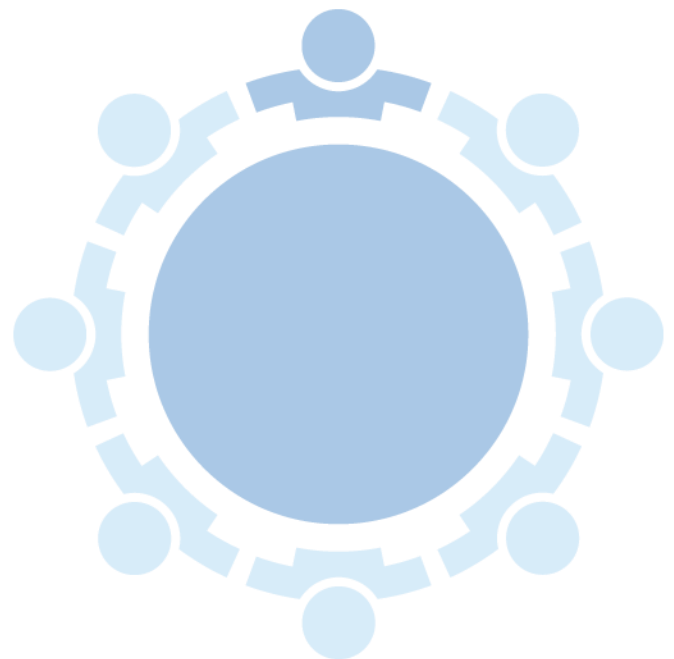


School governance in 2017

An annual survey by NGA and Tes

Fay Holland, NGA Policy and Information Officer

October 2017





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National Governance Association

The National Governance Association (NGA) is an independent charity representing and supporting governors, trustees and clerks in maintained schools and academies in England. The NGA's goal is to improve the wellbeing of children and young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. It does this by providing information, guidance, research, advice and training. It also works closely with, and lobbies, UK government and educational bodies, and is the leading campaigning national membership organisation for school governors and trustees.

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1 Foreword

We are once again stepping up to fill a gap in official national data. For six consecutive years, the National Governance Association (NGA) has been running a survey of school governors and trustees in partnership with TES, and for the last three years we have had more than 5,000 respondents from across England and all types of schools.

Governors are an extraordinary bunch. A volunteer army of about 250,000, giving up their time for free to act as the guardians of state schools. The eagle eyed amongst you will have seen that we used to say 300,000 but the shrinking of the size of governing boards has reduced the number of volunteers needed. And despite this, more governors and trustees are saying it is difficult to recruit new volunteers to the role and almost one-third have two or more vacancies on their governing board. We do however need to continue to encourage younger people to govern, and particularly black, Asian and minority ethnic people who make up only 4% of respondents, far lower than the proportion of the adult population. This is compounded by the age profile given 61% are 50 or over.

Contrary to popular belief, four in five of those governing are, or used to be, managers, directors, senior officials or professionals, and this applies to elected parents as much as any others. I don't say this because I think all those governing must be. In fact governance is strongest when the board is diverse, bringing different backgrounds, knowledge, views and skills to the discussions. I point it out because the constant refrain from the DfE is we need to recruit skilled, competent people as though this is a novel or controversial idea which anyone disputes, but it can be perceived as suggesting that those who already govern are just not good enough. So I am using these figures to back up what I know from my travels round the country: there are a lot of good, impressive people who step forward to take on this great responsibility.

Just 3% respondents oppose high quality induction training being mandatory for new governors and trustees. We repeat the importance of this each year, but the Government is averse to making anything more compulsory in schools, despite the fact it is for magistrates and many other volunteers. In the meantime - and it might be rather a long meantime - we just need to make the obligation to undertake induction training clear at school level. When you consider the amount of time volunteers are giving to the system – at a conservative estimate, school governors and trustees contribute in kind in excess of £1 billion per year to the education budget in England – the amount invested in their training and development appears even more paltry.

A significant minority of those in work are not receiving time off to govern and, of those that are, almost one quarter are taking unpaid leave. However payment for governing is supported by only a minority of governors and trustees (27%) and this figure is not increasing with time, despite the frequent, but unevidenced, suggestions from certain high profile educationalists that this might improve governance.

Almost three in 10 governors and trustees say that their responsibilities are not manageable in 20 days per year and concerns about the time commitment are the biggest barrier to taking on the hugely important role of chair. The survey shows governors to be concerned about the work-life balance of schools leaders and teachers, but their own work-life balance is ignored. My suggestion to the DfE that they need to take seriously the workload of governors has not yet been taken up.

But I hope these results from NGA/TES survey 2017 remind the policy makers and the broader sector that here are a group of people who know a huge amount about state schools and have difficult



decisions to make; but despite their role often being overlooked, they are acting not for themselves but for the schools, communities and children who are ultimately in their trust. They are mainly motivated to do this to give something back or to improve this particular school.

Funding, one of the governing board's three chief official responsibilities, is very tough. Nearly half (43%) of respondents reported making posts redundant last year, and this had rocketed from 26% the previous year. 47% of schools have already reduced the number of support staff and 30% the number of teachers. There were also a range of other reactions to reducing funding which Fay Holland covers in this report.

These are stark decisions for people who volunteered to improve education for children: and worryingly only one fifth of whom are now confident that funding pressures can be managed without any adverse impact on that education. Since the survey was undertaken, the Secretary of State has announced another £1.3 billion for school funding and the new version of the National Funding Formula, which is not quite an NFF at all during the current spending review period.

A loud message is coming through from governors and trustees once again calling on the government to provide stability for the education system and ensure that the expertise of education professionals is valued and listened to. This has been the said for the last few years and was reported to Nicky Morgan when as Secretary of State she came to address NGA's summer conference two years ago. At that point the removal of national curriculum levels was causing much discombobulation, and even now, only a minority (17%) of governors and trustees see their removal as a positive change although a considerable proportion (42%) haven't made up their minds.

And then of course there are decisions being made in the wake of the introduction of harder A-level and GCSE regimes, coming as they do with Progress 8 and Ebacc. Although the vast majority of governors and trustees believe they are still offering a broad and balanced curriculum, most of those secondary in secondary schools had reduced the number of subjects and qualifications on offer. Those challenges are particularly acute in sixth forms, even less well funded than Key Stage 4, and respondents reported significant concerns about taking these decisions.

The third significant area of comment by respondents was concern for staff, their workload, the stress and their pay, with a significant call for them to be valued more as professionals. While those governing want to retain and develop staff, funding pressures are acting in the opposite direction with a worrying number already having cut resources for professional development and others considering the same over the coming year. This dilemma brings into sharp relief the tensions facing those who govern our state schools who want to be able to invest in the offer to pupils and quality of teaching, but find the resources are not always available to do this.

I very much hope that by next year's survey is taking place, the Chancellor of the Exchequer will have listened to the voices of those who are volunteering in order to improve the education of England's young people and found additional funding for this important public service on which the country's future depends.

Emma Knights
Chief Executive
National Governance Association September 2017



2 What did governors and trustees say?

“To make a difference to the lives of children and to ensure they get the best possible education that we can give them. Education is the key to a better future especially in a deprived area like ours.”

Concerns and messages for the government from the governors, trustees and academy committee members responding to this years’ survey:

“Avoid introducing too many changes. A period of stability would be appreciated so that schools can plan forward with some certainty.”

