

# Our achievements in 2023

Championing good governance to  
improve the education and wellbeing  
of children and young people

National Governance Association  
November 2023



# Foreword

**This year has been another challenging year for England's schools and for many of the pupils who learn within them. The cost-of-living crisis continues to challenge our school and trust budgets. The RAAC crisis has added a further layer of uncertainty for some. Yet once more, one thing remains absolute: NGA continues to support, give voice to, and adapt to our members' needs and challenges.**

Throughout the last 12 months, we have expanded our resources and training in our Knowledge Centre and our Learning Link eLearning platform. We have added new events to ensure our offer is tailored, whether you govern within a multi academy trust or maintained school.

This year NGA returned to the House of Commons for our Outstanding Governance Awards, which allow us to celebrate what school and trust governance can and has achieved and to raise the visibility and profile of what we do.

However, some things have changed; Our new website launched in the summer term. This significant investment has improved accessibility to our resources and enabled easier navigation around the site. Alongside the website, we revealed our new brand, a modern look to take us forward into the next part of our NGA journey: From September, we were excited to welcome Emma Balchin as Co-Chief Executive, sharing the role with Emma Knights. We anticipate this new flexibility at the top of NGA will allow us to achieve even greater things over the next 12 months.

After dedicating three years as your chair of trustees, I share with deep sadness that I will be stepping down from this position in November. Leading this extraordinary organisation has been an honour. I find solace in knowing that as I depart, NGA stands robust and resilient, ready for the challenges ahead.

NGA's ethos is firmly centred on a continuing desire to influence, shape and support the practice, culture and impact of school and trust governance. This is done from a position of knowledge gained from members' voice and actively working alongside other sector leaders, and to support you, our members, to directly impact upon the life chances of the children and young people in your care. NGA is your organisation. Please keep sharing your experiences with us and telling us what you think we need to hear.



Lynn Howard  
Chair of Trustees  
NGA

**This year, governing boards have demonstrated just how instrumental and supportive their role is during times of crisis and challenge. As schools and trusts faced hurdle after hurdle, governors and trustees were consistent pillars of support.**

NGA has responded and supported you in dealing with things such as the cost of living crisis, rising poverty levels among families, the energy crisis, industrial action and then, to top it all, crumbling concrete. We have responded to and represented our members, provided guidance, advice and support, refreshed our training programmes and lobbied on your behalf to the central policymakers in Westminster.

Completing the National Leaders of Governance (NLGs) programme was a massive achievement for the NGA, and we documented findings having undertaken over 400 reviews to ensure practice is shared nationally. The NLG programme, despite its conclusion, through further analysis of this year's reviews, will continue to expand upon its legacy of driving sustainable change at a governance level, positively shaping what schools and trusts provide their pupils. NGA will continue to offer and share learning from external reviews of governance through our long-standing consultancy services.

This year has also been a time to celebrate your work. We were delighted to award the winners and finalists of NGA's Outstanding Governance Awards in September for their exceptional work. Boards and governance professionals drive all we do, and it was an honour to spend some time recognising that at the Palace of Westminster.

This year, we have also conducted an extensive engagement exercise to learn more about your governing workload. We have heard that the work has been ramping up for many volunteers, and the mental load is increasing. While boards tell us how fulfilling governance is, we must get to the bottom of this issue to retain existing governors and trustees and bring in the 20,000 or so new volunteers we need each year.

So, as we approach 2024, we release our findings of that work – not as a 'job done', but as a 'job begun'. We know how hard you work; your contribution to society must be recognised by the sector, the wider community, employers, and those in power. We promise to continue producing quality resources so boards can deliver the best for our schools while raising the governance profile. And as we await an election, most likely during the next 12 months, our manifesto, channelled through our members' voices, presents any incoming government with the priorities you tell us need to be addressed.



Emma Balchin &  
Emma Knights OBE  
Co-chief executives  
NGA

# About us

NGA is the national membership association for governors, trustees and governance professionals in England's state schools and trusts.

We empower those in school and trust governance with valuable resources, expert support and e-learning. Together, we're raising standards and shaping stronger governance to ensure every pupil can thrive today – and tomorrow.

As well as embracing the Nolan Principles of Public Life (selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, leadership) and the Framework for Ethical Leadership in Education, we aim to be courageous, creative, visionary.

