future leaders and employees.

UK businesses are perfectly placed to nurture this pool of talent. We've seen
businesses offering vital work experience and preparing young people for
the world of work; teaching new skills, inspiring them and boosting their
confidence. This involvement is key to addressing the skills gap, developing
the pipeline of future workers and boosting the personal development of the
employees themselves. There's potential for real positive impact.

In order to innovate and strengthen the education system we need businesses
to build close relationships with schools through voluntary schemes,
governance roles and education partnerships. Since our last report over
10 years ago we've certainly seen progress, but businesses must support
and encourage those who choose to give back to the community by giving
volunteers greater flexibility and allowing the time for training – this way they
can truly commit to making a difference. The more businesses support the
education of young people, the greater our chances of driving long overdue
change throughout the UK education system.

Amanda Mackenzie OBE
Chief Executive, Business in the Community

Executive summary

In 2008 Business in the Community (BITC) undertook a detailed report into school and academy governance called '*Governing Our Schools*'. Now, ten years on, the research team at Education and Employers have revisited some of the themes that emerged from that earlier report a decade ago. Here are our main findings:

Main findings

1. Clarity of Purpose

a) The different roles and responsibilities of governors and trustees are much clearer than ten years ago. Governors and trustees are much more informed and knowledgeable about their role, have a heightened sense of responsibility and are more focused on school strategy.

b) Although clearer, the roles and responsibilities of governors and trustees have not been simplified in the last ten years. The emergence of new models of school and academy governance and the varying degrees of local governing board autonomy in Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) have made some roles more complex.

2. Skills/Composition

a) Since 2008, there has been an ongoing push to value governors with professional skills. Participants in the study welcomed the increased focus on skills but felt that the DfE's competency framework is too prescriptive and does not guarantee governors will be effective in their roles.

b) Interviewees were predominantly in favour of achieving the right balance between skills and community representation, referred to as the 'stakeholder plus' model of governance.

c) Diversity on governing boards, particularly in terms of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) representation, has not seen much change in the last ten years.

d) Interviewees identified a third set of skills important to governance that they suggested were additional to professional skills and stakeholder representation. These they deemed as skills of 'leadership' and 'governance' itself.

3. Recruitment

a) School governance itself is now much better publicised and there are more pathways for volunteers to become a governor. Initiatives like Inspiring Governance, Academy Ambassadors and Governors for Schools were praised by interviewees for helping to support boards in their governor and trustee recruitment.

b) It is still more difficult for schools in rural and disadvantaged communities to recruit governors than the more urban and well-connected areas of the country.

4. Recognition

a) Interviewees felt that increasingly, new and existing governors are put off from volunteering due to the increasing pressures of the role and perceived negative press that governance receives when linked to school/MAT failure.

5. Clerking

a) While training and guidance has improved, it is still hard to recruit professional clerks to school boards. Many schools still use a member of the school's administrative staff as the board's clerk.

6. Training and Induction

a) Training and induction for school governors has improved. However, the uptake of governor training is varied according to the availability of training, school geography, school budget and whether the chair encourages it.

b) The majority of interviewees favoured making induction training mandatory.

c) Interviewees called for more ongoing training and CPD taking place once governors are in post.

7. Employers

a) There was unanimous agreement that volunteering as a school governor was beneficial for both volunteers and their employers.

b) Larger employers encourage school governing more formally (through volunteering policies and paid time off) than small and medium sized enterprises, who are more informally supportive.

c) The growth of self-employment has not significantly impacted governor recruitment.

8. Funding

a) Interviewees felt that changes to school funding in the last ten years have negatively impacted school governance. There was wide agreement that it is now harder for governors to balance the school budget without cutting Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provision, closing sixth forms, spending less on teacher CPD or making posts redundant.

9. Accountability and Ofsted

a) More emphasis has been placed on the accountability of school governors since 2008.

b) Ofsted has placed more emphasis and inspection on governing boards in the last ten years, but interviewees felt inspectors do not seem to adequately understand the role/contribution of governors.

c) Ofsted are limited in their ability to inspect academies without being able to adequately assess the governance structures of multi-academy trusts.

10. Technology

a) Perhaps not unexpectedly, governing boards are embracing new forms of technology to support meetings and to keep connected between meetings (such as conference calls and Skype).

b) Governing boards are also using new technology to support the business of their board such as e-mailing papers, document sharing platforms, online recruitment services and online e-learning.

Recommendations

As part of the research process interviewees were made aware of the original recommendations from the previous *Governing our Schools* report (see appendix 1). When asked to propose solutions for some of the issues raised in this later report *Governing our Schools: 10 years on*, interviewees often cited recommendations that had been made in the previous report. The following are our recommendations today:

For the Government and Governing Boards:

1. Clarity of Purpose

1.1) Greater clarity needs to be given to volunteers about the widening range of governing and trustee roles. For example, the differences between governing within a local authority-maintained school, governor in a foundation school, acting as a trustee or member within a MAT and of becoming a governor within a MAT's academy committees/local governing boards.

1.2) There should be an aim to share practice and achieve greater consistency around the terminology and practice of governing in an academy committee/local governing body of a MAT. This role has emerged in the last decade and varies significantly between MATs.

1.3) Further work should be undertaken to share best practice in all types of school governance (maintained, Single Academy Trust, Multi-Academy Trust, Foundation) and more research is needed around increasingly important elements of governance such as how the system shares governance good practice, good schemes of delegation and governing for financial sustainability.

1.4) Further guidance is required to support headteachers and governing boards to agree the right data from the school executive to enable governors/trustees to fulfil their strategic role around holding the executive to account and setting executive pay. This guidance needs to keep pace with or precede changes in the school/academy system.

2. Composition of Governing Bodies

2.1) The focus on smaller, skills based governing bodies has been beneficial but with the growth of larger MATs there is a need to investigate and define a more nuanced 'stakeholder plus' model of governance, that better blends skills with representation.

2.2) The DfE governor competency framework is too long and should be shortened and revised to better articulate the leadership and governance skills that are needed to govern, alongside the range of professional skills such as finance, procurement and HR.

2.3) Achieving race diversity on governing boards over the last decade has been hard to achieve with governing bodies increasingly unrepresentative of the school populations for which they govern. Efforts need to be increased significantly in order to achieve better representation and more diverse thinking by characteristics such as age and ethnicity.

2.4) Governing bodies themselves need to think wider than a basic skills audit to ensure they have the right representation and leadership skills on their boards, including educational skills.

3. Recruitment and placement

3.1) Recruiting governors remains challenging. There should continue to be a wide range of nationally provided routes that skilled volunteers can use to become a governor or academy trustee. Further effort and investment need to be made in supporting recruitment and induction in areas that suffer a lack of 'governance capital' such as rural and socio-economically disadvantaged areas. This should also cover governor roles that have a more limited pool to draw from such as foundation governors for schools of a religious character.

3.2) Governing boards should be supported to become far more professional and strategic in the way they approach their recruitment and succession planning. Equipping governing boards to succession plan for the increasingly demanding role of Chair of Governors/Trustees is particularly important and will require more definite measures to ensure better continuity and stability.

4. Recognition

Greater public recognition should be given to the importance of serving as a school governor/academy trustee and the work done by governors should be more publicly celebrated. More practical and detailed examples of excellent governance should be generated, inspiring governing bodies to improve their own practice.

5. Clerking

Good governance is built on sound advice and understanding of process. The clerking competency framework should be retained and updated to reflect the differences between maintained schools and academies, most of whom are constituted as charitable companies. All schools and academies should have professional (and where possible independent) clerking/company secretary support. Clerks training should continue to be funded by the DfE and further consideration given to measures that could address the reported shortage of professional clerks.

6. Training and Induction

6.1) Governor/Trustee induction training should be mandatory to ensure new governors/trustees understand their distinct role and can operate effectively to ensure they focus on their strategic role. With the increased diversity of governance roles, there should be moves to stimulate a market in more diverse and tailored training to avoid one size fits all approaches and improve governing boards for their specific context.

6.2) In addition to formal and online training, governing boards should consider more informal training and support for new appointments including peer mentoring and personal development sessions with more experienced governors to quickly establish and grow positive relationships. Governors should be provided with glossaries of educational terminology and acronyms as this was regarded as a significant barrier to making early contributions to the governing boards' work.

Recommendations

7. Accountability

Ofsted should ensure all Inspectors understand with clarity the purpose of school and academy governance to ensure consistency of inspection.

8. Approaches to meetings and new technology

Governing Boards should consider less traditional approaches to board and committee meetings and aim to maximise the availability of their membership by considering the times that they meet and the use of new technology (e.g. Skype and conference calls) to support meeting connectivity. This could also include approaches to document sharing via platforms and undertaking online training modules.

For Employers:

9. Civic and Corporate Social Responsibility commitment

9.1) Employers of every size and in every sector should be encouraged to support their employees to serve as school governors/academy trustees, supporting closer links with their local schools and communities. Consideration should be given to the launch of a national pledge and simple actions that employers can easily sign up to, to publicly express their support for school governance.

9.2) Employers should actively promote the opportunity to govern via their intranets, internal communications channels and staff noticeboards. Employers should also be encouraged, through their approach to volunteering, to support governors to undertake relevant training for the role and secure appropriate time off to govern (preferably paid). Larger employers should consider establishing governor support networks across their organisations.

10. Professional development

Employers should be encouraged to position the undertaking of school governance as a part of their formal professional development and talent management offers to staff. This could include reviews of the skills gained from being a governor as part of regular performance management reviews. Employers of size could further consider creating internal governor networks through which staff can share experiences and best practice.

11. Research and Recognition

The government should invest in further research to understand the financial contribution made by UK employers to the UK economy through governance. It should also research the return 'skills gain' that employers receive from supporting their staff to govern. To date only relatively small-scale studies have been undertaken. Employers should give greater recognition to their employees who are supporting the education of young people in their local communities by serving as a governor or trustee.

① Introduction

School Governance has changed significantly over the last 10 years. The most far-reaching change has been the diversification of English schools to include free schools, single academy trusts and multi-academy trusts (MATs). Academies now educate over 50% of our school age pupils and this complex and fast-evolving picture of school ownership has sparked the development of new governance structures, roles and practices.

Correspondingly there has been a reduction in local authority education funding, leading to a more 'geographically' variable range of governor services available to the majority of our schools – maintained primaries. Add in the long-standing need for foundation governors to uphold the faith and beliefs within schools of a religious character and Anglican and Catholic dioceses establishing their own MATs and you have potentially the most dynamic governance environment for a generation.

Against this backdrop of rapid change, the following research report *Governing our Schools: 10 years on*, is an in-depth look at the evolution in school and academy governance and the issues arising over a decade since Business in the Community launched their original 2008 report: *Governing our Schools*.

The original report was written by BITC's Director of Education Nick Chambers and his team for the National Council for Educational Excellence; a committee chaired by the Prime Minister which brought together senior leaders from education and business to grapple with the question of how to make employer engagement in education easier and better for everyone involved.

The report made its recommendations following extensive consultations and based on the findings of research that the then chair of BITC's Education Leadership Team – Bob Wigley, commissioned. Bob who was also chair of Merrill Lynch (*Merrill Lynch merged with*

Bank of America in 2009) was keen to see how best employers could contribute to school governance and asked Professor Chris James and colleagues at the University of Bath to undertake a series of in-depth interviews, complemented by a literature review to identify key themes.

Researchers from the charity Education and Employers have used the original 2008 report and the research undertaken by Professor Chris James and his colleagues at the University of Bath as a reference.

Accordingly, we look at the high-level changes that have taken place over the last decade against the similar themes of: clarity of governing purpose; composition and skills of the board; governor recruitment and training; and the involvement of employers.

In addition, we also raise new themes around governance not covered 10 years ago, including the impact of school funding changes, accountability changes and the rise of technology. All these changes raise questions about how we support the exchange of governance best practice; the governance language that we use; the support and guidance that we give governors/trustees; and the skilled people that we need to volunteer as governors and trustees.