“Fund it properly, including 6th form. In real terms, we are having to cope with so much less than previously. It's short sighted.”

“Stop constantly changing things - let teachers teach.”

“To recruit/inspire more high class teachers. They should be made to feel more valued for the amazing job they do in society.”

“Financial constraints to the LA resulting in loss of support services.”

“Financial constraints but particularly regarding mental health provision for youngster, our school is spending a lot of money to obtain help for youngsters with issues as CAMHS services are vastly reduced”



3 The survey

The National Governance Association (NGA) has been running a survey of school governors and trustees in partnership with *TES* since 2012. The aim of the survey is, in the absence of any official data or academic research, to provide an overview of the state of school governance in England and also to gather views on of the concerns of those who govern.

Over the years, the scope of the survey has increased and so too has the number of responses; we were delighted to hear from 5,338 governors, trustees and academy committee members between the 12 June and 17 July this summer.

This report sets out the key findings from the survey but we will continue to explore the data throughout the year to inform the NGA's policy work and research.

The methodology

The survey is open to anyone who governs state-funded schools in England and is administered online through the SurveyMonkey website. It is distributed directly to NGA members via emails and reminders in our weekly e-newsletter as well as being featured on the website homepage. We are grateful that partners, including local authorities, local governance associations and the Catholic Education Service also distribute it to their networks. A link was also included in the *TES* magazine and website.

Based on testing, we estimated that the survey takes around 20 minutes to complete. As this is a reasonable chunk of time, we expected some drop-off in the number of responses through the survey. This was the case, with around 20-25% fewer responses to questions on the last page of the survey compared to the first. However, we still had roughly 4,000 or more responses to each of the questions that were applicable to all respondents (some sections were tailored for specific groups such as those governing a multi academy trust).

The participants in the survey were self-selected, therefore it makes sense to consider how representative the respondents are of the population involved in school governance in England.

Is the survey representative?

Although it is the largest survey of school governors and trustees that we are aware of, the 5,338 respondents do of course only account for a fraction of the total number involved in school governance nationally. Previous estimates have put this number at around 300,000 but since we started asking in our surveys in 2013, responses have indicated that the trend is towards smaller governing boards. This year, the median size of respondents' governing boards was 11-12 individuals (when there are no vacancies) which suggests that the actual number of people governing may be closer to 250,000.

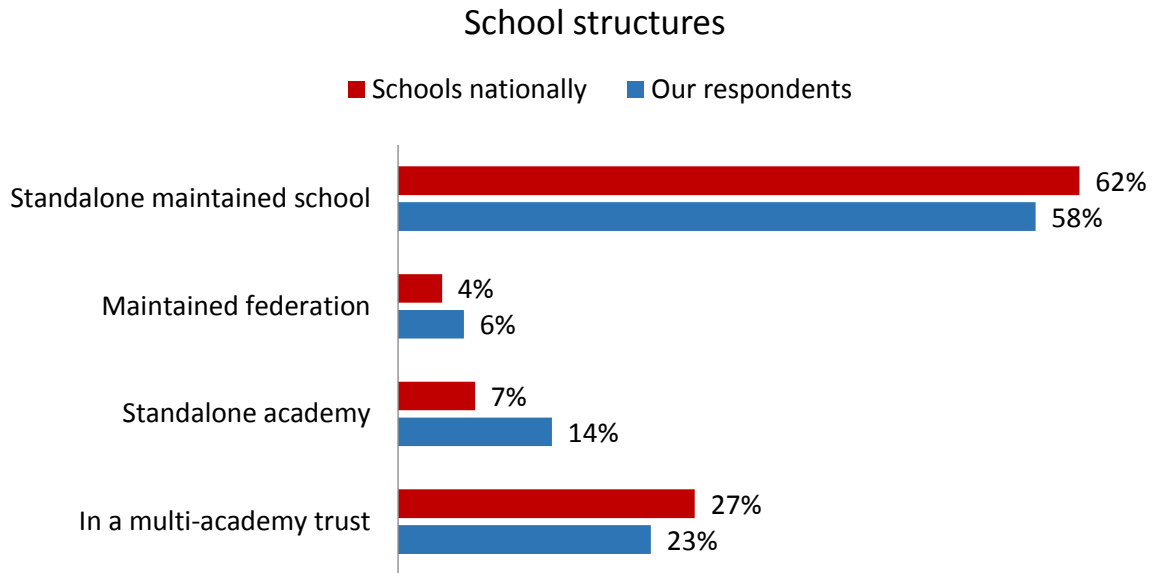
5,024 respondents gave details of the type of school structure in which they governed, with 57% on the governing body of a maintained school, 6% on the governing body of a federation, 14% trustees of standalone academy, 16% on an academy committee (sometimes referred to as a local governing body) of an academy within a multi-academy trust (MAT) and 7% on a MAT trust board.

The multiple layers of governance involved in some groups of schools, the differing sizes of governing boards and potentially having more than one respondent from one board make it difficult to determine precisely how representative this is of the school governance community. However, figure 1 below compares the proportion of our respondents governing in each structure to the proportion of



schools which have each structure nationally (all respondents governing in a MAT, whether at academy committee or trust board level, are shown together for this purpose).

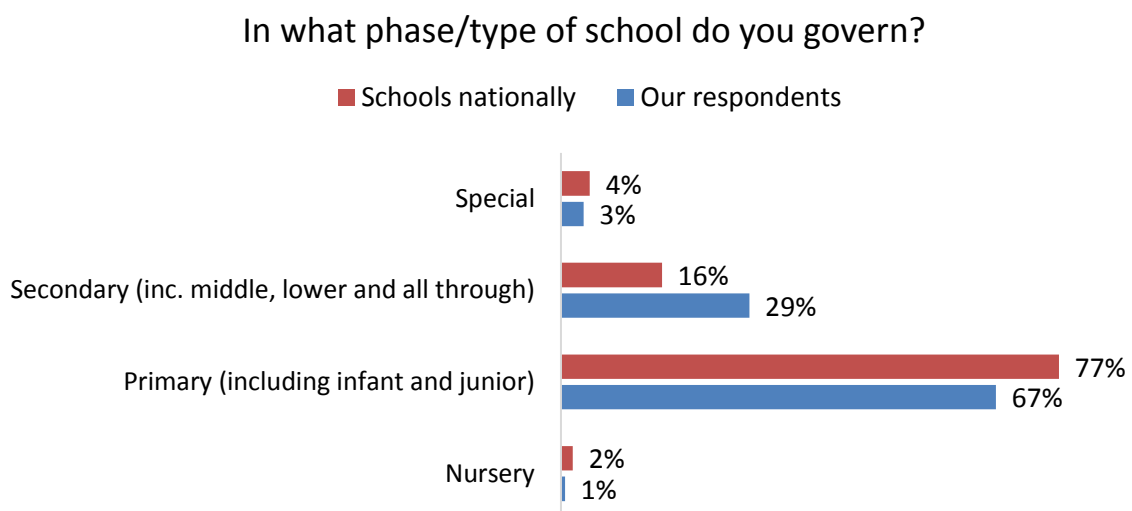
Figure 1



This shows that our respondents slightly over-represent the number of schools which are standalone academies and maintained federations. Responses elsewhere in the survey suggest that these tend to have larger governing boards, which may partially explain this (see page 18). Those governing in MATs and standalone maintained schools are slightly under-represented but in both cases the difference is four percentage points.