There are around 250,000 governance volunteers and approximately 10,000 governance professionals in state-funded schools and trusts in England. We support them with:

The reporting period of 'this year' is from November 2022 to October 2023. All other figures and information are correct as of 31 October 2023.

\*\* This report of our achievements complements the formal report and accounts published on the Charity Commission website for the year up to 31 March 2023.

## Information, advice and guidance

Our extensive and popular Knowledge Centre provides resources that cover a wide range of topics, give insights, and share best practice with practical examples. They are designed to give members the guidance, templates and information and more that they need to be effective in their role. Our Gold Advice service provides independent and timely legal, procedural and strategic advice to boards, bespoke to their settings and circumstances, often on the same day.

## Professional development

Through bespoke training and consultancy, either face to face or virtually, our professional development service supports those involved in school and trust governance, individually or at a board level, to improve their practice and effectiveness. Our Learning Link eLearning platform offers flexible training designed to support new and experienced governors and trustees. High-quality and interactive, our modules help fill knowledge gaps quickly, provide affordable professional development and empower those who govern to tackle every challenge with confidence.

Our Leading Governance training offer includes a variety of in-depth longitudinal programme that focus on the skills and behaviours needed to perform governance roles effectively. For boards, we provide off the shelf and bespoke training and consultancy services, self-evaluation tools and bespoke support.

## Influencing and representation

Representing and creating change for the governance community is essential to delivering on our charitable objective.

Our policy and research reports explore governance in schools and trusts and make best practice recommendations. We collect the views and experiences of our membership and beyond through surveys, events and informal feedback.

NGA continues to expand the sector's understanding of school and trust governance by adapting to your changing responsibility and representing your views on a national stage. We have achieved this through the national and education press, working with partners and influencing policy at a governmental level.



**45 staff**

We have a team of 45 staff based at our office in Birmingham or remotely across the country.



**40%** of our staff govern in schools or trusts.



**87% response rate**

The Staff engagement score reported in September 2023 was 3.89 out of 5. The response rate was 87%.



**1:2.91**

Our current pay ratio is 1:2.91 between the highest and lowest paid staff.



**40 consultants** support our professional development service.



**9 trustees**

8 were elected by members representing all the regions of England.

# Our year in numbers



NGA has represented governance on **29** Stakeholder groups.



**65,460** members receive our weekly newsletter



**72%** of Gold Advice queries are answered the same or next working day



**118,365** copies of Governing Matters magazine distributed



Our **11** free webinars attracted **4,492** viewers



**10,772** schools subscribed to Learning Link



**119** bookings for training from 55 organisations



**9 new** Learning Link modules were added



**72%** of all schools have some form of NGA membership



**21,037** followers on social media



**2,149** Gold Advice queries resolved, up 2% from last year



**2,695** respondents to our Annual Governance Survey



**51** new or updated resources added to the Knowledge Centre

We were the expert voice of governance responding to

**9 consultations**



**5** regional leads

**168**

people completed our Leading governance development for Chairs programme



**4562** academies and **5,438** maintained schools have NGA membership

**13**

governing boards and governance professionals recognised at the outstanding governance awards