The new report then seeks not to look at week by week, year by year incremental changes in governance, but to understand and describe the high-level trends that have taken place over this last decade, including what they might mean for school and academy governance, and for policy makers, now and into the next decade.
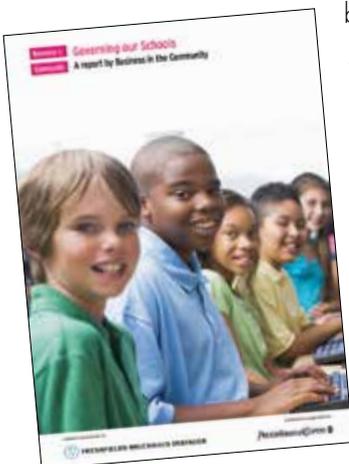
2 How we undertook the research

This research looks at the trends in the school governance landscape over the past 10 years. It does so by looking at the leading academic and non-academic research papers which highlighted the changes in the status of the school governance and conducting telephone interviews with 19 experts with extensive experience and knowledge in this area.

Literature review

The literature review search was conducted using Google Scholar and personal libraries to include both academic and so-called 'grey' literature. The team then assessed the relative value of available literature to assess whether individual pieces warranted inclusion. Literature was also drawn from extensive personal and university libraries within the research team, as well as a desktop review of literature from a network of academic partnerships and key advisers.

Interviews with experts

Views from 19 stakeholders with a specific interest in and experience of school governance were gathered through telephone interviews. We agreed respondents' views would remain anonymous, but stakeholders included a credible mix of those representing national organisations and those from the world of work practicing as chairs – in a range of locations, phases, and school types, including academies, maintained schools and those of a religious character. It is not a widespread empirical study. Results of the interviews were used to challenge and/or complement the findings of the literature review, in particular the policy documents and reports by professional bodies. The interview schedule can be found in **Appendix 2**.

Focus group with BELMAS members

During the BELMAS Governing and Governance in Education Research Interest Group Meeting in November 2018 the team at Education and Employers had the opportunity to use one of the sessions to conduct a focus groups with the attendees. During this session the attendees, mostly with extensive experience in this field, responded to a range of pre-designed questions in order to share their views on the changes to school governance in the past 10 years.

Abbreviations

Throughout this report we use a number of well-known abbreviations but for clarity a select few are listed below. The National Governance Association also has freely available glossary on its main website for new governors and trustees from outside the education sector.

MAT   Multi Academy Trust (there is current debate about whether we should move away from this term but for this report we use the term interchangeably with academy trust).

DfE   Department for Education

NGA   National Governance Association

BITC   Business in the Community

BELMAS   British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society

SEND   Special educational needs and disability

3 Main findings

3.1 Clarity of Purpose

Headline findings: The role of a governor/trustee is clearer than it was 10 years ago and there is a much better understanding of its strategic purpose. However, the role is also more complex due to heightened accountability and operating within a much more diverse landscape of school type. Governance roles are thus different depending on the different setting in which they are undertaken.

IN THE PAST: 2008

The 2008 report recommended that the role of the governing body should be **clarified** and **simplified** to ensure that governors remain focused on strategic direction and do not become embroiled in the day-to-day management of schools. Respondents to the 2008 study placed a clear understanding of the board's role and responsibilities as the most important attribute of effective governing bodies. The study also argued that the roles and responsibilities of a governor had been described ambiguously in policy documents and regulations, which as a result, had led to overcomplication and variation in the interpretation of policy and practice of governing bodies (pg. 63).

Since 2008 the DfE have brought clarity to the role of a governing body through a number of iterations and updates to the DfE's *Governance Handbook*, with the role of a governing body articulated in the latest 2019 version as:

• Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;

• Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the effective and efficient performance management of staff and;

• Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent.

WHAT HAS CHANGED: 2018

There is a positive story to tell in 2018, with **everyone indicating that there is an improved understanding of school and academy governance**. In the words of one respondent,

'The DfE has done a lot to produce a lot of guidance, the academies (financial) handbook is useful, the various frameworks have brought clarity.'

1) Participants in the focus group ranked the 'roles and responsibilities of governors' as the area in which the most progress has been made since 2008. The group felt that **governors were much more knowledgeable about their role, had a heightened sense of responsibility and were more focused on school strategy**.

2) Interviewees in the wider research agreed that **the role and responsibilities of school governors are much clearer than ten years ago**. Notable developments that were cited as helping this improved clarity included the following:

• Successive Ofsted Inspection frameworks introducing a tougher assessment of school governance, placing more emphasis on the responsibility of governors in setting strategic direction and holding the senior leadership to account than previous Ofsted frameworks. (Baxter 2017)

• Interviewees felt that improvements in induction training and the wealth of materials provided to new governors had made the role much clearer. Many of the changes were introduced after 2012 to complement the greater importance of governance in policy. This included the governor competency and clerking frameworks and the strong clarification work undertaken by governance associations such as the NGA.

3) In the original 2008 study, use of the phrase *'critical friend'* to describe the relationship between governors and headteachers was seen as unhelpful and open to interpretation. Interviewees felt that in 2018 we had moved beyond this and the relationship was now clearer –

'People used to have the impression that boards were a cosy group of people that got together now and then and sign off what the head is doing. I think there's probably more of an understanding that the role is about holding the school leadership to account.'

However, achieving universal ability in the system to hold executive leaders to account continued to cause concern among respondents. Interviewees felt there needed to be more consistency around the **governing boards' varying abilities to hold the senior leadership team to account; undertake performance management; and make consequent decisions on Headteacher/Principal pay**.

4) Interviewees felt that, although recent iterations of the Ofsted framework had helped place more of a spotlight on holding the school executive to account, **some governing boards were still not getting adequate information from the school's executive to do so**. This also correlates with recent governor surveys, with the NGA/TES 2018 survey finding that, "a considerable number of governors were not receiving enough relevant information from the headteacher to hold them to account for their performance. Moreover, the objectives of the headteacher or other lead executive were shared with only 81% of respondents' governing boards." (NGA/TES, 2018, 39).

N.B. It does appear though that DfE **policy makers are now better aware of the issue of holding school leaders to account**, with the DfE recently introducing guidance for governing boards on what data they should be receiving from the school leadership team. DfE advice on setting executive pay in academies has also been recently released. The 2018 interviews were conducted before the release of this advice (2019), so we cannot report on how the advice has been received and used.

Figure 1

Source DfE (2018) Open academies and projects awaiting approval as of 1 September 2018,

www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-academies-and-academy-projects-in-development

Total number of Academies in England 2008-2018
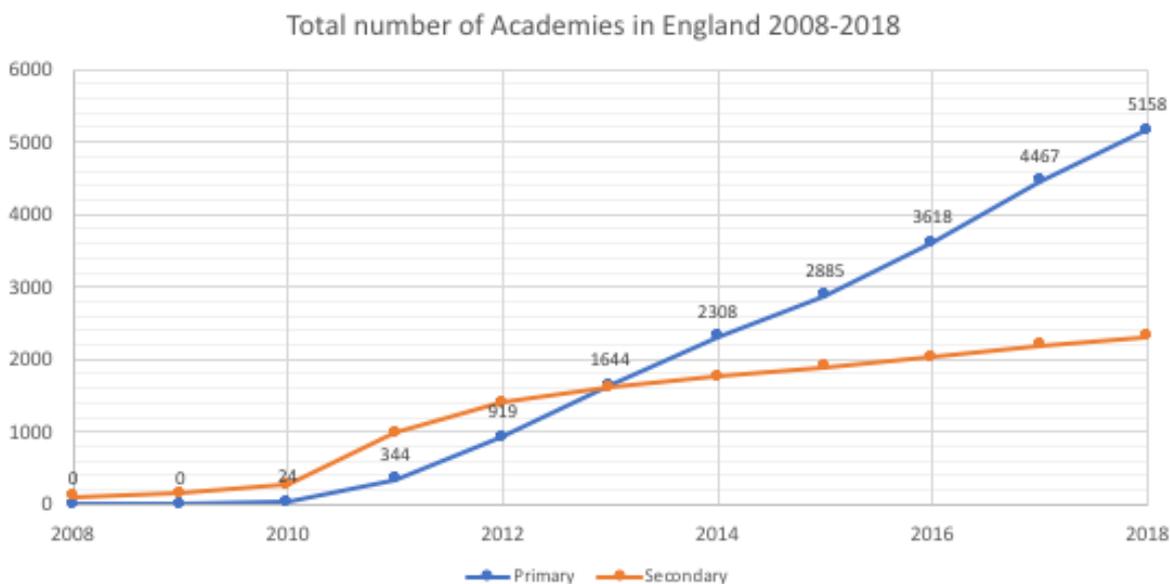
3.1.1 Multi-academy trusts and the complexity in governing boards

In the 2008 study there were virtually no primary academies and a relatively small number of secondary academies. These were the Labour Government's 'sponsored' academies or those that had emerged from the City Technology Colleges (CTCs). There were also a small but growing number of federation arrangements.

As a consequence of successive governments' academy conversion policies since 2010, there has been a significant increase in the number of academies in England (Figure 1). This growth in academies has in turn led to a growth in the phenomena of multi-academy trusts, where multiple schools exist under a single decision-making board of trustees, with each school within the MAT often having a local governing body or academy committee with reduced devolved powers, set out in a 'scheme of delegation'. **This emergence of MATs has brought new and varying models of school governance**. (Salokangas & Chapman, 2014). The National Governance Association has recently produced their research *Moving MATS forward: the power of governance*, to support the system with the issues raised by new governance structures.

With over 50% of pupils now educated in an academy, interviewees felt that the **growth in multi academy trusts (MATs) has been the single most significant ('seismic') change in the governance landscape since 2008** – particularly in the secondary sector. These changes over the last ten years have required governors to consider the benefits of becoming or joining a multi-academy trust, sometimes with a lack of readily available advice and guidance, as traditional local authority support services have correspondingly reduced during this period *'The systems around governance that support it seem to be weaker than ever as LA structures and capacity is weaker.'*

It has also required governors to broaden their skills to successfully steward their school through the legal, financial, cultural and stakeholder changes involved in taking a school from maintained to academy status. Four main issues emerged from our interviews:

1) Many interviewees and focus group participants from BELMAS were concerned that there is still **not enough understanding amongst volunteers considering becoming a governor about the difference between governing in a maintained school, governing in a foundation/voluntary aided school, or governing as a trustee of a MAT**. Fundamental differences were highlighted by interview respondents, such as MATs being constituted under charitable company law with volunteers on the MAT's board of trustees having significantly more responsibilities and risks to manage. The MAT board of trustees are now the employers of teachers and staff working for their trust (as the governing body is for VA schools), compared to other maintained schools, where ultimately the employer is the local authority.

It was felt that both 'academisation' and tougher Ofsted frameworks have increasingly shifted the autonomy for school improvement from a state to a non-state matter and that potential volunteers needed to understand this. Changes in policy and practice have created what Keddie (2015) describes in the research literature as 'the proliferation of new players or stakeholders who are now responsible for schools and school governing – businesses, state agencies, social enterprises, trusts and faith groups".

2) Not all interviewees were confident that the **guidance on governance coming from the DfE could necessarily keep pace** with the rapidity and dynamism of these changes in the school system. It has always had the challenge of guidance for non-secular schools and schools of a religious character but the DfE is now presented with the additional challenge of providing advice and guidance to support governance across both MATs and maintained schools. In the words of one interviewee,

'the Governance Handbook conflates academy governance and maintained school governance, that's wrong minded. Trustees have legal responsibilities like a charity board that maintained bodies don't have.'