Secondary schools are slightly over-represented among our respondents when compared with schools nationally (respondents governing single schools).

Figure 2

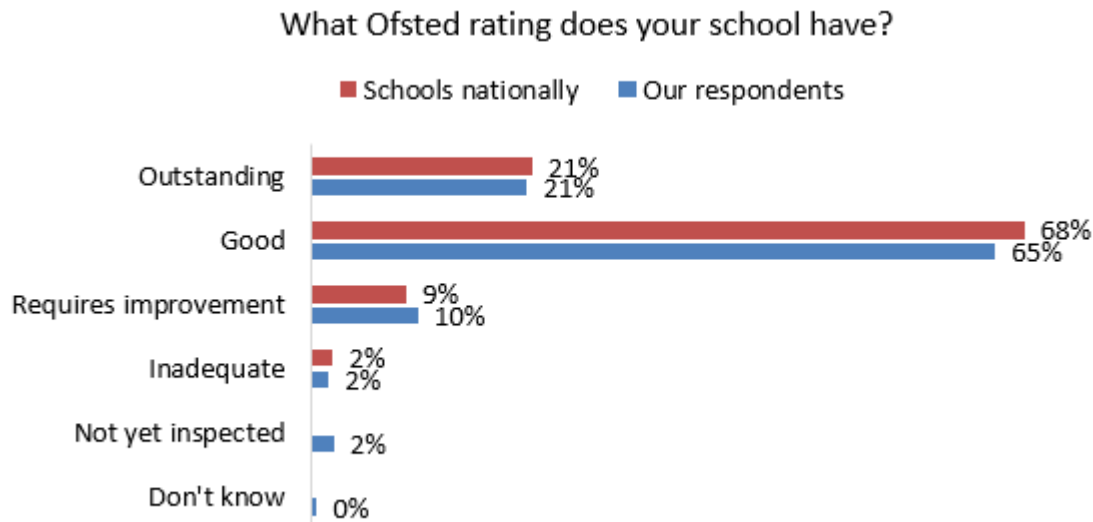


Nationally, 34% of primary and secondary schools have a religious character; 30% of our respondents governing single schools were governing schools with a religious character.



In terms of the Ofsted rating for the schools they govern, our respondents are fairly representative of schools nationally. The chart below compares the responses of those governing single schools with the overall effectiveness grades of schools nationally at their most recent inspection.¹

Figure 3



One group that are over-represented in the survey are NGA members. While approximately one third of schools in England are NGA members, 76% of respondents said that they have membership either through their governing board or as individuals. This is a consequence of the fact that we are able to send the survey to our members directly: while we advertise the survey through TES and encourage our partners to disseminate it to their networks we are inevitably more limited in our ability to reach non-members. Broadly, there do not seem to be striking differences in the responses of NGA members and non-members but this is something that is worth bearing in mind.

¹ Ofsted, 'Maintained schools and academies inspections and outcomes as at 31 March 2017: data, charts and tables', Table 3 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/maintained-schools-and-academies-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-march-2017>



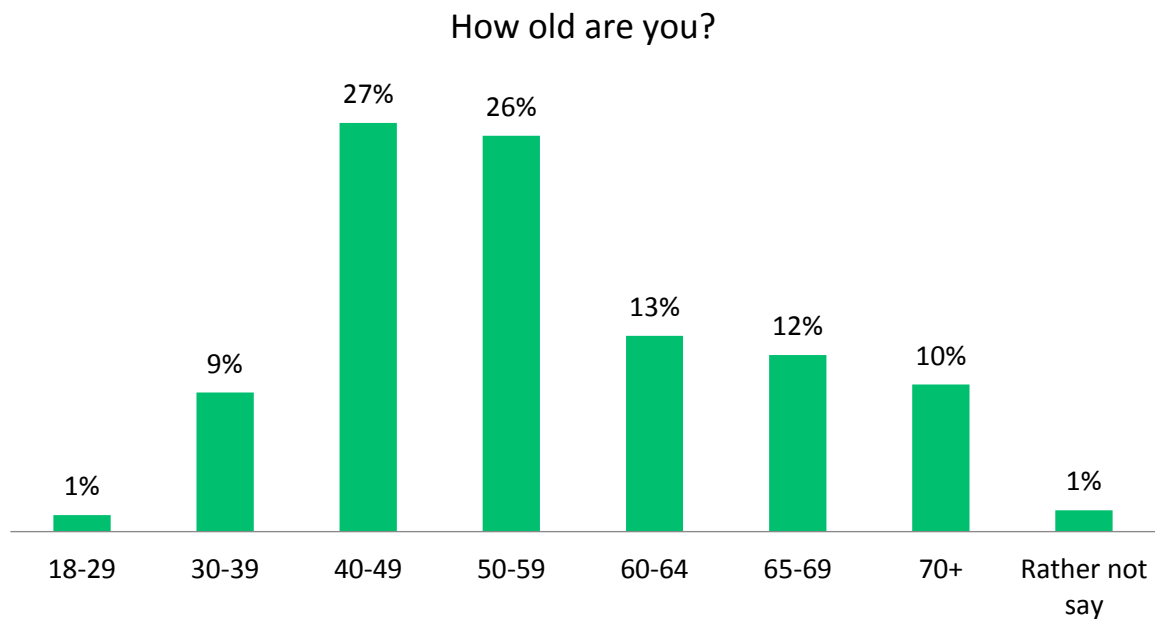
4 Who governs our schools?

Effective governance depends on the participation of people with a range of backgrounds and perspectives. Our survey looks at who is volunteering to take on the responsibility of governance in English schools.

Age

Our annual survey has consistently found that younger people are underrepresented in school governance. Just 1% of respondents were aged between 18 and 29 in each of the past three years. This year, a total of 10% of those surveyed were under 40 (11% in 2016 and 12% in 2015). By comparison, over a third were aged 60 or older.

Figure 4



This age profile is likely to be driven by a number of factors. When asked about their motivation for becoming involved in school governance, many retired governors/trustees cited having more time on their hands or the desire to utilise skills developed during their careers. The survey cannot, however, give insight into reasons younger people are not participating in school governance (for example, lack of awareness of the role).