**220** governance professional jobs advertised for free

**6,686**

publications distributed through our membership offer and sales this year

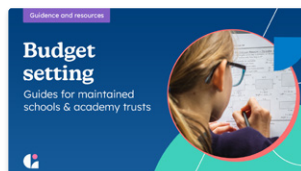
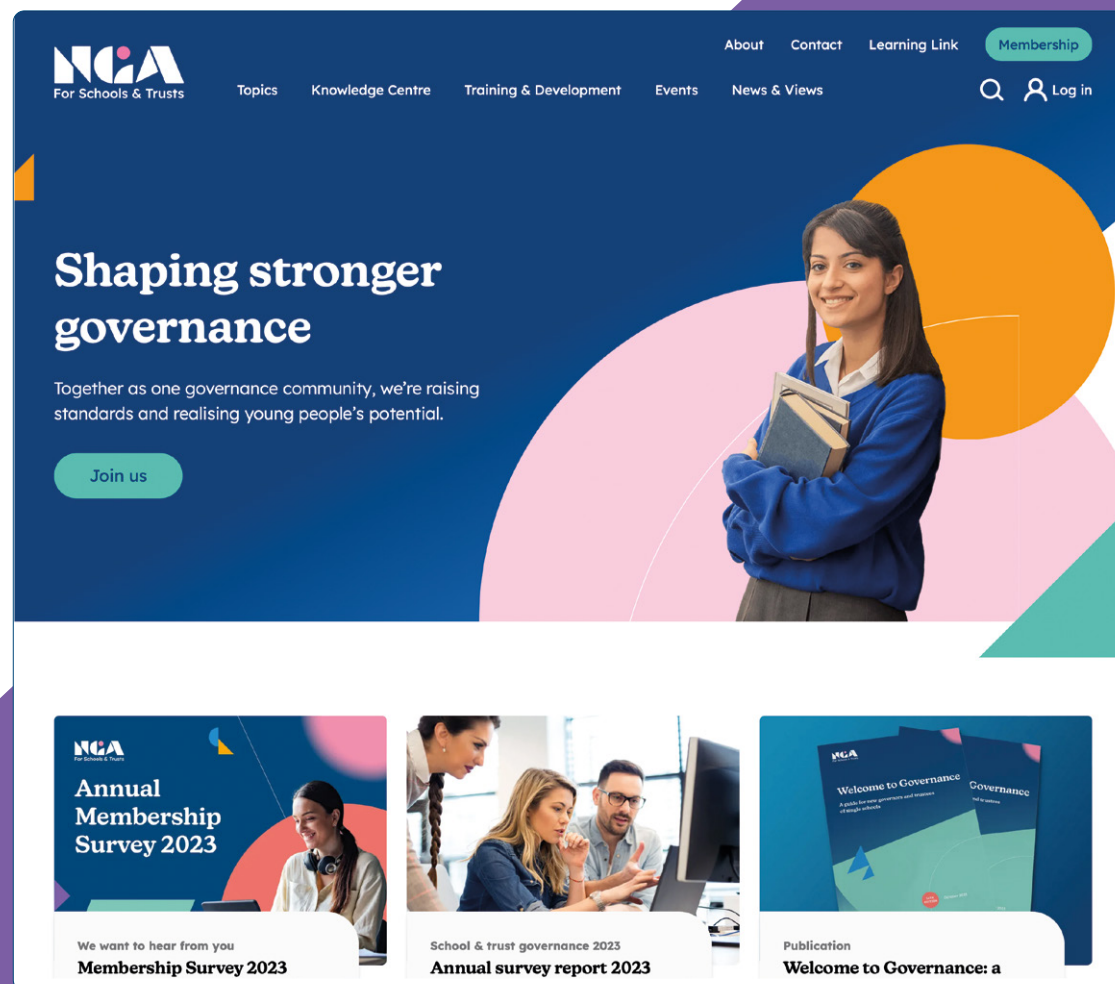
# New look NGA

NGA developed a new look in 2023 that reflects our modern and vibrant approach to governance. The new brand identity highlights our role in shaping the practice and culture of trust and school governance.

Our refreshed look is more engaging and distinctive and reflects that, together, we can all shape the lives of young people for the better.

We also enhanced our membership offer to provide you with an improved website with easier access to our bespoke guidance.

Our new website, features easy-to-use navigation, an updated and contemporary structure and a simple single sign-on for all users to access their membership and learning link subscription.



# Information, advice and guidance

## Publications

This year we published the 14th edition of our popular **Welcome to Governance**, the first in our new brand. We released the exciting **Governing a Multi Academy Trust: a handbook for trustees**, the definitive handbook for all MAT trustees. It is full of invaluable guidance for trustees from induction and beyond. NGA has distributed **6,686 publications** through membership offers and sales this year.



## Gold Advice

Our Gold Advice service resolved **2149** queries from boards regarding various legal and procedural matters throughout the year. This marks a **2% increase** in cases compared to last year. Despite the increase, **54%** of queries were answered on the same day. A further **18%** were answered the day after receipt. Some inquiries are of a more intricate nature and necessitate additional research or collaboration with our legal partners.

## NGA Guidance

NGA's **Knowledge Centre** is the essential hub for information resources and best practice guidance, catering to governors, trustees, and governance professionals, regardless of their setting or level of expertise.