3

Another example was around the new roles within MAT governance and in particular the member role, *'There are areas that haven't matured such as the member role. People kind of don't know what to do in that role and who should be taking that role. More trusts should be sharing what is working and not working about their member structure.'*

3) Many interviewees and BELMAS focus group members felt that, in addition to volunteers not having enough understanding of the difference between governing in MATs and maintained schools, **the structures and language of MAT governance arrangements varied greatly between different MATs themselves.** *'It has become much harder to identify what the term governor means, especially when you have some MATs that still use it and others that have moved away. I've worked in both, so I have some local governing bodies doing the same work but with two different sector languages.'*

While there was an agreement that there had been an ongoing improvement in the quality and consistency of schemes of delegation across MATs, interviewees felt that **different trusts varied greatly in how good the trustee board and executive were at outlining the expectations and accountabilities of the trust board and their local governing boards.** *'We need be clear that when a school joins a MAT, they do lose governance power within the school. Any trust not clear about that causes problems. If the trust is clear about schemes of delegation and values the governance work done on a local level, then the MAT can benefit. If there is lack of clarity, then people feel under threat.'*

4) Related to this apparent variance within and between MATs, there was a prevailing view from interviewees that, **whilst academisation was expected to improve freedom and autonomy, the reality of this is inconclusive and depends on the approach and ethos of the individual MAT**. There was a view that some operate very tight models of governance and executive control while others have progressive systems of 'earned autonomy' for their schools/local governing bodies. In essence, **the extent to which a MAT will allow local governing bodies to have certain powers is complex and varies considerably.**

'They (the MAT) are the accountable body and the decision making body. I think where it has massively changed is at that local level. If you're on a local committee body you're not the accountable body and any powers you have to make decision rests at the behest of the trust board. That was massively misunderstood previously and today in certain contexts.'

This variability in autonomy within and between MATs is backed up by some of the research literature and Ofsted's findings through their school inspections: "One key argument supporting the academies programme has been the freedom and autonomy to be gained from academy status. However, our findings indicate that autonomy to experiment and make local decisions without sponsor permission varies considerably within chains as well as between chains" (Salokangas & Chapman, 2014). The Ofsted Inspection Handbook 2018 states: "In some other cases, there may be a local governing body that is wholly advisory, with no formal governance responsibilities delegated to it".

5) Whilst there was clearly a universal view from interviewees that academisation had led to new demands on governors/trustees **there were mixed feelings about how pronounced these differences actually were and whether this was positive or negative for volunteers looking to become governors**: *'I'm a governor in both a MAT and a maintained school and governance is governance. There is more autonomy in academies if you choose to take it but there aren't many MATs that have gone too far from LA practice'.* Some interviewees however, felt that a trustee role on the board of a MAT was significantly different and would be an attractive development role for volunteers, where others felt it might be more daunting. *'Absolutely there's a difference between MATs and maintained schools in terms of governance, I'm a governor in one of each. I love being in a MAT, I love the transparency and very clear expectations of you. One of the issues I find in maintained schools is unless there is a major problem you don't necessarily know if you're doing a good job. My experience of MATs is that they require you to be better. There is more*

'They (the MAT) are the accountable body and the decision making body. I think where it has massively changed is at that local level. If you're on a local committee body you're not the accountable body and any powers you have to make decision rests at the behest of the trust board. That was massively misunderstood previously and today in certain contexts.'

accountability as a governor in a MAT'. There were again **varied views on the experience of governing on a local governing board/academy committee within a MAT** between those who felt it was a reduced (and therefore a less attractive role) with those who felt that having less responsibilities could be positive for many volunteers who had limited time to give: *"For some people, not having to worry about HR policies is an absolute godsend, they can focus on monitoring curriculum and standards".*

N.B. Since these interviews were completed and the literature review undertaken there has been another version of the DfE's Academies Financial Handbook updated and released for 2019: www.gov.uk/guidance/academies-financial-handbook. The National Governance Association have also released their detailed publication Moving MATs forward: the power of governance which deals with many of the current governance issues arising in MATs and how good governance can take MATs forward: www.nga.org.uk/Knowledge-Centre/research-(1)/Moving-MATs-forward-the-power-of-governance.aspx

3.2 Composition of governing bodies and skills frameworks

Headline findings: Governing boards are smaller and more based on governors' professional skills. However, these skills don't always guarantee effectiveness and wider leadership and governance skills are needed. Skills and representation are not seen as mutually exclusive. The diversity of governing boards remains an issue and requires concerted action to address this into the future.

The 2008 study was critical of what it described as the historical model of governance, which largely represented stakeholder groups such as parents, local authorities and the community. This view of governance representation had been influenced primarily from the 1977 Taylor report; which argued that the interests of teaching staff, parents and past pupils needed to reflect the constitution of governing bodies.[1] The 2008 report felt that constantly trying to achieve this 'representative governance' might be at the expense of governing boards securing the full requisite set of skills they might need in increasingly important areas such as for example, financial and legal scrutiny, estate management and marketing.

The 2008 report suggested that, 'a governing body should be required to undertake a standardised skills audit and performance self-assessment annually. Ofsted should, inter alia, review and comment on these in its inspections.' Since the 2008 report, and in consultation with key governance stakeholders like the National Governance Association, the DfE has released a new Competency Framework for Governance. This statutory guidance sets out the competencies required of governors, helping to guide recruitment, self-evaluation and Ofsted inspections. (DfE 2017).

1. Taylor Report (1977) A New Partnership for our Schools.

What has emerged from our 2018 interviews ten years on is that, alongside a continued rigorous focus on having the right skills on governing boards, there is a more nuanced view emerging from stakeholders regarding what exact mix of representation and skills constitute 'good governance'. In addition to professional skills, interviewees highlighted the growing need for an expanded repertoire of 'leadership' skills which includes: good judgement, the ability to ask the right questions (in the right way), a strategic approach, knowledge of how to run an organisation and how to operate at board level. The main findings that emerged are:

1) Interviewees felt that **since 2008, there has been a continual push by government and businesses to value governors with professional skills (Young 2017, BITC 2008, CBI 2013**). Publications by the DfE and organisations representing business have argued that the composition of governing boards should be represented with the right skills and be no bigger than they need to be. Lord Nash epitomised this approach in his foreword to the 2014 edition of the Governor Handbook – "My ambition is that every school has a dynamic governing body. That means one that understands its responsibilities and is focused tightly on its core strategic functions. One that is no bigger than it needs to be with all governors actively contributing relevant skills and experience." (DfE: 2014; Foreword).

2) Interviewee respondents reported an **increase in recruitment of governors from professional backgrounds and a decline in the size of governing boards and fewer parent and local community governors**. This has been driven over the past decade by the DfE revising governing board constitution arrangements to ensure smaller, more focussed governing bodies

   'I think the size of governing boards is coming down. It's definitely happening. You shouldn't have a board larger than 12, that's the same across a lot of sectors.'

This respondent's view is replicated in the annual survey of governors conducted by the NGA and the TES. The proportion of smaller governing boards who reported themselves as having 10 governors or less rose from 17% in 2013 to over a third (38%) in 2018. This reduction in the size of governing boards is an outcome of this push by the DfE for more cohesive and dynamic boards but also the increasing number of schools joining MATs (which tend to have smaller local governing boards with less responsibilities allocated to them) (NGA/TES, 2018: pg. 22). **However, some interviewees raised the issues of this placing more pressure on fewer people when it comes to governors supporting staff HR matters or pupil dismissals** *'Smaller boards but they struggle to fulfil those requirements for instance HR related tasks. It puts more strain onto (fewer) governors.'*

3) Interviewees welcomed more involvement from professionals over the last 10 years and **felt that a focus on skills had aided governor recruitment**. However, they also acknowledged that someone having 'the right skills' did not always guarantee that a volunteer would be an effective governor. *'I'm not entirely sure that just because someone is a lawyer or an accountant that they are going to be an excellent governor. I would much rather have the right kind of people that want to be governors and train them to be good governors.'* Several interviewees also acknowledged that some school governors with overt strengths on paper were hesitant to contribute their professional skills and knowledge to school boards. Some governors were worried that giving the wrong legal advice or advice on General Data Protection Regulation could affect their own professional careers. *'I have three lawyers, one of which is a circuit judge, I have an IT expert for a major bank, two accountants, a chair of a charitable trust, two teachers and an HR person from an academy. We have a huge talent on paper, if you say to the accountant, we're going to have you help on school finance, they will back out because they are liable. I will never put anything in my name because if something goes wrong, I have no cover'.* Interviewees also noted that the professional skills volunteers have on their CV may not reflect the

skills those governors use when on the board. Wider research has echoed this, highlighting the **need for governors to make active contributions** – '...there is very little value to be gained from individuals having technical expertise if they don't play an active part in meetings.' (Connolly, Farrell & James 2018: pg. 21).

4) Our research also shows that governing boards consider soft skills such as community engagement, communication and teamwork as important as legal, HR and other professional skills. Governing boards should also avoid holding narrow views of where they might secure these skills. Many interviewees felt that you could train candidates with the right attitude to have the necessary skills which they identified as **'leadership skills'** such as good judgement, a strategic approach, knowledge of how to run an organisation and how to operate at board level. Respondents to the *'State of School Governing'* research in 2014 similarly placed 'readiness to ask questions', 'taking collective responsibility', 'commitment to the school' and 'ability to work in a group' before 'expertise' and 'specialist knowledge' when asked to identify the preferred characteristics of new governors. (James et al., 2014). Interviewees also acknowledged that many individuals outside of perhaps a career that would be considered 'professional' (such as a HR advisor) may hold many of the skills schools look for such as basic budgeting, legal and administrative skills (e.g. a secretary) that could be used on a governing board.

5) Interviewee respondents felt that **the DfE's governor competency framework was useful for self-assessing which skills the board currently had and which skills it would look for in future recruitment** to their board. This greater propensity to use skills audits was consistent with other findings from Ofsted and the NGA: 'Governing boards frequently use skills audits to identify strengths and weaknesses within their governors and use the audit to allocate members to committees and that utilise their knowledge'. (Wilkins, 2015). 86% of respondents to the NGA/TES 2018 Survey said they had used a skills audit in the past year to review their performance (compared to 72% in 2012). Skills audits were reported to be used primarily for

recruitment purposes, in addition to assigning governors to committees and training. However, whilst most interviewees were in favour of the increased focus on school governors' skills in the last decade, some felt that the **DfE competency framework was too prescriptive, especially for schools in rural or disadvantaged areas**, where the available pool of volunteers looking to become governors was more restrictive, *'I can see where all this central government tick box stuff works but if you are in a small primary school in the middle of nowhere, you're happy to find anyone that will volunteer rather than an HR expert or financial advisor.'*

6) Most interviewees welcomed the move away from a pure stakeholder model of governance over the last decade. However, rather than favouring an exclusively skills-based board, most respondents **supported a more nuanced 'stakeholder plus' model of governance**. This was described as a model that combines having the right skills around the table alongside the benefits of informed stakeholder representation. Some highlighted the challenges posed by developing MAT structures that are leading to governance that potentially operates without the buy-in of local school stakeholders *'I don't like that LAs have less influence in school governance. I think giving schools the power to recruit anybody has some risks in it.'* Others raised the **importance of professionals on boards challenging headteachers in the right way** to ensure a constructive relationship *'I find this push for more and more professionals in governance can be as dangerous as having the basic no experience parent governor for instance. You can get professional people that are used to a certain style that can be very threatening for a school leadership team'*

7) Many interviewees also argued that **skills and representation aren't mutually exclusive**, and we should avoid thinking of them as always separate.

'I don't buy the skills vs. inclusion debate, I don't think it's a binary question. I think it's about diversity of thought and divergent thinking. If you have 80% of people on a board that all think the same way, you're missing 20% of the decisions. You have a risk gap'.

His view is replicated in the research: Helen Young (2017) – 'Skills' is often used in opposition to 'representation' so the valuing of governors with skills operates to simultaneously devalue representative governors with lay knowledge. 'Skills' tend to be associated, in policy discourse and by governors in the study schools, with business and a business rationality." There is a presumption in policy and research that stakeholders would be more emotionally invested rather than rational when it comes to making governor decisions. There was a view from interviewees that this is not necessarily the case.

8) Many interviewees highlighted a concern that the focus on professional skills over the last ten years had potentially **led to a decline in education expertise on governing boards**. There has been strong support from governance stakeholders for the recent *'Educators on Board'* campaign from the NGA to place education professionals in governance roles outside of their immediate educational context through using the *Inspiring Governance* recruitment service.