Ethnicity

“Governing boards do not always reflect the ethnic diversity of the communities they serve”

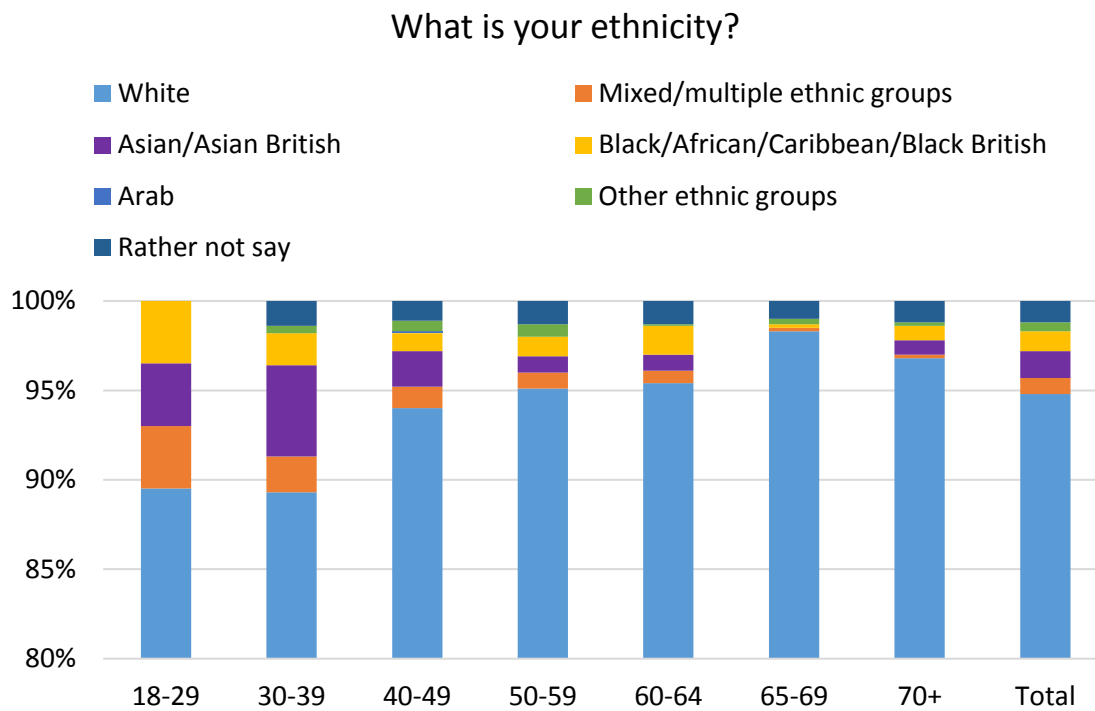
The findings of the survey indicate that we have a significant amount of work to do on improving the diversity of school governing boards: **only 4%** of respondents gave their ethnicity as non-white, while 94% of those surveyed gave their ethnic group as white (the remaining 2% selected ‘rather not say’). This is considerably higher than the 86% of the population at the last census in 2011. This suggests that governing boards do not always reflect the ethnic diversity of the communities they serve.



Those in leadership roles on governing boards were more likely to be white: 97% of chairs, 95% of vice-chairs, and 96% of committee chairs, in comparison to 92% of other governors, trustees or academy committee members.

Although younger governors and trustees make up a minority of respondents, younger respondents were more likely to give an ethnicity other than white compared to older respondents.

Figure 5

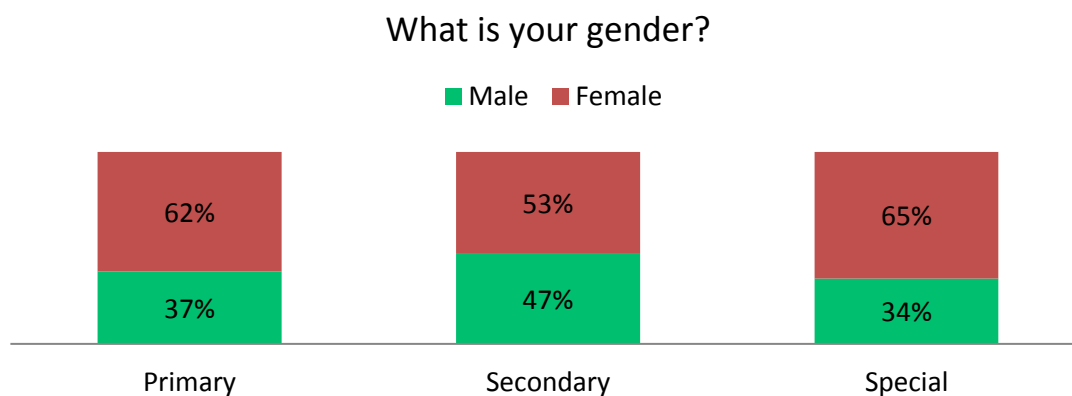


Gender

While women accounted for 61% of the responses, there was some indication that they are less likely to be in leadership roles on the governing board. 31% of the male respondents were chair and a further 15% were chair of a committee, compared to 25% and 12% of the female respondents.

There was a higher proportion of men among respondents governing secondary schools compared to primary or special schools, as shown by figure 6 below.

Figure 6





Employment

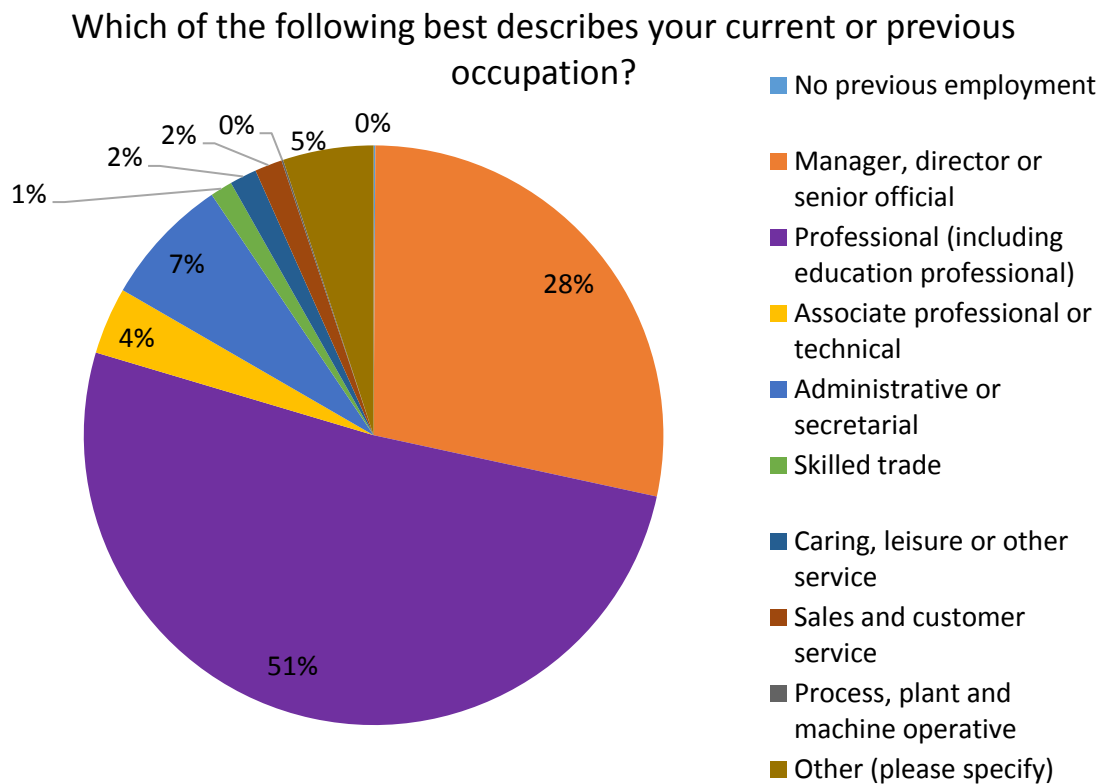
Almost two thirds (65%) of those surveyed were working (53% were employed and 12% were self-employed). 28% were retired and 5% were looking after home or family. Trustees of MATs were the least likely to be in work, with 59% either employed or self-employed and 31% retired.