**200+**

Knowledge centre resources – including guidance, templates, research and resources

**51**

new or updated KC resources were uploaded altogether



**Skills audit**



**8 Resources** produced with partners



- What governing boards and school leaders should expect from each other
- Being Strategic

### Popular topics and search terms this year.

**Safeguarding**

**Exclusions**

**Ofsted**

**Complaints**

**Wellbeing**

## NGA Events

### Webinars

Our popular monthly **webinars** covered essential governance practice topics from being strategic and school estates to complaints, Strategic governance for strong trusts and safeguarding. Our webinars are free and available to members and non-members. They are vital tools to convene changes in legislation and governance responsibility. This year, we held **11** webinars that attracted **1,719** live attendees and a further **2,773** online on demand.

### Member bulletins

NGA supports members with additional bulletins, this year, we distributed our MAT bulletin and the Governance Professional bulletin a total of **8** times. The MAT bulletin was sent to an average audience of **8,703** key decision makers in MATs, and the Governance professional bulletin was sent to an average audience of **3,460** governance professionals. Both bulletins provide key NGA content to support members with policy knowledge and governance practice.

### Governing chatters podcast

We have published **27** episodes since we started making podcasts in 2020. This year, we published 6 episodes, attracting more **13,202** listeners. You can **download the latest podcasts from the NGA website** or wherever you get your podcasts.

# Membership reach

Every year we ask NGA members their opinions on NGA membership along with what they liked about what we offered to them.



This year the response from **1545** members told us:

## Impact of NGA on effectiveness of board

**3.5 out of 5 (89%)** agreed that NGA membership had a positive impact on the board.

## Representing your voice

**3.8 out of 5** agreed that 'NGA is effective in representing governors, trustees and governance professionals in the national education arena'.

## Value for money

**3.9 out of 5** say membership was good value for money with **54%** scoring **4 out of 5** or above.

## How likely would you recommend NGA membership

**57%** said they were very likely to recommend us.

Many membership benefits scored **4 out of 5** for satisfaction, including Learning Link e-learning, The Chair's Handbook, NGA's Knowledge Centre, Gold Advice Service, Webinars, Welcome to Governance, and the Weekly E-newsletter.

## Top 3 reasons why members join

- Broaden awareness of issues and good practice
- To have independent information, guidance and resources
- To keep up to date with changes

**"The resources you provide are helpful and reliable and assist us in providing support to governors."**

## Governing Matters

With a new design, our **member magazine** includes contributions from NGA staff, policymakers, government ministers, governors and trustees, governance professionals and others involved in education. We sent out **118,365** copies this year – an average of **23,673** copies per issue. In addition, many more members choose to read the magazine online. To encourage member engagement with Governing Matters, we have sent 4 issues of the Governing Matters bulletin to members who have elected to receive a digital copy of GM. The bulletin reached an average audience of **52,590** per edition.



## Outstanding governance awards

At our biennial [Outstanding Governance Awards](#) in September, we recognised 13 governing boards and governance professionals for their exceptional contributions to school and trust governance in England.

The awards were held every two years in the House of Commons, where excellence in school and trust governance was celebrated.

We recognised the exceptional work of individuals and governing boards at their schools and trusts, applauding their significant impact on the lives of children and young people during the ceremony.



# Professional development

## Learning Link

Our e-learning platform is a fantastic way to develop your governance skills and knowledge, with **60 easy to use**, informative modules covering every aspect of your role. Learning Links remains the market leader for e-learning in the school governance sector.



**9** New modules added

**19,935**

modules completed since October 2022



User increase of

**32%**

(15,372 new users)



Almost

**50**

hours of learning are available



### Satisfaction scores

97% of users would recommend our new modules, 96% say the modules have increased their governance knowledge

**“The materials are excellent, well targeted and cover a wide range of topics. There is something for all Governors from the newly appointed to the Chair of great experience.”**

## Leading Governance

Our Leading Governance development programme continues to share expert guidance and training. Since October 2022, we have continued to offer training to vice chairs, committee chairs and aspiring chairs and governance professionals through our development for chairs and governance professionals programme. This year **240** Chairs and Governance professionals have completed the programme. Since launch **4051** have benefitted from the programme. Overall, **6** expert facilitators deliver our leading governance programmes. In January 2023 we also launched a new MAT Development for Trustees programme of **8** workshops. **180** participants have booked to attend workshops across all that are delivered.