3.2.1 Diverse boards

Skills and local stakeholder representation are two elements of the composition of governing boards. The other is about how reflective the governing board is of the school population that it serves. The 2008 BITC report did address this issue and suggested that clear consideration was given to the characteristics of governor appointments: *'we believe that, in the selection of governors, as with all public appointments, there is a need for diversity in the sexes, ages and skills and cultures represented on the governing body.'*

However, it is probably fair to say that tackling board diversity was not as significant a focus as it could have been at this time and it is sobering that, in the last decade, the diversity of governing boards has not substantially changed. The DfE does not hold national data on the diversity of school and academy governing boards but this picture is articulated in external surveys. The NGA and TES annual survey of governors for example, has shown very

little change since 2012 in the age and ethnic category background of its respondents; with <5% of respondents coming from a non-white background and 10% of respondents being aged 39 or under in 2018. Interviewees had the following collective reflections on board diversity:

1) Interviewees felt that **governing boards are unrepresentative of the communities they serve**, *'In terms of its impact from what the NGA has researched, most metrics of inclusiveness, age, ethnicity, sex, they haven't really moved on. I don't think it's the case that we started off with an inclusive governance sector.'* and that **the skills framework had had no beneficial impact on redressing the lack of diversity on governing boards**. *'We've gone through the stakeholder model and now in the skills models but there is a campaign again about how they're not inclusive or diverse. Our LA doesn't represent the changing multicultural community that the school serves'; 'I don't think the skills framework had an effect.'*

2) Interviewees felt that there were **significant issues associated with governing boards not being representative of the fast-changing pupil population that they serve**. There was a feeling that this would pose a challenge for making strategic decisions about the education provided for all children in those schools. *'I visited an academy board in (city withheld) with an 80-85% Asian student cohort and 10% black/dual heritage. The board (there were 14 of them) had only one non-white face and one parent governor (who was white). Only 3 women were on the board (one of which was a dame and the other a lady!) How can a parent relate to these people?'.* This is an issue that only seems set to grow in importance as the demographics of English schools rapidly change. DfE data shows that in 2017, 29% of secondary school pupils were from a BAME background and this figure will continue to rise as nearly a third of all primary students are now from a BAME background.

3) Some interviewees felt that the **traditional methods of recruitment via networks and word of mouth were reinforcing the lack of diversity in governing boards**.

'Another change is that boards are more responsible for the recruitment and appointment of everyone on the board. It works brilliantly well when the board has the skills to be reflective and evaluative, but when the board wants to recruit people that look just like themselves then it can force people out.' The NGA have recently introduced their updated *'Right People Around the Table'* guidance to governing bodies which encourages governing boards to reflect on the diversity of their make-up. Some chairs were actively taking positive action to re-dress the balance in the light of this: *'I've tried working various minority (majority) communities to try to get them onto governance boards because otherwise they're blocked. I don't know how you can run a school without local input.'*

Everyone on Board

In 2018, the National Governance Association and Inspiring Governance launched a joint campaign to encourage more young volunteers and volunteers from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds to become governors. This was in response to NGA survey data which showed less than 10% of their respondents' boards were under 39 and less than 5% were from a BAME background.

Whilst a number of governing bodies are actively considering their diversity a number are not and this remains an important issue to get right for the school and academy system. For communities to have confidence in schools and for decision makers to take account of the needs of fast changing pupil populations we all need to look actively at how we seek to encourage governors from a wide range of backgrounds. For more information visit *www.inspiringgovernance.org/everyone-on-board/*

"In my community, young people often have low aspirations. Seeing me, a young governor from an ethnic minority background can really inspire them and change their perceptions of what they can achieve."

Jordan Holder

4) Some interviewees raised the **benefits of encouraging younger governors with less experience of governance to join boards and offer fresh thinking** *'I'm always a little cautious of experience on boards, there are often people on boards that will say I'm on 5 boards, I've got years of experience, but to be honest that's not necessarily all that helpful. I think fresh and uncluttered minds on boards can be better. There's a better sense of originality, innovation, potential I think from fresh approaches to governing.'*

3.3 Recruitment and Placement

Headline findings: There is a feeling that school governance is now better publicised with a range of clearer routes into becoming a governor. Recruiting governors to some types of schools remains more challenging than others but more is being done to get governing bodies to think more strategically about recruitment and succession on their governing boards.

IN THE PAST: 2008

The 2008 report recommended that *'to ensure that governing bodies have the necessary skills and the independence to perform their function effectively, the routes by which governors are recruited need to be reviewed and improved'*. At the time of this earlier study, governors were often recruited through routes such as local authority led recruitment and placement, personal networks and the DfE funded School Governor One Stop Shop (SGOSS). The 2008 report wanted to avoid the need for headteachers themselves to source and 'arm twist' volunteers to become governors (this is not a role they should or would want to do). The report also cited a potential conflict of interest if these volunteers were to then make later judgements on headteacher pay. It also recommended a wider use of associate or probationary appointments to give volunteers a sense of what governance involves and to develop them towards the role.

In the ten-year period since the report there has been a diversification of recruitment options available to recruiters looking to bring on board governors and trustees. The DfE have maintained their investment in supporting governor/ trustee recruitment by funding their chosen vehicles of governor and trustee recruitment – Inspiring Governance and Academy Ambassadors. Academy Ambassadors has focussed closely on bespoke recruiting to bring the right financial and professional expertise onto MAT boards and Inspiring Governance has introduced a new online platform approach (with an NGA support package) to support nationwide recruitment of skilled governors for both maintained schools and local governing bodies of MATs.

The level of support from local authorities and diocesan boards of education now varies widely, from those that offer governor recruitment to schools (often as part of a paid for governor offer to schools), through to those (LAs in particular) who are now resourced to only offer more minimal support. SGOSS has continued without government funding and become the Governors for Schools charity. These developments have meant that **governor recruiters have a wide choice of options to turn to for their governor recruitment**.

Governor recruiters themselves have also diversified, with recruiters ranging from the Chair of Governors to clerks, LA representatives to headteachers and school business managers. Moreover, there has been a growing range of advice and guidance from organisations like the NGA that **encourage governing boards to think more strategically about recruitment**; both on who they have assembled around their current board table and how they succession plan for replacing these skills in the future and, in particular, the Chair of the Governing Body – (NGA, *Right People Around the Table*, 2019 version). Interviewees had the following reflections on recruitment:

1) The interviewees and the BELMAS focus group provided a **mixed response as to whether it is now easier to recruit governors** than in 2008. This is echoed in recent governor surveys undertaken by the NGA/TES, where respondents had felt that governor recruitment had become increasingly challenging in recent years (2018, pg. 21). This NGA survey also identified that, despite the trend towards smaller governing bodies, 38% of respondents to the survey reported that they had vacancies of 2 or more governors on their boards.

2) Despite recruitment challenges, interviewees felt that **governing boards were better at recruiting governors** and better at the targeted recruitment of the governors that they wanted for particular roles *'I think people are much better at recruiting new governors and actually having a role description. These are the expectations of new governors. In the past, there was much more of an element 'it's a quite nice thing to do'.* Interviewees also acknowledged though, that despite this, there is still a continuing **need for Trusts and maintained schools to become ever more professional about recruiting to their boards**. Volunteers will expect an organised approach from recruiting boards and there is more of a competitive element to secure the best voluntary talent. *'We have some Trusts that have lost good people because they've not acted quickly enough in the recruitment process and that's a problem in the system… Everyone needs to understand that if you don't act quickly you will lose good people.'*

2) Notwithstanding whether it is more or less easy to recruit governors, **interviewees all felt that school governance was better publicised and that there are now more and clearer pathways to become a governor**. Interviewees indicated that here are now numerous third-party initiatives supporting the recruitment and placement of governors. Initiatives like Inspiring Governance (IG), Academy Ambassadors (AA) and Governors for Schools were praised by interviewees for helping to support schools in their governor and trustee recruitment.

'Inspiring Governance has been a breath of fresh air',

'Big tick for both Inspiring Governance and Governors for Schools'.

'I've used Academy Ambassadors with my MAT board very successfully'.

However, interviewees felt that academisation and the decline in local authority funding and support over the last decade had led to a corresponding **decline in LAs' role around governor recruitmen**t. Some interviewees felt that struggling maintained schools were not getting the same support from local authorities to fill vacancies in their board that they once enjoyed *'I think in the maintained sector there has been a cultural shift away from phoning up your LA and saying I have 3 vacancies and asking for help. Governing boards are now having to take their own initiative for their own recruitment strategies and drive it which I think can be really difficult.'* It was clear from respondents that they felt not all schools were taking on this responsibility well.

‘Arguably the schools that require the best governors probably struggle to find them the most because they probably have weaker business links and engaged parents’

inspiring governance

The school governance recruitment and support service

www.inspiringgovernance.org/

Inspiring Governance is a DfE funded online recruitment service supporting both governing boards of maintained schools, SATs and MAT local governing bodies to recruit skilled volunteers from the world of work. It works via online mapping technology where boards can search for volunteers in their local area and begin a dialogue with them about becoming a governor or trustee.

If a successful appointment is made, newly appointed governors receive a support offer from the National Governance Association, which includes the *'Welcome to Governance Handbook'* and e-modules from the NGA's Learning Link. As one interviewee from the research study said:

'Working with IG, I've used their service to recruit some fantastic governors here, from the LA I've had mixed support in terms of recruitment. IG gives us reach and we can see geographically, it's easy to get in touch. It really helps to target recruitment.'

4) Many interviewees felt that there are significant geographical and school type differences that affect recruitment. For example, interviewees commented that it is **much harder for schools in rural or disadvantaged areas, foundation schools and schools of a religious character to recruit governors**. One diocesan respondent articulated, *'We had 40 vacancies when I started, I now have 102. There is a big spike there in foundation governor vacancies."* Another interviewee remarked, *"Arguably the schools that require the best governors probably struggle to find them the most because they probably have weaker business links and engaged parents".*

An interviewee cited earlier research by James et al. that argues that generally low socioeconomic areas will likely have fewer potential board members and parents and suffer from what they describe as low governance capital (2011, 2017). **Low governance capital** may likely occur in communities where English isn't the first language of parents, where there is a low number of major institutions and professionals such as (businesses, churches, hospitals, etc.) and in schools with low performance standards. (James et al. 2011, 2017). This variability in geography and school context might explain the mixed response from interviewees as to whether recruitment had got easier. This was highlighted as an especially difficult challenge when some schools go into special measures and require IEBs (Interim Executive Boards).

5) Some interviewees raised concerns around what they saw as the potential **declining attractiveness of the governor role in terms of both accountability and financial pressures in schools** and whether this would impact on future recruitment patterns,

'what we hear anecdotally is that people who might have previously stepped up as governors are now feeling that what they're signing up for is quite different. The decisions around staff redundancies and cutting pastoral support I think we do risk putting people off becoming governors. It's not something people want to do in their spare time.'

This sat alongside separate points that were made around the **changing age profile of governors** which noted the positive benefits of this but also some of the restrictions around available time. *'Younger people in the community are becoming governors who maybe have family and professional responsibilities and have to juggle (governance) around that. It does have a knock-on effect on the training and induction. They can't give up any extra time.'*

6) Interviewees felt that it was **important that governing boards undertook activities to retain and motivate their governors in addition to concentrating on recruitment**. Suggestions included the importance of the Chair forming a strong relationship with newly joined (and existing) governors; distributing a responsibility that fitted in well with new and existing governors' skills and interests (such as a curriculum subject, finance or SEND); and encouraging the development of a strong attachment to the school by engaging appropriately and strategically with stakeholders like teachers, students and the school's local community. The latter was based on interviewees' views that, overwhelmingly, governors volunteered out of a desire to make a difference to children's education.