Of all those in work, two-thirds (66%) worked full time and the remaining third work on a part time (31%) or casual (3%) basis.

“Stakeholder representation is not incompatible with skilled governance”

The Department for Education have, rightly, been promoting the importance of skilled governance over recent years. Our findings suggest that the majority of governors and trustees are already bringing valuable skills and experience from their working lives: 28% are or were managers, directors or senior officials, and a further 51% are or were professionals.

Figure 7



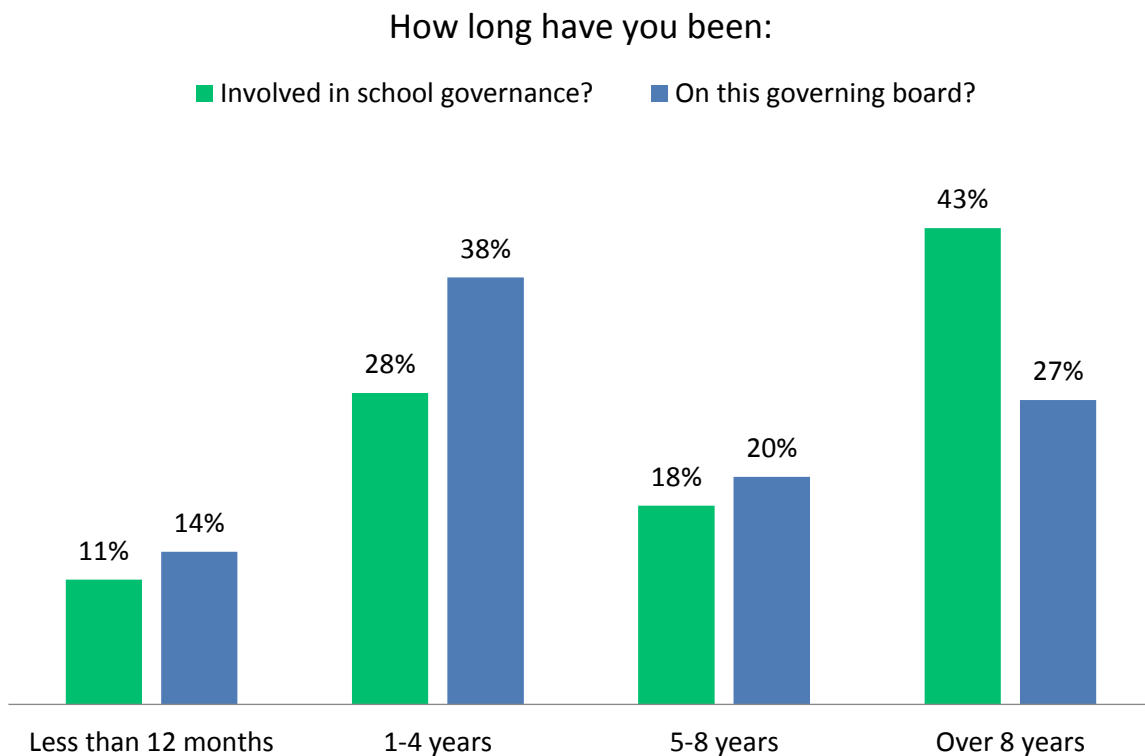
Our survey also reveals little difference in the proportion of managers, directors and senior officials (current or previous) among those elected to the governing board by the parent body and those appointed by the governing board or trust members: 32% of elected parents compared to 31% of those appointed. This suggests that stakeholder representation is not incompatible with skilled governance.



Governance experience

In line with good practice in the charity sector and many others, the NGA thinks that individuals should serve no more than two terms of office (eight years) on any one governing board. This is a message that has received mixed feedback from members and the wider school governance community, which is perhaps reflected in the 27% of respondents who had been on the same governing board for more than eight years.

Figure 8



Despite this, it is encouraging to see that a higher proportion of people (43%) have been involved in school governance for more than eight years, suggesting that some long serving governors and trustees are moving on but still using their experience to benefit another school(s).

This is reinforced by participants' responses when asked whether they have governed on more than one governing board. While 57% had not, 27% had been part of another governing board before their current one. 13% of respondents were governing on more than one school governing board at the time they were surveyed. A very small proportion (3%) had experience of governance outside the schools sector, suggesting this is a seam of governance expertise schools are not currently accessing.

Routes to governance

Just under a third of those surveyed (32%) were parents or carers of a child at the school(s) they govern. Among these, less than half (44%) were elected to the governing board by the parent body, suggesting that the parent community is also an important recruiting ground for co-opted governor/trustee vacancies. We know from previous surveys that 44% of serving volunteers first

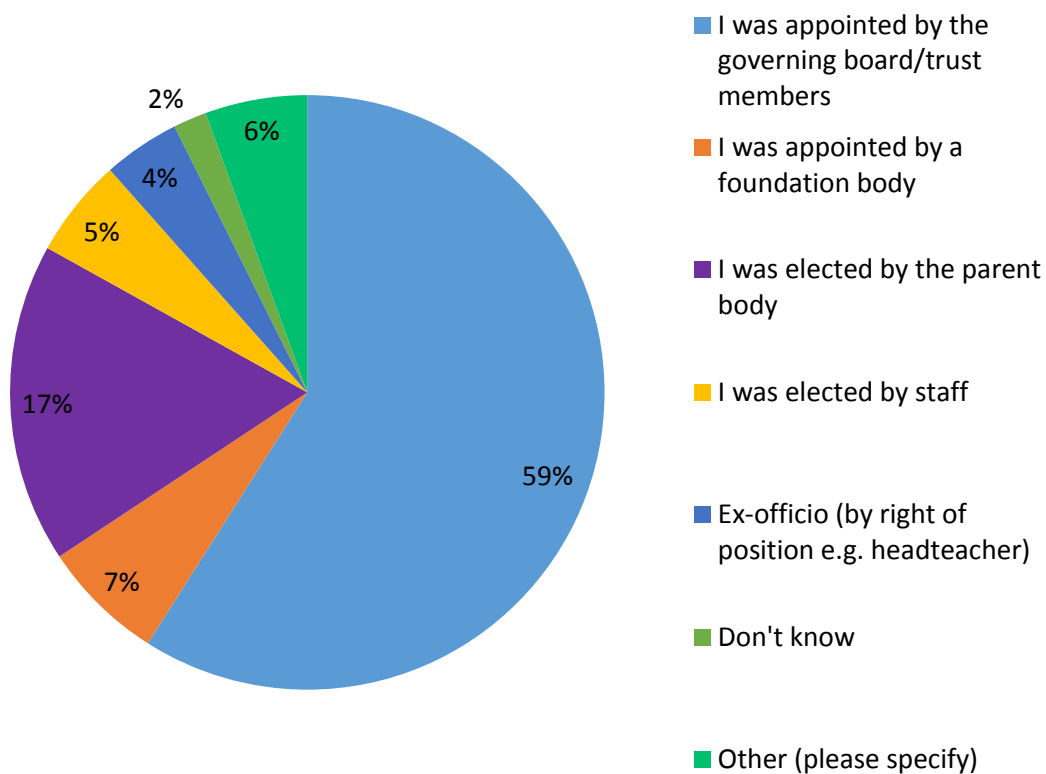


became engaged as a governor through being elected as a parent. Even though the number of places reserved for parents is falling, co-option may keep a route to governorship open.