## Consultancy

Our training and consultancy offer continues to build upon last year's success. **55** organisations made **119** training bookings and **121** bookings for our consultancy services, marking an **8%** increase from the previous year; **81** of these bookings were related to External Reviews of Governance (ERGs). The Governance for Executive Leaders saw **130** places booked. Overall, participant feedback shows that over **88%** now feel more confident in governance roles, and **96%** of participants would recommend our services to others.

## Governance development for executive leaders

### Training for executives and senior leaders within MATs, SATs and maintained schools

Facilitated by experts with first-hand experience in MAT and academy leadership and governance, each focused 90-minute course is setting-specific and leader-centric. Participants can learn with leaders facing similar challenges in their own settings, looking at quick wins and sensible, practical approaches to more deep-rooted obstacles to good governance.

### Sessions will cover

- working together on vision and strategy development
- Acknowledging the power of good governance
- maintaining good relationships between the board and senior leaders
- effective information sharing
- efficient reporting
- improving board meetings
- reliable evaluation of governance effectiveness.

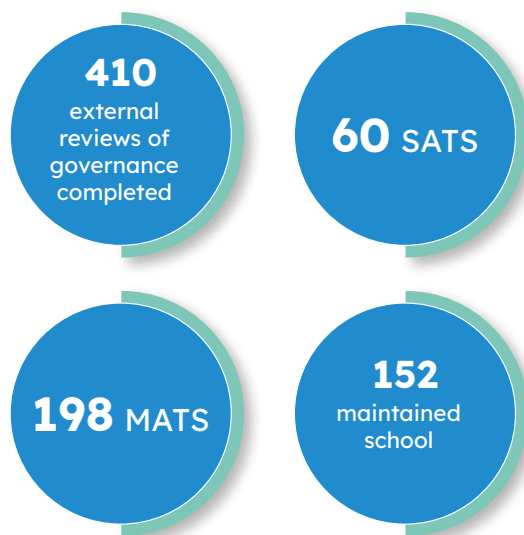
And more!

Click here to read more and inquire

# Improving governance

## National Leaders of Governance

Since being awarded the contract to deliver the National Leaders of Governance (NLG) support in May 2021, and the contract end in October 2023, NGA and the **76** expert NLGs we recruited have supported over **400** schools and trusts through an extensive programme of external reviews of governance, advice and guidance.



NGA have had the unique opportunity to view a wide range of practice, and, analysing the evidence-based reports that that NLG programme produced, **NGA were able to publish research on the key themes found; research that will learning across the whole sector.**

## Governance professionals

Following the successful launch of **career pathway** for governance professionals last December, we've provided additional resources, such as blogs, podcasts and a film for those considering self-employment.

We've also improved the governance professional job section and CPD information. Our network meetings have become more interactive, offering a platform for professionals to share experiences and discuss governance trends, with special guests including our Outstanding Governance Awards finalists.

We've also **enhanced governance resources**, including templates for electing governors and trustees, AGM organising, and more. Additionally, we've participated in local networks and conferences like the Cambridge Clerks Conference, Essex Clerks Conference, West Northants Chairs Forum, and Bath & Wells Governance Professionals Network Meeting.



**220**  
GP jobs advertised



**293**  
attended July's network meeting



**340**  
booked on to the November meeting



**342**  
attendees at the governance professional conference in march

## MAT governance

MAT Governance continues to be a key priority for NGA. Here are some of our highlights:

This year, we maintained our position at the cutting edge of the sector with our latest research report on local governance within MATs - [Local Governance Here and Now](#). This research complements our annual survey, consultancy work, and conversations in the regions and on the Gold Advice service to ensure we are representing the views of local governors and trustees in our discussions with the Department.

We also improved our MAT membership offer this year, adding new benefits for the local tier alongside exclusive MAT webinars to ensure that our MAT package still represents outstanding value for money.

Our **MAT Handbook** has been revolutionised from an induction piece into a definitive and sector-leading guide for trust governance. Trustees have also benefited from an enlarged series of trust specific guidance on our Knowledge Centre, from risk management and estates to AGMs.