7) Interviewees felt that the **recruitment of new Chairs of Governors was variable**. *'I am aware of schools struggling to find chairs, schools that have large governing bodies, but no one wants to step forward.'* They felt this often depended on factors such as the location of the school and its current circumstances or propensity to enter special measures. Some interviewees

mentioned having board members take turns every term to be chair as no one was willing to step into the role permanently. This is clearly not an ideal scenario but reflective of the **burgeoning workload, accountability and time pressures of the modern Chair of Governors role**. This was seen as **even more challenging** for those undertaking the role of **Chair of a MAT Board** *'The chairs of trust boards are a very weighty role, essentially you are leading an organization, you are an employer/ line manager/chief exec. It's a fundamentally different proposition, so the quality of chairs has had to improve very significantly.'*

8) Interview participants felt that **chairs were better trained and more organised** than has been the case in the past. They also **welcomed a trend in boards hiring new Chairs externally**, rather than exclusively recruiting from within the current governing board *"I think it has changed for chairs in the way that there's now an expectation that someone can just come into a school and just chair. In my current primary school, I was appointed straight in as chair. I think that's a good thing, it's acknowledging that there is a gap, we need to fill that role and bring someone with the skills in, not just a person that steps in from the (current) board."*

3.4 Governor Recognition

Headline findings: Interviewees did not want to see payment for governors/trustees but felt more should be done to recognise governor contributions and celebrate and share good governance practice. There was concern that negative press could lead to governor recruitment challenges.

IN THE PAST: 2008

The 2008 BITC report called for greater public recognition to be given to the importance of serving as a school governor, and for the excellent work done by good governors to be more publicly celebrated. It outlined the range of ways that governance could be celebrated, ranging from a DfE award (at the time Department for

Future Chairs, Succession Planning and DfE Chair Development Programme

In recent years the DfE and stakeholders have increasingly recognised and supported the role of the Chair of the Board. The DfE for example, continue to fund the Chairs' Development leadership programme (which has since now been extended to up to two members of the board of governors). The NGA has been urging governing boards to look at their succession planning and in association with Inspiring Governance offer the Future Chairs recruitment service which is a geographically targeted programme to support boards where there is no obvious successor to the current chair.

www.nga.org.uk/Governance-Recruitment/Future-Chairs-Recruitment-Service.aspx

Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)) for Governor of the Year, through to more civic recognition such as local authority led governor award ceremonies or (for the very few), attending the Queen's garden parties or an honour such as MBE. The NGA's biennial Outstanding Governance Awards focus on school governance; prior to 2010, DCSF contributed to the funding of these awards.

WHAT HAS CHANGED: 2018

Since 2008, there has been an ongoing debate about whether governors, particularly the chair, should be paid in the way that some other non-executive director posts are paid. **Significantly, in our interviews most stakeholders would not want to see the payment of governors/trustees**, but all acknowledge the greater pressures and accountability that accompany the governing role of today. There remains a need to celebrate the role of governance:

'What we hear anecdotally is that people who might have previously stepped up as governors are now feeling that what they're signing up for is quite different. The decisions around staff redundancies and cutting pastoral support I think we do risk putting people off becoming governors. It's not something people want to do in their spare time.'

1) Interviewees frequently felt that **negative press and the increasing pressure of the role were cited as reasons people were put off by becoming a school governor**. *'The public image of school governing is unfortunately poor. The (press) images of certain academy governing doesn't do any good for the overall image of school governing'* This aligns with wider research: Eddy-Spicer, D et al. (2017) used an extensive literature review and multiple national surveys with governors to map the current governance environment. 60% of governor respondents to their survey felt that the attractiveness of the role of school governor worsened in the past 5 years. (2017, pg.17). The authors also argued that increased threat of competition from other schools and the change in status of LAs has affected pupil enrolment and funding, placing more pressure on governing boards and headteachers (2017, pg.7).

2) Interviewees often felt that *'when a school does well in an inspection, the school/leadership is celebrated but **when a school does badly, the governors/trustees are blamed'** and some referenced the increasingly **'high stakes'** nature of the role. '… over the last 10 years the*

role has changed considerably. We're so accountable now, it puts people off'. Respondents wanted to see more instances of positive coverage of governance in the wider media. In particular, this included laying out clearly for volunteers what the role entails as there was a feeling that potential volunteers and their employers often overestimated the amount of time they would need to commit to volunteering as a governor. In part this stemmed from a misunderstanding of the role as operational and not as one of strategic oversight.

3) Interviewees often felt that **they wanted to see more instances of what good governance looks like** and examples of best practice, particularly in the media. The NGA currently publishes case studies of the winners of their Outstanding Governance awards and policy makers at the DfE are thinking through how they can better bring to life accessible examples of what is good governance.

3.5 Clerking

Headline findings: Despite efforts to support the role, the availability of high-quality clerks remains an issue of concern a decade on.

The 2008 BiTC report recommended that all schools should have professional clerking support, shared among several schools if necessary. It called for greater support, training and guidance to be given to clerks of governing bodies. It also suggested an accredited training programme for clerks should be made mandatory for all clerks. It also highlighted the growing phenomena of clerks being drawn from the staff of the school or trust – *"The status of the clerk to the governing body should be raised and the clerk should not work in the school in a different capacity to reduce the potential for conflicts of interest."*

Despite the best efforts of a number of stakeholders it appears that the universal availability of qualified clerks remains an issue for schools and academies in 2018. This is despite the NGA running its 'Clerking Matters' campaign to give the role profile in 2013 and the DfE supporting and funding the Clerk's Development Programme from early 2018. Whilst there are clearly some very strong clerks in the system providing independent support and legal advice to governing and trustee boards, there remain a number of issues around clerking a decade on in 2018:

1) Interviewees felt that **good clerks were essential, but it is now harder to recruit clerks**. Many felt that the role was very demanding and not enough was being done to support, train and develop new clerks. 'It does seem hard to recruit clerks, particularly this year there has been a lot more vacancies coming up. There seems to be more turnover of clerks'.

   'There is a real shortage of clerks in our area. Some of our staff governors have really struggled to find a clerk, which is very important to have. There have been 5 or 6 people that have mentioned this recently to me.'

2) **Several interviewees welcomed the continued professionalisation of the role** and suggested that the clerking competency framework was more effective than the governor competency framework. This is replicated in the literature: The NGA/TES 2018 Survey found that 91% of respondents had a clerk who can provide legal and procedural advice. While this is an improvement on previous years, a basic requirement of clerks, as outlined in the 2017 Clerking Competency Framework, is that they can "provide knowledgeable and confident support to the board to ensure compliance with the relevant legal frameworks, contractual obligations and governance requirements of the organisation". (pg. 8)

3) Interviewees were concerned that **many schools were still using the headteacher's personal assistant as the board's clerk**. Interviewees felt that this was more likely to happen within academies than maintained schools and **had ramifications for whether the clerk could**

independently carry out their function of supporting the board (rather than supporting the executive). This is supported by other governor surveys such as the NGA/TES annual survey of governors (2018) which found single academy trusts are most likely to have a clerk who has another role in the school (35%). The survey also indicated, "Maintained schools and federations were most likely to employ a clerk through the local authority (42% and 40% did so respectively). The next most popular scenarios were that the clerk was self-employed (20% and 21% respectively) or had another role in the school (both 19%)."

3.6 Governor induction and training

Headline findings: There is a strong consensus for making induction training mandatory. Governor training has improved over the last 10 years but the availability of it depends on geography and provider capacity in any one area. Boards are undertaking more informal and new approaches to training.

IN THE PAST: 2008

In the 2008 report *Governing our Schools* there was a call for induction and continued training to be mandatory. This call was based on findings from a related 2008 study, commissioned by Business in the Community and undertaken by Bath University. The Bath study showed participation in induction training was relatively low and less than half of boards had a structured induction process.

WHAT HAS CHANGED: 2018

1) Overall, interviewees felt that school governor training had improved and is more available. However, it was felt that whether governors undertake training greatly depends on whether a school governing board encourages it, the budget available for governor activity (which some interviewees highlighted was reducing in the current funding climate) and the geography of the school itself – i.e. how close the school was to credible providers of face to face induction training.

2) Interviewees felt that **induction training for school boards had improved over the last ten years** and that this had helped clarify the role and responsibilities for new governors. However, interviewees felt that the uptake of induction training amongst some governing boards is still varied (see 1 above). Interviewees felt that wider **governor training was most effective when it was tailored to the school or academy board** and its governors' specific needs and requirements. This is an important point as some interviewees pointed out that historically induction training has often been a 'one size fits all' approach. The suggestion is that there is a need for tailored training to be more widely offered.

3) Unanimously **interviewees felt that there should either be more induction training or that it should be made mandatory**. This was one of the few areas where there was clear and unified agreement from all interviewees.

'When you read reports of boards going wrong, there's always something in there about board members not understanding their roles and responsibilities and that's part of induction.... The expectations we had 10 years ago are different to those we have now'.

Interviewees also felt that whatever your professional background induction is still vital. These views match other governor surveys, with the NGA/TES Survey 2017 stating – "The vast majority of respondents agreed that high quality induction training should be mandatory for new governors and trustees: 95% (with just 3% disagreeing and the remainder saying they have no view). Support was high across those governing in all phases and school structures. 95% of those who described their current occupation as 'manager, director or senior official' also agreed – showing recognition that having skills from your working life does not negate the need for induction training specific to the role." Given such a clear consensus on the need for more (mandatory) induction training it does raise questions as to why this doesn't happen. Some interviewees questioned whether mandatory induction training was too much commitment for busy individuals offering their time on a voluntary basis. Others felt that if you don't have time to learn you don't have time to govern.

4) Several interviewees felt that the **reduced funding and therefore reduced presence of Local Authorities in school governance negatively impacted the breadth of training and support that maintained school boards received**. *'I think that cuts to LAs has meant that they're not running their training courses or there aren't as many. I think we see the same thing with more experienced governors. Those courses are run much less frequently. I know the NGA and DfE training is good but it's very specific, really for chairs and clerks. There's a lot of governors falling through the gaps.'* This is supported by some of the recent literature. Baxter, (2016) argues that the greater emphasis on school governance and governor training was introduced in the Ofsted 2012 Inspection Framework at a time when Local Authority support and training was at an all-time low. Schools looking to support governor development found themselves having to buy such training at a greater cost than before.

5) **Governing Boards are introducing new less formal approaches to training than 10 years ago**. Interviewees frequently cited how they are training new governors by internally pairing them with existing and experienced governors to help mentor them. This was by no means considered as a replacement for induction training or a cost-effective alternative, rather just an example of best practice. **Interviewees also praised the increased use of e-learning in school governance training**. However, it was felt that e-learning was not as impactful as face to face learning and many worried that they could not guarantee school governors would complete an e-learning training course in their spare time.

3.7 Employers' engagement with promoting and supporting governance with their staff

Headline findings: There are now more pathways for employees to become school governors and there is universal agreement that being a school governor/academy trustee is beneficial for employees' personal and professional development; particularly for those aspiring to leadership roles. Employers also benefit from their staff undertaking governance roles and there is scope for them to promote it further within their organisations.

The quality and availability of governors from employers depends on geography and the local employer environment, although employer size is less of a factor as the flexibility of self-employment and SMEs counters the formal volunteering time offered by larger organisations. 10 years on the business environment is under more pressure and this is a concern for whether employers will continue to be supportive of school governance.

alongside school networks, local authorities and charities. However, interviewees felt that employers were not the major driver behind governor volunteering and that **the majority of people make the decision to become a governor through personal initiative or the encouragement of friends/peers**. This mirrors quantitative surveys – e.g. only 5% of respondents to the NGA/TES 2018 survey suggested that they were encouraged by an employer to get involved in school governance. (NGA 2018, pg.17).

Be A School Governor Champion

Inspiring Governance is calling on all employers to support their employees to govern in schools by signing up to our new campaign pledge www.inspiringgovernance.org/employers/

We hope all employers can:

1. Act as an advocate and supporter of school governor volunteering and the Inspiring Governance recruitment service. We will do this by encouraging and supporting staff to be governors and to register their interest with Inspiring Governance.

2. Nominate a named lead as an internal school governor champion to liaise with our named contact at Inspiring Governance.

3. Create a Be a School Governor space in the workplace, either on a noticeboard in a staff area, on our intranet or through internal communications to staff.