Overall, 59% of respondents had been appointed by the governing board or trust members, 7% were appointed by a foundation body, 17% were elected by the parent body, 5% were elected by staff and 4% held ex-officio positions e.g. headteachers. 2% were unsure which of these applied, and 6% specified another route. Among those responding 'other', many said they were appointed by the local authority (LA), suggesting a slight misunderstanding as LA governors are nominated by the LA but appointed by the governing board.

Figure 9

How were you selected for your current governing role?



Motivations for governing

“I have always believed in the importance and power of education, and I felt it was time to share my experience in other fields.”

Beyond the mechanism for joining the governing board, why did those surveyed decide to become school governors, trustees or academy committee members? We asked them to describe their motivations and 4,245 free text responses were given.

The responses have been coded according to common themes to allow us to understand how prevalent particular motivating factors may be. Many responses explicitly mentioned multiple

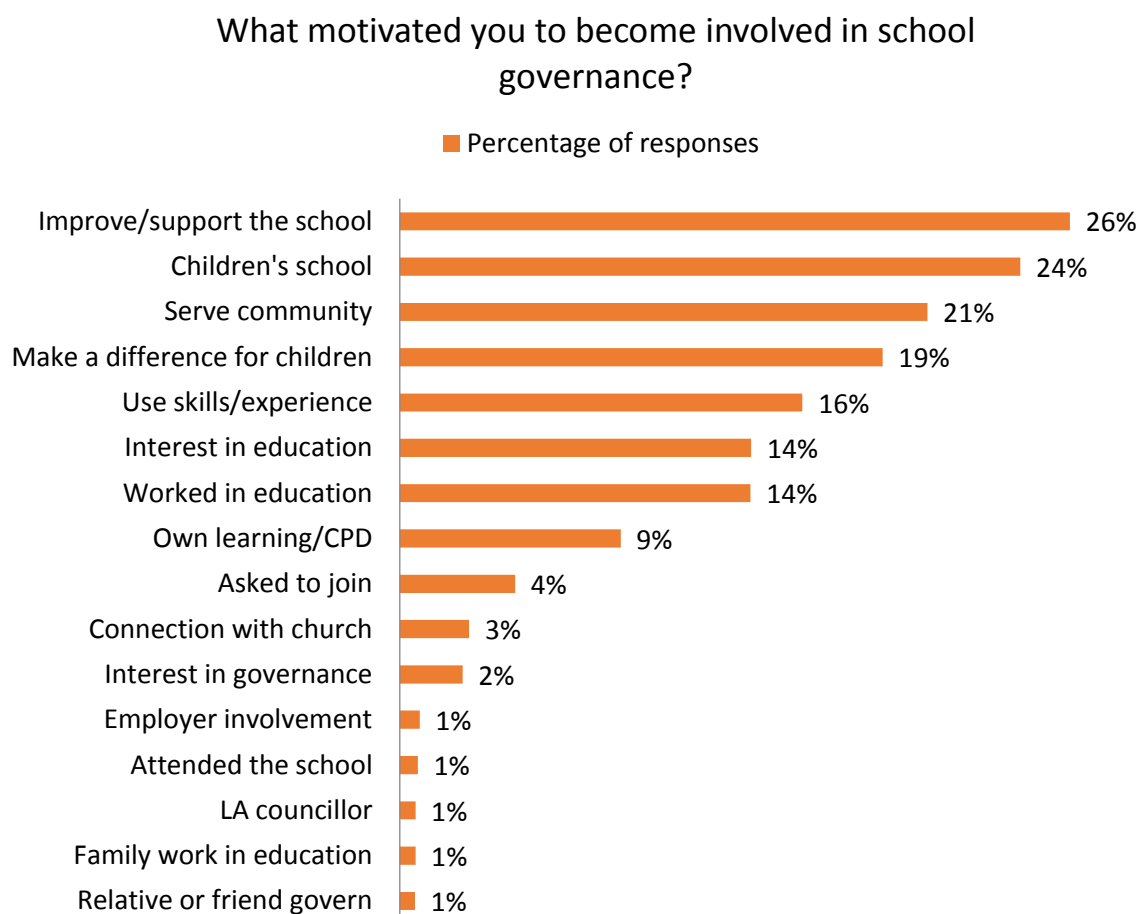


motivations. It is possible that this methodology underestimates some factors (for example, someone who has worked in education may also be motivated by an interest in education but has not explicitly said so) but it gives a reasonable impression of why people join governing boards.

The wish to support or see improvements in a particular school was the most frequently mentioned motivation, followed by having (or having had) a child or grandchild attending the school and a wish to give back to or serve their local community. Each of these relies on a link to the school or locality, which goes some way to explaining the difficulty many governing boards have in recruiting people without a pre-existing tie to the institution.

It is striking that less than 1% of responses cited employer involvement as a motivating factor, despite many larger employers now working with organisations such as Inspiring Governance to encourage their employees to volunteer. A larger proportion cited their own learning or continuing professional development (CPD) as a motivating factor but this was still low at 9% and for many people this was as much to do with their personal development (for example, understanding the education system in order to support their parenting) as their professional career.

Figure 10



Examples of the responses given illustrate the range of different motivations reported:



- “The opportunity to support the development of an already good school to ensure the provision of excellent education for its pupils. It also provides me with an opportunity to develop myself in a strategic role within an organisation.”
- “Because I'm a full-time working parent I don't have as many opportunities to be involved with the school as I would like. This is my way of giving back and being involved with the school.”
- “I wanted to get more involved with the school and felt the governors lacked the experience that a professional working in the private sector would bring.”
- “To find out more about how the school is run.”
- “Having spent my life in public service at a senior level, on retirement, volunteering as a governor allowed me to contribute learned skills, and satisfied my interest in education of the young.”
- “Fears over schools future direction. Feel you can't complain about how a school is run if you aren't prepared to offer time to be involved.”
- “Looking at skills to gain for management and leadership to help with my career and university course.”
- “I thought I had a gift to give. Turns out, over the years, it was not the gift that was needed but hard work over many hours.”



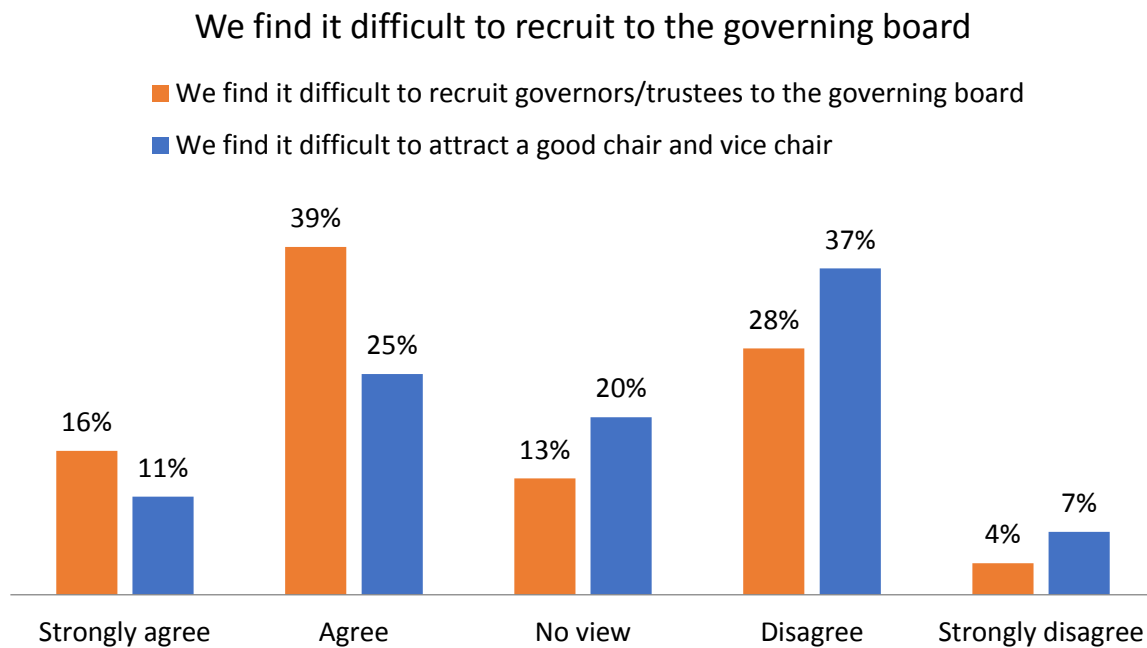
5 How are schools governed?