Meanwhile, our events programme for trusts continues to go from strength to strength. The highlight was our annual MAT Conference, returning for the first time since the pandemic, and fully booked weeks before the event. At the same time, our termly leadership forums and Welcome to Governance events continue to prove popular for both trustees and local governors.

# Our voice, your voice

## Annual school and trust governance survey

For the 13th consecutive year, NGA has sought the views of those who govern to fill the gaps in understanding the challenges, views and experiences of those involved in school and trust governance. This year, our annual governance survey saw responses from 2,695 respondents. We partnered with the leading education survey company, **Edurio**, who supported the collection and analysis of the survey. For the first time, and thanks to Edurio technology, we released an **interim report** highlighting some of the key findings of the survey in July, followed by the main report in September.

**The survey report, Annual Governance Survey 2023**, highlighted the issues and challenges around governance volunteers and board practice, the challenges and priorities facing schools and trusts, the view of those governing multi-academy trusts, and NGAs' recommendations.

**The findings of the survey and the report were featured in BBC News, the Independent, the Daily Mail, Schools Week, TES, various local news sites and many more.**

## Influence

**NGA is engaged with the developments across the sector and shares our views and evidence to advocate for a strong education system that meets the needs of all pupils. We also hold regular meetings with government ministers.**

## Manifesto

Based on insights gathered from our annual governance survey and extensive work with governing boards, we have unveiled our 2024 manifesto titled "**From Classrooms to Communities: A Manifesto for Schools and Trusts**." This comprehensive document delves into the critical challenges encountered by schools and academy trusts and puts forward recommendations and valuable guidance for any forthcoming government.

Our proposals and recommendations are categorised as:

- Future proofing
- Families
- Funding
- Leadership and accountability.

## Ofsted

Following NGA's continued research into Ofsted inspections and letter to Amanda Spielman in 2022, NGA was invited to give evidence to the education committee's inquiry into Ofsted's work with schools and trusts. NGA's director of policy and communications, Sam Henson, gave our evidence based on the ongoing research and the findings of our annual governance survey.

## Consultations

NGA has acted as the expert voice of governance, responding to 8 consultations this year, including:

- Teacher recruitment, training and retention
- Persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils
- School teacher's review body
- Ofsted: Complaints handling

## Representation

NGA represents governance in **29** stakeholder groups, roundtables and working groups to advise and influence various areas of education policy. You can find details on our website.



## Parliamentary activity

NGA has submitted evidence to parliament contributing to discussions around Ofsted, the Academy trust code, pupil mental health, and wellbeing. We have also written and co-signed letters to ministers and MPs calling for action on funding and pay, recruitment and staff retention. We also represent the voice of school and trust Governance at various All Party Parliamentary Groups, offering contributions and sharing members' views to influence policy and change on topics including estates, flexible working and early education.

# Our voice, Your voice, One Voice

Our yearly governance survey asked our members about the foremost hurdles and critical focuses for their school or trust. This allows us to provide personalised resources, training, and guidance to support our members, their boards, and educational institutions. It also plays a crucial role in shaping our influence within the sector. By doing so, we aim to assist your board in addressing priorities and overcoming challenges specific to your school or trust. The feedback from our members remains instrumental in determining the focal points of our organisational efforts.

## Challenges and Priorities facing schools and trusts

- Attendance tops both challenges and priorities, with parental communication as the most effective tool in tackling it.
- Balancing the budget remains the foremost challenge for 52%, with staff pay as the primary concern in setting a balanced budget
- 66% Reported funding access is the major hurdle for schools and trusts in relation to SEND
- 97% agree that energy price hikes negatively impact school or trust budgetary position.
- One-third disagreed that their school buildings were in good condition.
- 64% report practical actions on environmental sustainability.
- 56% reported an increase in Safeguarding concerns of schools and trusts, with bullying, neglect, and domestic abuse the most common concerns
- 56%, of MAT responses report an increase in secondary exclusions rise - while maintained secondary sees a 38% increase.
- Since 2022 support for pupil mental health has dropped across all methods by at least 6%.
- 60% of governors and trustees agree a form of graded school inspection are needed.
- Academisation sees significant growth.



## Our partners

In addition to working with government ministers we regularly partner with the following organisations to support our work and widen our reach.