4. Provide the opportunity for Inspiring Governance to visit our organisation to promote the role of school governor.

5. Consider how we can support staff who govern – this could be supporting a governor network and ensuring staff have time to govern.

IN THE PAST: 2008

The 2008 BITC report recommended that employers should encourage their employees to serve as governors. It went further, suggesting that employers should be encouraged to facilitate support to employee governors in the form of relevant training and time off (preferably paid), and by creating and maintaining company networks through which they can share governor experiences and best practice.

WHAT HAS CHANGED: 2018

Interviewees felt that there had been a number of changes to employers supporting school governance in the past decade:

1) Interviewees agreed that there were **more pathways for employees to become a school governor**. Initiatives such as Inspiring Governance (where employees can register via an online platform) were cited as diversifying the routes by which volunteers could become governors,

2) Many interviewees suggested that **employer involvement in governance varied by location, the quality of school/ business engagement in the area and the size of employers in the community**. This is consistent with the sentiment interviewees expressed when asked about the health of governor recruitment per se. The research supports this view – James et al. 2011 argue, the governance capital of schools will likely vary depending on the number of major institutions in their community and thus the type of governors they attract. "Schools are likely to have different amounts of governance capital of various kinds available to them. Major institutions, such as churches, universities, hospitals and businesses, may be important sources of governance capital for a school, especially if those institutions have a particular interest in the school." (pg. 430).

3) Some interviewees suggested that it was **hard to determine how much support employers were giving their employees** to operate as a governor. They felt that many school governors had simply not asked their employers for support or extra time off to engage in governing activities. It seems that **time for governance is managed on an informal basis by the individual rather than an organisation wide policy basis**. This is a similar picture in direct surveys of governors: nearly a quarter of respondents to the NGA/TES survey said that they had not asked their employer for time off to govern (NGA/ TES, 2018, pg.18).

4) **It was felt that larger employers are encouraging school governing more than small-medium enterprises (SMEs)**. Interviewees suggested that large employers are more likely to encourage volunteering as part of their organisation's ethos, their approach to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) or as part of their staff training and development.

If you're looking at FTSE 250 companies then yes, in my own business we have a social policy for a local community, and we do encourage people to volunteer in the charitable sector... we want to be seen as engaging socially (its brand awareness).'

Moreover, it was felt larger employers are more likely to have larger accounting, HR or legal departments where they can more ably cover employees taking time out of the business, thus allowing for employees to take leave to volunteer. It was a view from interviewees that **larger employers also have more overt volunteering policies** that allow staff to take paid time off from work

to volunteer and that **this formalisation of the right to take volunteering leave led to more employees taking up this opportunity**, whether it be governing or other volunteering choices.

5) However, it was noted that alongside this, 10 years on, **the business environment is under increasing pressure and this can lead to it being less supportive of promoting governance** to staff *'business is under pressure. A lot of employers don't necessarily want employees out of work too many times. 10 years ago, the banks encouraged their managers quite a lot. But I would say companies and businesses are under a lot of pressure. We've had to have meetings at 8 o'clock in the morning because it's easier for business people.'*

6) Several interviewees suggested that there are **far more SMEs than large businesses in the UK and that we need to be doing more to encourage SMEs to support school governance**. They also extolled the potential benefits of community-based SMEs becoming involved in governing schools, *'Do we want schools stacked out with people from big corporates? They also don't necessarily understand the school environment' 'There's a lot of focus at the moment going into the top 4 accounting firms or larger companies with well-developed CPD programmes. But the bulk of people in our economy don't work in those environments, in ways it's better to recruit people locally that have some connection to the community'.* Some interviewees suggested though that **where communities lack a larger employer and are exclusively made up of only SMEs (especially more rural areas) they can struggle to recruit** new governors, as opposed to for instance, city schools with access to a greater mix of large and small employers. This again parallels the research, with James et al. 2011's discussion around geography and governance capital. 'The proportion of governors in management and professional occupations is higher for schools serving areas that are relatively advantaged socio-economically'. (James et al., 2014 pg.9).

7) Interviewees **did not feel that the growth and emergence of self-employment over the last decade had impacted governor recruitment**. Some speculated it might, considering that the self-employed volunteers may not be able to allow themselves time off. Conversely, others speculated that self-employed individuals could actually have more time and personal flexibility to volunteer. Further surveys have supported this view; that self-employment has not affected overall volunteering; with the percentage of self-employed governors not seeing downward movement in the last 4-5 years. Approximately 10% of governors were self-employed in 2014 (James, et al. 2014: pg. 9), increasing to 13% in a different survey in 2018 (NGA/TES 2018: pg. 15). Nationally the figures from the ONS show that 13% of people were self-employed in 2008, rising to 15% in 2018.

8) Interviewees unanimously agreed that volunteering as a school governor was highly beneficial for both volunteers <u>and</u> their employers. There was a clear consensus that the experience of governing was beneficial for individuals' skill development, with interviewees mentioning a range of employability skills that can be developed in the governor role including: better communication, self-management, teamworking and problem-solving.

'I encourage my sales(team) to go and do it. Listening to other people improves your listening in other functions. Having a better understanding of people's needs. It's almost free CPD for your own staff. It improves them as business people. All of a sudden they are listening to other people and facing similar problems.'

This accords with responses to other surveys such as the NGA/TES, 2018 survey of governors, where more than two-thirds of respondents agreed that governing was a valuable form of professional development (NGA, 2018, pg.18).

"I would say to anyone thinking of becoming a school governor – give it a try. It definitely built my confidence and helped my leadership and communication skills. You get a lot out of it, and it's rewarding to help a school do well and give something back into your community"

Nasreen Akthar, HomeServe

"I'm working on finance projects at work, so the two roles are actually strengthening each other. It's a good symbiotic relationship. I'm taking the learning from my job in finance and business processes and I can apply it to the school. At work I'm looking more at the inefficiencies of businesses, but not the granularity. It's nice I can go to the school and get hands on with the numbers, almost line by line."

Joshua Irish, PwC

"I feel my own skills have helped me settle in quickly to the role and contribute in a positive way, influencing decisions on purchases of equipment and building projects within the school. I would recommend anyone who wants to put something back to sign up to become a governor especially from other businesses and sectors as your skills can have a real impact on the next generation and those beyond."

Mark Holliday, DWP

9) Interviewees made the important distinction that not only was governing a good CPD opportunity in general but that it was an **especially good opportunity for those looking to advance in their careers into middle management and senior leadership positions**.

'I think the exposure to strategic thinking can be hugely beneficial for those people in the earliest stages of their career'.

Interviewees suggested that new governors learn to operate at board level, undertake meetings, scrutinise and monitor activities and budget, as well as learn education specific knowledge such as safeguarding and the national curriculum. Governing also provides an opportunity for employees to apply skills and knowledge from their workplace to new situations. It was felt that the ability to relate skills and knowledge effectively for a new context was a key trait of effective leaders.

10) Several interviewees also noted that becoming a governor was potentially **great CPD for any teachers and middle leaders from schools** wanting to develop a strategic understanding of school leadership and to further their teaching careers. *'I've seen more teachers getting involved on school boards (from other schools) and it's something that I actively encourage. I have frequently approached heads of my schools and asked if there is somebody who has ambitions to be a head or to move on who would like some governing body experience. I think it is really valuable.'* Interviewees also felt that having teachers and school leaders on a governing board would also bring curriculum/teaching experience, context and challenge to the school governing board

'We don't have enough educationalists on boards. There is a sense that boards become business places without the context, or the context is only provided by the headteacher. I think we should have more educationalists on boards.'

The NGA and Inspiring Governance have launched the *'Educators on Board'* campaign in the summer of 2019 *www.inspiringgovernance.org/educators-on-board/* to better promote the opportunity of governance to education professionals.

11) Interviewees felt that being a governor was **a good opportunity for connecting volunteers with their local community**, helping them to potentially see life outside of the 'business/corporate' world. *'It's (governance) personally rewarding as well. A lot of people feel very passionate about education and passionate about their local communities.'* There was however a plea that the **purpose of governance remains clear and is not conflated with business and school links** *'I think we need to be clear about the purpose of governance and not to conflate it with other things like links to big business, industry, etc. Staff are already there in the school being paid to make those links'*.

'I think the exposure to strategic thinking can be hugely beneficial for those people in the earliest stages of their career'.

4 Emerging Issues not considered in 2008

Throughout the course of interviews with the research participants in 2018, there were a number of issues arising that were not directly comparable with the 2008 BITC report. This is not unexpected over an intervening period of 10 years in such a fast-changing landscape as education. The most prevalent of the issues raised by interviewees and focus group participants were:

4.1 School Funding

Since 2008, there has been a significant increase in pupil populations that, together with increases to teacher pension and NI contributions, has meant that funding per pupil has reduced (for example, the 2018 IFS annual report on school funding estimated an 8% real terms cut per pupil from 2009-10 to 2017-18). This has led to a number of campaigns for increased school funding, which have been led by local authorities (f40), teaching unions, the headteacher associations, parent associations, local campaigns (e.g. WorthLess) and the NGA. Our interviewees picked up on governors' experiences of school funding challenges:

- **Interviewees and focus group participants overwhelmingly agreed that changes to school funding have had a negative impact on school governance**. Interviewees felt it was harder to balance the schools' budget and this had led to more instances of governing boards having to make difficult decisions in making staff redundant, cutting SEND provision, closing sixth forms and spending less on teacher CPD. Interviewees felt that cuts to school funding had created additional pressures for school governors, which has made governing less attractive to potential volunteers.

   'It's a challenge for governing bodies, the vast majority of governors got involved to improve children's education and not to make teachers redundant.... For those governors it's not a happy place'.

   Interviewees frequently said, *"no one joined to make redundancies"*.

The 2018 school governance survey by the NGA/TES also suggests that funding is the single biggest issue for governing boards, with 76% of respondents disagreeing that current funding is sufficient (NGA/TES, 2018: pg. 6). Moreover, just 15% of governors in the NGA/TES 2018 survey said they receive sufficient high needs funding to meet the needs of a growing number of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) (2018: pg. 28).

- Interviewees were concerned that **cuts to school funding had affected the capacity of schools to fund school governor training** over the last few years. The DfE is currently funding free training for those in governor leadership positions and also free training for clerks but this is not extended to wider governor training. Indeed, research has suggested that schools looking to support governor development found themselves having to buy such training at a greater cost than before (Baxter, 2016: pg.23).

- Several interviewees questioned whether having to deal with the current funding pressures schools face was too much pressure for unpaid volunteers. *'Well-established trusts made us feel like we were wearing tin hats in our schools in terms of restructures, budget forecasts, closing sixth forms. Why would you want to be a governor with all of that?'* There was also some anecdotal evidence amongst respondents of **governing boards considering a candidate's fundraising experience when recruiting a new governor**.

4.2 Accountability and Ofsted

Since the 2008 BITC report there have been a number of changes to the Ofsted Inspection Framework and the scrutiny of governors therein. There has also been a fundamental shift in accountability arrangements that have accompanied the growth of multi-academy trust structures. Particularly prominent in interviews was the issue of how accountable MAT boards of trustees operate and interact with their local governing bodies/academy committees.

- Interviewees felt that **more emphasis had been placed on the accountability of school governors since 2008**. This aligns with the argument put forward by Wilkins – that academisation and the removal of local government steering has **given rise to demands for good governance**, with greater emphasis on inspections and the professionalisation of boards (Wilkins 2015, 196). There were mixed views around how this was playing out in terms of governance behaviours. Some felt this was a positive development whilst others felt that we will need to mitigate against the risk of governance becoming solely about compliance and losing the element about setting vision: *'I worry that now a lot of the governing boards I attend, their meetings are about do we comply with DfE guidelines and Ofsted. If you do that you don't have any time to ask; why are we here? how do we want to support our children?'*

- In addition, interviewees felt that school governors were **more aware of their accountability** because of improvements in governor training, clearer guidelines, the increased attention from the media and the publicity of academisation. *'There has been an intensification of pressure on governing bodies to succeed. And by succeed, I mean pass the next Ofsted inspection.'*

- There was a feeling from interviewees that **schools are now more accountable to a greater range of stakeholders** who are now responsible for running our schools and their associated governance. Interviewees raised the **potential of confusion in such a landscape of diverse school ownership and of perceived multiple accountabilities**. This seemed particularly so around the tension schools feel between Ofsted and the eight Regional Schools Commissioners.