Governor recruitment

“The fact that almost a third have two or more vacancies is more worrying”

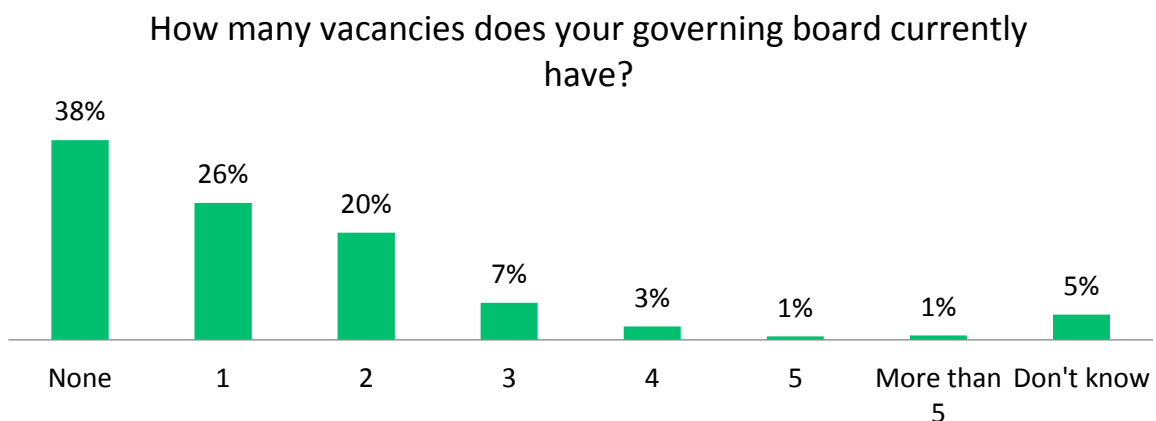
Given the importance of the role, the risk of failing to attract sufficient high quality volunteers is significant. A considerable proportion of those surveyed reported that their governing boards are finding it difficult to recruit governors and trustees. Overall, 56% agreed this was the case this year, which has increased slightly from 53% in 2016 and 50% in 2015.

Figure 11



This difficulty in recruiting is reflected in the number of vacancies respondents reported on their governing boards. 57% said that they currently have at least one vacancy.

Figure 12



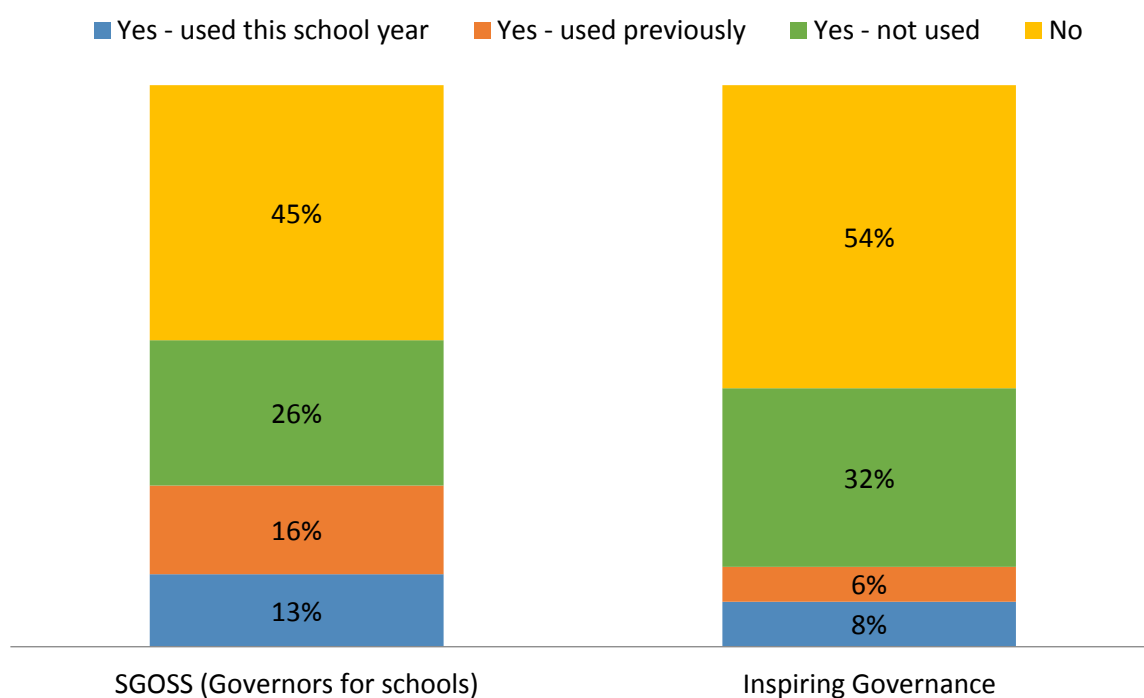


Some turnover in governing board membership is needed to support good governance, so having one vacancy at any point may not be a cause for concern. The fact that almost a third (31%) have two or more vacancies is more worrying.

Given that a sizeable proportion of governing boards have vacancies, it is notable that many are not using the free services available for volunteer recruitment and this may point to a need for improved communication. As shown in figure 13 below, just under half of respondents had not heard of SGOSS and just over half had not heard of Inspiring Governance. More respondents had used SGOSS than Inspiring Governance, perhaps reflecting the fact that this is a more established service.

Figure 13

Have you heard of the following organisations?



There was no change in the overall proportion of respondents who had used SGOSS when compared with the 2016 survey (29%), whereas the proportion who had used Inspiring Governance had risen from 5% in 2016 to 14% of those responding to this year's survey.