- Interviewees still felt that there was **some confusion amongst local governing boards about their responsibilities and their accountability via-a-vis the MAT trustee board**. There was agreement that schemes of delegation have improved, but this was somewhat variable depending on the MAT in question. Wider research also highlights this tension between central MAT decision-making and how they work with their local boards. Ehren and Perryman talk about the contradiction and confusion of what they describe as 'accountability networks.' On the one hand, MATs are much more accountable, but on the other hand some of the current structures and behaviours in MATs contradict the intention of academisation to improve the flexibility of local governing bodies to respond to local issues (2017: pg.946).

- Some interviewees raised the concepts of **silo vs. collaborative governance** – however there was **no consensus as to whether school governance is more or less collaborative** than it was 10 years ago. Interviewees felt that lessening involvement of local authorities and the proliferation of MATs had made school governance policy more competitive and schools less likely to share best practice and resources (silo) – *'Silo governance and silo governance mentality returning'*. Others felt that schools in MATs were more collaborative and others felt that maintained schools collaborated more due to the declining involvement of local authorities (collaborative). This concept of collaboration/non-collaboration linked to different governance models is also discussed by researchers - Salokangas & Chapman, (2014) and Keddie (2015). Both Salokangas & Chapman and Keddie state that the support for academisation and federation models were 'undergirded' by the promise of greater autonomy, diversity and choice. This makes collaboration complex and challenging when a 'proliferation of stakeholders other than the state are now responsible for governing schools.' (Keddie: pg.13).

- Nearly all interviewees felt that Ofsted did not consistently understand the role/contribution of governing boards.

  'I've never been convinced that Ofsted have organisationally understood governance. There is currently no coherent train of thought about governance amongst Ofsted teams as far as I can see.'

  Interviewees cited instances where they felt Ofsted did not adequately engage with the board during their inspections. Other interviewees discussed instances when Ofsted congratulated a particular board for taking an operational role that they are not required to do. *'Ofsted don't understand governance. They're the Office for Standards, not equipped to look at governance. I think it would take legislation and years for them to understand it. We need to think more about accountability'*.

  Wider research has also **raised this seeming lack of governance understanding from the schools' inspectorate**: Baxter (2012), examined 50 Ofsted inspection reports, thematic reports, policy documents and government enquiries published between 2004 and 2012 through textual analysis. She found significant change within the content of inspection reports from 2010 onwards. Actual commentary on the specific work of governors declined while 70% of reports only evaluated the discharge of their statutory duties, **with little attention to their strategic role in clarifying the ethos of the school** (Baxter, 2012).

- Interviewees were **concerned that Ofsted were currently limited in their ability to assess governance structures in academy chains**. This has been echoed by current Ofsted Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman and her predecessor Sir Michael Wilshaw and the Education Select Committee (Chain Effects 2018: pg.12).

4.3 Technology

In the last 10 years the growth of technology has continued apace in all fields of life, including how governors/trustees approach their roles:

- Interviewees felt that there had been a big push in the last 10 years in **moving away from paper documents** to emails and using Microsoft Office online. People felt the majority of governing bodies were not distributing board papers through the post as was the most likely approach 10 years ago.

- **Conference calls and using Skype** for remote meetings was cited frequently by interviewees. This was suggested not as a replacement for face-to-face meetings, but rather to keep communication more frequent and allow for more flexible governing.

- Interviewees noted that the take up of new technologies has been slow to start with, but many felt that **as the younger generation get more involved, use of technology will increase**.

- Interviewees felt that school governance was better publicised and that are more pathways/routes to become a governor including an **online recruitment service in Inspiring Governance** (IG)

Inspiring Governance uses Ordnance Survey technology that allows recruiters to search a map for registered governor volunteers within a certain radius of their school or academy. It also allows volunteers to search for governor vacancies posted by schools so that recruitment is driven both ways, through a simple online platform based on a Salesforce customer relationship management system.

With Inspiring Governance schools can search for governor volunteers via an O/S map
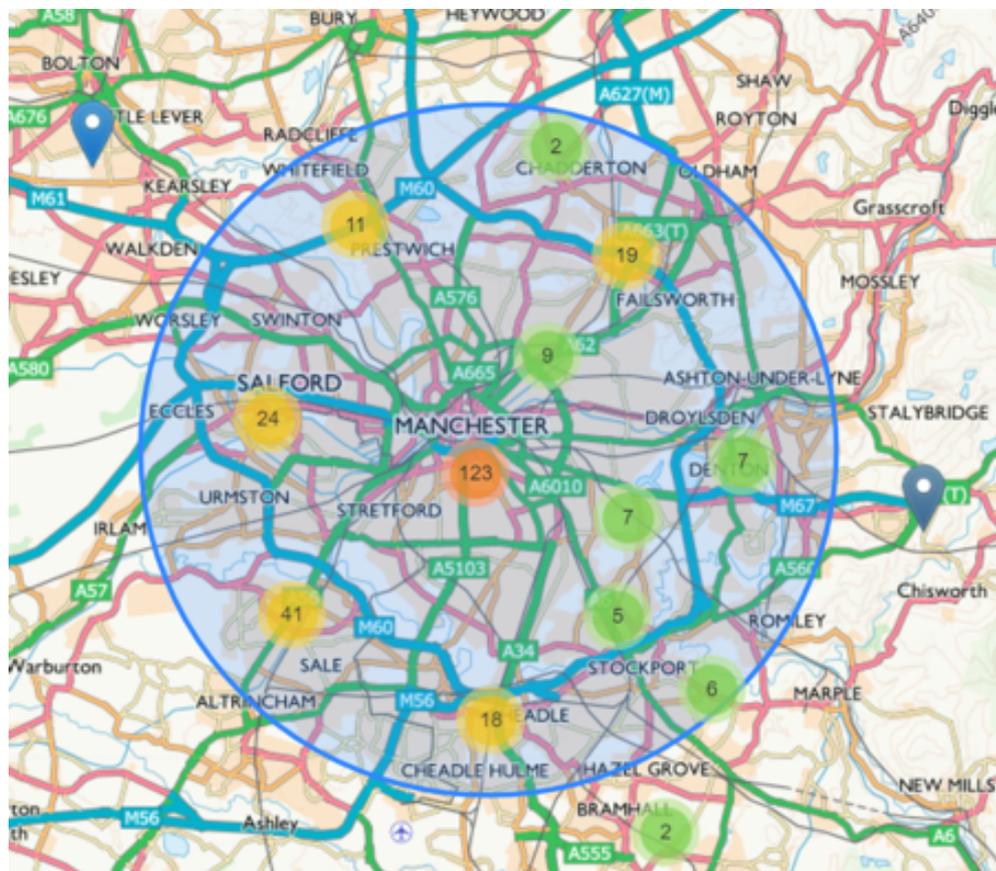
4.4 Young Governors

There has been a long-held image of a typical governor as being older and possibly retired. It appears that in 2018 there are more overt moves to harness a wider spread of experience, skills and ages to become school governors/ academy trustees.

- While anecdotal, **interviewees agreed that the average age of school governors has lowered over the last ten years**. This view potentially contrasts with the 2018 NGA/TES survey which found that young people are still underrepresented in governance, and it does not look like it's changing (2018: pg.12).

- Interviewees felt that that the **increased focus towards skilled professionals had lowered the average age of governors**. Schemes like the NGA's Young Governors' Network have helped to support this trend: "Our mission is to support young people to volunteer by creating a network that can address the challenges that young people face when governing schools today."

- Some **governing boards focused their recruitment on young people (21-29) with some focusing their recruitment almost exclusively on young people** and post-graduate students. The belief being that they have more available time than older governors and have frequently learnt many of the skills outlined in the competency framework as part of their degree/masters.

5 Reflections from Professor Chris James, University of Bath

This report charting developments in school governing in England over the last 10 years raises a number of significant issues as follows:

1) The tasks of school governors, particularly as set out in current statutory guidance, are much more centred on the essential matters than previously. Having said that, there is scope for revising those tasks so that they concentrate on the core tasks. For me, school governors undertake three main tasks:

- The first task relates to curriculum provision and the outcome of that provision in terms of student attainment. Curriculum provision is the primary task of schools – see Bunnell, Fertig and James (2017) – it is what they are there to do. The recent shift in the focus of Ofsted inspections supports this emphasis on the scrutiny of curriculum provision. It is essential that school governing boards scrutinise the school's curriculum provision and outcomes.

- The second task concerns the scrutiny of the resources the school requires to work on that institutional primary task. Those resources are of course financial, but they also include physical resources, for example the school buildings, and human resources, which include the teaching staff and the ancillary staff. The appointment and performance management of the headteacher would fall within this task.

- The final task relates to the overall conduct of the school. Scrutiny of this aspect helps to ensure that the school is legitimate as an institution. Is it complying with the rules and regulations? Is it complying with the relevant norms as one would expect a school to do? Is the way the school runs proper and appropriate?

Approving and scrutinising compliance with policies and the school's strategy and development plans and their implementation, ensuring the values and ethos of the school are appropriate and securely underpin practice, and engaging with the school's stakeholders would all come within this task.

2) There is now much greater variation in the responsibilities of individual school governing boards, with the implementation of MATs, which vary in size, structure and importantly in their mode of operation. There is a danger that in order to run efficiently, the way MATs operate may 'hollow out' the governing role of the school governing board of individual schools/academies in a MAT. In such cases, the trust board takes on the substantive governing responsibility of the schools in the MAT and school governing boards then become simply advisory bodies/councils. In my view every school should have a full governing board that governs that school at a 'local level'. That governing role should not be taken on by the MAT board, except in exceptional circumstances.

3) The competency framework should be revised in the light of developments that have taken place in school governing. The framework, which in my understanding was the first of its kind, now needs to be reviewed and developed to ensure it is fully fit for purpose.

4) Governor capability is only one aspect of governors' engagement in governing. Engagement in any activity including school governing requires capability,

opportunity and motivation. So, school governors need to have the right capabilities, but they also need to be able to make participation in governing a priority and they need motivation to participate by attending meetings and participating during meetings. All three aspects – capability, opportunity and motivation – need to be considered in governor recruitment and performance review.

5) It is a truism that governors need particular skills to be good governors but what those skills are needs to be carefully considered. It is not just a matter of having technical knowledge of say financial management or human resource management, a much wider range of skills is required. Arguably, a very important skill/capability is the ability to learn.

6) The benefits of participation in school governing are numerous. They include learning to work in complex settings and how to tackle thorny problems that do not have simple answers, developing understandings of the notions of role and responsibility, enhancing collaborative working capability, and developing the capacity to influence others (leadership development). These benefits need to be more widely known and used to encourage participation.

7) Ensuring diversity on governing bodies remains problematic for a range of reasons. There is a strong case for arguing that school governing boards should seek out potential governors from as wide a variety of sectors as possible and then to integrate them into a cohesive, secure and fully authorised governing body. That endeavour can be especially difficult in particular settings, such as those experiencing social and economic disadvantage, where the recruitment of any governors is likely to be challenging.

8) The challenge of recruiting governors, especially primary school governors, in more rural/disadvantaged communities remains. The impact that has, which was pointed out in the 2014 study of school governing (James et al. 2014), remains: The

recruitment difficulty may result in lower governance capability, which in turn results in lower school performance. One of the capabilities that declines is the capacity to recruit and as a result, governance capability declines even further. The ability of the governing board to impact on the performance of the school declines further, and recruitment capability also declines further, and so on. The spiral of decline continues. Intervening in this spiral of decline is essential. The work of the NGA and Education and Employers in enhancing governor recruitment through the Inspiring Governance service is very important in this regard.

9) There is no doubt that being a school governor and particularly being a chair is a significant responsibility. The challenge of that responsibility in particular contexts, and when schools generally receive negative media coverage is likely to be high. It may be argued that the weight of responsibility governors carry may have a negative impact on governor recruitment. However, in my view, it is unlikely that scaling down the nature of the responsibility will impact positively on recruitment indeed it may have the opposite effect. Why would individuals commit time and energy to an activity that is considered unimportant or insignificant? Further, the work of schools is deeply embedded in communities and in society generally. They will always be the central in debates about the nature of society. Again, for that very reason, responsible citizens of good intent are always likely to be drawn to engage in school governing. The recruitment task is identifying such individuals and encouraging them to engage in school governing. In the past, we have referred to such a process as governance agency (James et al 2010).

10) Clerking remains a crucial and under-valued activity. Clerks have a crucial role in ensuring that governance activities adhere to the appropriate rules and principles (Forrest et al. 2014) Efforts need to continue to enhance the recruitment and retention of high quality and well-trained clerks.

11) It is regrettable that the uptake of training by governors/governing boards is varied and is not consistently high, especially given the turnover of governing board members. Chairs do have a significant role and responsibility in promoting governor training. It is part of their responsibility for ensuring the proper conduct of the board (James et al. 2013). Induction is essential. New governors may not know the school and/or may not understand school governing, thus all new governors need to undertake induction. Making induction mandatory may be problematic for a number of reasons. Making it part of the Ofsted inspection of school governing would enhance its status.

12) The research has confirmed that the 'employment world' makes a substantial contribution to school governing in a range of ways. It is important to note the benefits to employers and employees of participation in school governing – see (6) above – and to make those more widely known.

13) The current 'funding crisis' in schools is having, and will continue to have, a significant impact on school governing. The crisis increases the importance of high-quality school governing and the role school governors have in scrutinising the management of their school's finances.

14) With the increased focus on school governing in the last 10 years, school governing boards now have a more central accountability role in both holding the headteacher to account for the proper conduct of the school and themselves being held to account by various stakeholders, including Ofsted. This accountability role is central to school governing.

15) Ofsted's increased emphasis on inspecting the governance of a school during an inspection is to be welcomed. However, the view expressed that Ofsted inspectors may not fully understand the nature of school governing and the role of school governors is a matter of concern and should be addressed. A close inspection of the governance of the school will reveal important insights into the school as an institution. Although the relationship between the quality of school governing and student outcomes is difficult to establish statistically, especially in secondary schools (James et al 2010), logic suggest that robust governance by the governing body is likely to impact on the overall quality of the school.

16) That school governing is using new technologies is an important and promising development. New technologies can enhance the flow of information and aid interaction between governors. Reservations about this increased use of new technologies would appear to relate to the importance of ensuring that the functioning of the school governing is still legitimate even though new forms of technology are being used. The use of such technologies especially the use of 'meeting technologies' such as Zoom and Skype, should be inclusive and is an important consideration. Also, those using new technologies should be aware of the potential for these new ways of working to increase the time spent on governing.

17) The indications that the age of governors is reducing is heartening. It is important that participation in governing is inclusive. Exclusion on the basis of age is not appropriate. The capability, opportunity and motivation to engage in governing should be central.

In summary, school governing in England continues to face challenges – it would perhaps be remarkable if that was not the case. Addressing those challenges wisely and thoughtfully is both important and essential. Schools are very significant institutions in our society. That they are securely governed is of vital importance.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Recommendations of the original BITC Governing our Schools report

For the Government

1. Clarity of purpose

The role of the governing body should be clarified and simplified to ensure that it focuses on providing clear strategic direction and does not become embroiled in detailed day-to-day management of schools. It should support and hold the head teacher and senior management team to account for delivery of the school's objectives.

2. Composition of governing bodies

The historic model of governors largely "representing" stakeholder groups such as parents, local authorities and the community, while important, may not necessarily result in governing bodies having the necessary skill sets to perform their function effectively e.g. finance, property management and human-resource management. The skill sets of the governing bodies should be defined and the governor recruitment system reviewed to ensure these skills are found, while not losing necessary links with relevant stakeholders.

3. Skills audit, performance assessment and information

A governing body should be required to undertake a standardised skills audit and performance self-assessment annually. Ofsted should, inter alia, review and comment on these in its inspections. Reporting packs should be designed to ensure that governing bodies have the information necessary to perform their duties on a timely basis.

4. Professional clerking

All schools should have professional clerking support, shared among several schools if necessary. Greater support, training and guidance should be given to the clerks of governing bodies. An accredited training programme for clerks (which is available) should be made mandatory for all clerks.

5. Recruitment

In order to ensure that governing bodies have the necessary skills and the independence to perform their function effectively, the routes by which governors are recruited need to be reviewed and improved. This will increase the number of skilled volunteers and help avoid the position where the head teacher has to "twist arms" to recruit sufficient governors who then find themselves having to scrutinise the head teacher's performance, potentially compromising their independence. Greater consideration should be given to the use of associate governorships and probationary appointments, not only to provide access to specific skills, but also to help would-be governors to understand the governor role and develop their skills by exposing them to it in a phased way in advance of a full commitment.

6. Placement

A number of constraints on the speedy translation of volunteer interest into governor placement have been identified, in addition to examples of good practice that minimise delay. Those examples should be highlighted as part of a drive to complement the efforts already being made by the School Governors' One-Stop Shop (SGOSS) in partnership with local authorities to improve the placement rate.

7. Induction and training

Appropriate induction and in-service training should be obligatory, for governors, chairs and clerks, together with formalised mentoring of less-experienced governors by the more experienced.

8. Attracting governors

A national campaign should be launched to recruit more governors, particularly for schools in challenging circumstances. Part of the campaign should be aimed at getting employers (particularly larger and medium-sized employers) to recognise the value and importance of supporting their employees as school governors.

9. Recognition

Greater public recognition should be given to the importance of serving as a school governor, and the work done by good governors should be more publicly celebrated.

For Employers

1. Board-level support

Employers should be encouraged at the highest level to support their employees to serve as governors. Employers should be encouraged to adopt a clear policy statement that sets out the support they will provide and ensure that it is communicated to line-managers.

2. Support and training

Employers should be encouraged to facilitate support to employee governors in the form of relevant training and time off (preferably paid), and by creating and maintaining company networks through which they can shareexperiences and best practice.

3. Recognition

Employers should give greater recognition to the value of the skills and qualities developed by employees serving as school governors and their contribution to the education of young people.

For the development of education-employer partnerships

1. The role of employee governors

The role of employee governors in the development of education-employer partnerships needs to be encouraged. Employee governors can provide an excellent link between schools and employers and help co-ordinate a wide range of business support for schools.

Appendices

10 Years On –
The state of school governance

A follow up study to Governing our Schools: A Report by Business in the Community 2008

Thank you once again for agreeing to take part in our ongoing project exploring the state of school governance in the UK.

For this interview we are interested to hear your perspectives on whether governing bodies have made improvements and progress since the publication of *Governing our Schools* by Business in the Community in 2008. Specifically, we want to explore whether the recommendations have been met, whether these challenges still persist, or new challenges have emerged.

The findings from this project will be published in early 2019.

Information on how we plan on safely using and storing the information gathered from this interview can be found in the attached ethics and consent sheet.

The interview should take no longer than 30 – 40 minutes. Please see below the questions we are going to cover during the interview. It would be helpful if you have a look at the questions and the recommendations of the 2008 report prior to the interview.

The changing landscape

Thinking about the state of our school governance…

- What has changed in the past 10 years in terms of practice?

- What has changed in the past 10 years in terms of policy?

Challenges

- Has the role and importance of governance and governing boards been clarified comparing to ten years ago? If so, how?

- Do you think changes to school funding has impact on governing boards? If so how?

- What's your opinion of the skills framework for recruiting governors? Are these helpful to get the right people to our boards? Or have we gone a step too far in thinking about skilful candidates rather than creating inclusive and engaging boards?

- Has the training and induction for new governing board members improved in the past 10 years? Are you familiar with practices that provided governors with the right mentoring and induction?

- What trends you observed in the past 10 years in terms of recruitment of governors? How easy has it been to recruit different members of the boards including chairs and clerks?

- Do you think becoming a governor has become easier comparing the past, when thinking of the challenges individuals experience for volunteering as a governor?

- What other challenges are governors/governing boards and schools facing?

Emerging trends

- Have any new issues emerged since 2008 that have positively or negatively impacted on governance in schools? (For example; the emergence of MATs, rise in self-employment, new technology)

- Are employers providing more opportunities for their employees to volunteer in governing roles? If so, what policies or examples have you heard of to encourage this? Can you please share with us what more you think needs to be done here?

- What benefits do employers and employees get from volunteering as a governor? Why should employers invest in this?

- What is the role of new initiatives in promoting governance as a volunteering activity?

- What role do you think Ofsted can play in holding governing bodies to account?

- How can schools make sure governors remain engaged and motivated? Can you give any examples you know of where this is taking place?

Solutions

- When thinking about what we discussed today, what solutions do we need in place to support the governing boards/governors/schools? What systems, policies and procedures do we need to design in order to tackle the challenges we talked about today?

Interview ethics information

Research project title: 10 Years On – A follow up study to Governing our Schools: A Report by Business in the Community

Research investigator: Dr Elnaz Kashefpakdel, Head of Research, Education and Employers

Interviewer: Jordan Rehill, Research Assistant/Max Haskins, Project Assistant

The interview will take about 30-40 minutes. We don't anticipate that there are any risks associated with your participation, but you have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time.

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the above research project. Ethical procedures for academic research undertaken from UK institutions require that interviewees explicitly agree to being interviewed and how the information contained in their interview will be used. This information is necessary for us to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation. Would you therefore read the accompanying information and then sign this form to certify that you approve the following:

- the interview will be recorded

- the transcript of the interview will be analysed by Education and Employers as research investigator

- access to the interview content will be limited to Education and Employers and academic colleagues and researchers with whom they might collaborate as part of the research process

- The data collected will be stored in the main drives at Education and Employers

- any summary interview content, or direct quotations from the interview, that are made available through publication will be anonymized so that you cannot be identified, and care will be taken to ensure that other information in the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed

- the actual recording will be destroyed as soon as the project is officially completed in early 2019

- any variation of the conditions above will only occur with your further explicit approval

- the data collected from this interview will not be shared with any third party

About Education and Employers Charity

Education and Employers is an independent UK based charity launched on the 15th October 2009 with the vision of "providing children and young people with the inspiration, motivation, knowledge, skills and opportunities they need to help them achieve their potential". It aims to achieve this by working with state schools, employers, the national bodies that represent them and a wide range of other partners including the government and third sector organisations. The charity also works with partners internationally.

The charity runs Inspiring the Future, a free service which uses technology to connect volunteers with state schools and colleges, quickly, simply and at scale. Schools can very easily search a massive database of willing volunteers from employers inviting them to visit and talk to young people. It enables young people, wherever they live, whichever school they attend, the opportunity to meet people from a wide range of backgrounds doing jobs from across the whole world of work. Inspiring the Future operates on a match-making technology platform kindly developed in partnership with Deloitte, Salesforce and Ordnance Survey. It allows the charity to run national campaigns such as Inspiring Women and others focused on specific geographic areas or economic sectors such as engineering, science, health and arts and culture. In partnership with the National Association of Head Teachers the charity has developed a version for primary schools called Primary Futures and over 4,000 primaries have already signed up.

Since its launch, Education and Employers has sought to understand what difference employer engagement in education makes to young people and the economy. It works with academics and researchers from around the world and its own research is regularly cited by government and international organisations. To see all the research findings and access the free searchable on-line library with other research from around the world please click here: www.educationandemployers.org/research-main/

At Education and Employers we have also been delighted to work with partners the National Governance Association to deliver Inspiring Governance; a Department for Education funded online recruitment service for governing boards and local governing bodies of MATs. Our aim has been to work with a wide range of employers to secure skilled professionals alongside running joint campaigns to encourage those from education and black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds into governance.

The charity is very grateful to Bank of America who have been its key strategic partner and lead corporate supporter since 2012.

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