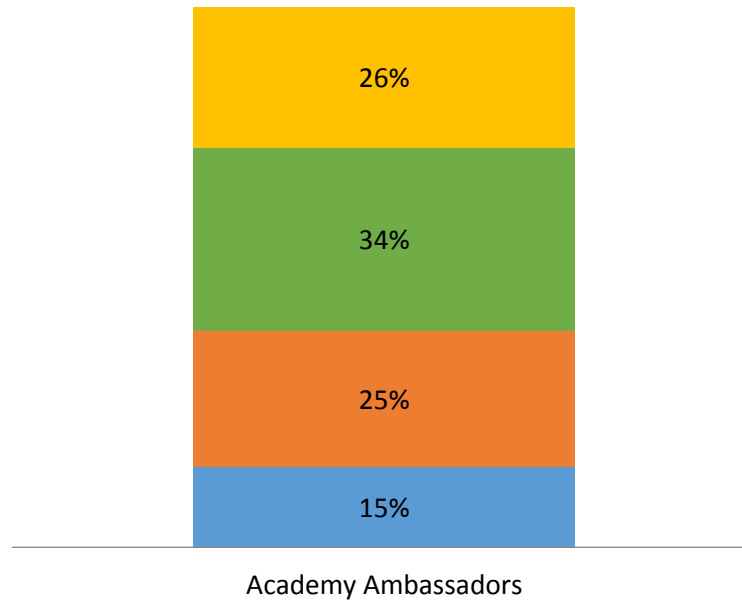
Overall, 78% of respondents had not heard of Academy Ambassadors but this is not surprising given that the service is focused on recruiting for MAT trustee boards. If we look only at responses from MAT trustees (figure 14 overleaf), this figure drops to 26% and four in every ten have used the service, in this year or previously.



Figure 14

Have you heard of the following organisation? Responses from MAT trustees

■ Yes - used this school year ■ Yes - used previously ■ Yes - not used ■ No



Beyond locating potential volunteers, how you go about recruiting them is crucial and NGA recommends formally interviewing prospective governors and trustees. Only 39% of respondents had done this in the past year (10% did not know whether this was done on their governing board). However, of those that had done it, 96% had found it useful.

“having skills from your working life does not negate the need for induction training”

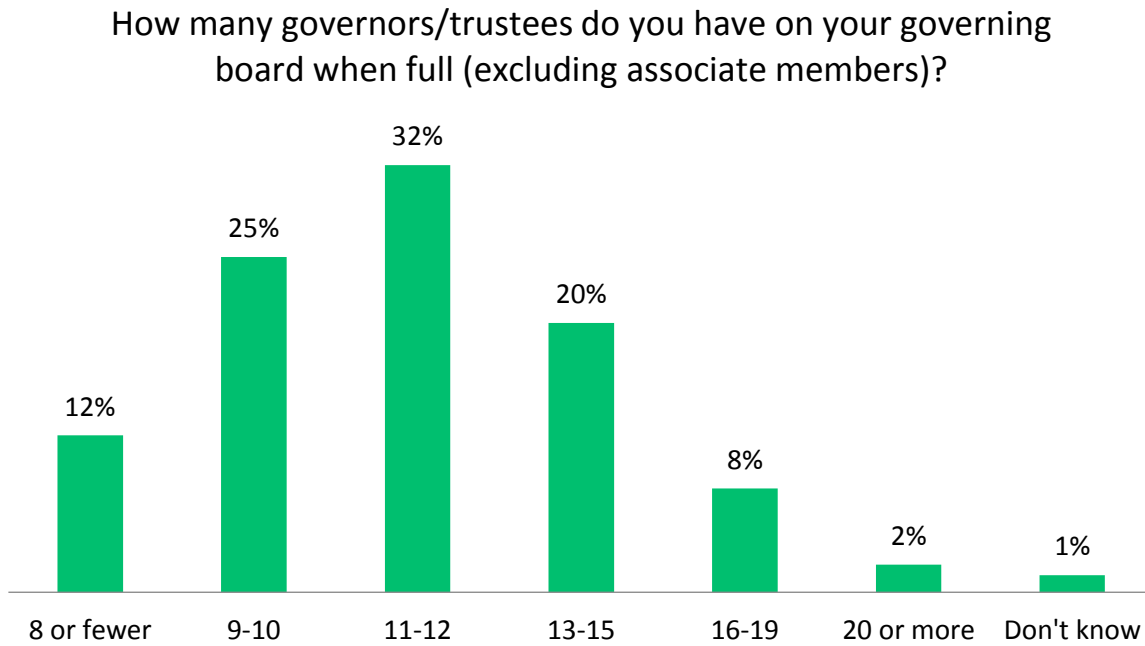
Once new trustees are on the board, supportive induction is essential to ensure that they become effective in their role. The vast majority of respondents agreed that high quality induction training should be mandatory for new governors and trustees: 95% (with just 3% disagreeing and the remainder saying 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.

Board size and committees

Since we began asking about the size of governing boards in the 2013 survey, our findings have suggested a trend towards smaller governing boards. Responses to this year’s survey indicate that this is continuing: in 2013, 17% of boards had 10 or fewer places and 29% had 16 or more, whereas this year 37% had 10 or fewer places and 10% had 16 or more (see figure 15 overleaf).



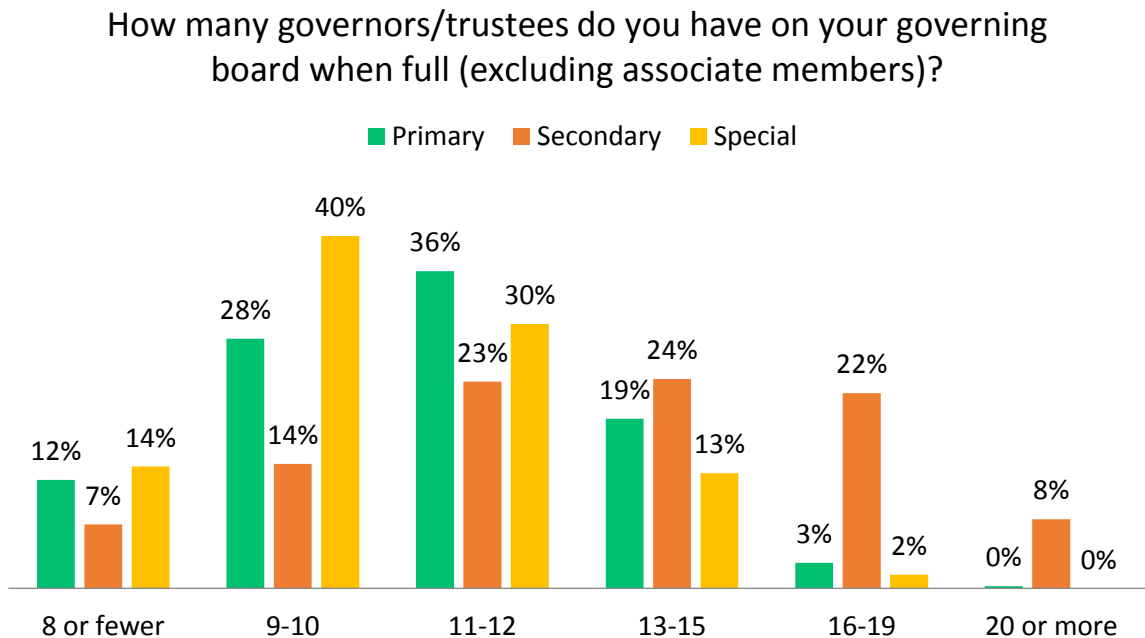
Figure 15



There are considerable differences in the responses about the size of governing boards between phases and school structures.

A greater proportion of those governing secondary schools were on larger governing boards: almost one in three (30%) were on boards with 16 or more places.

Figure 16



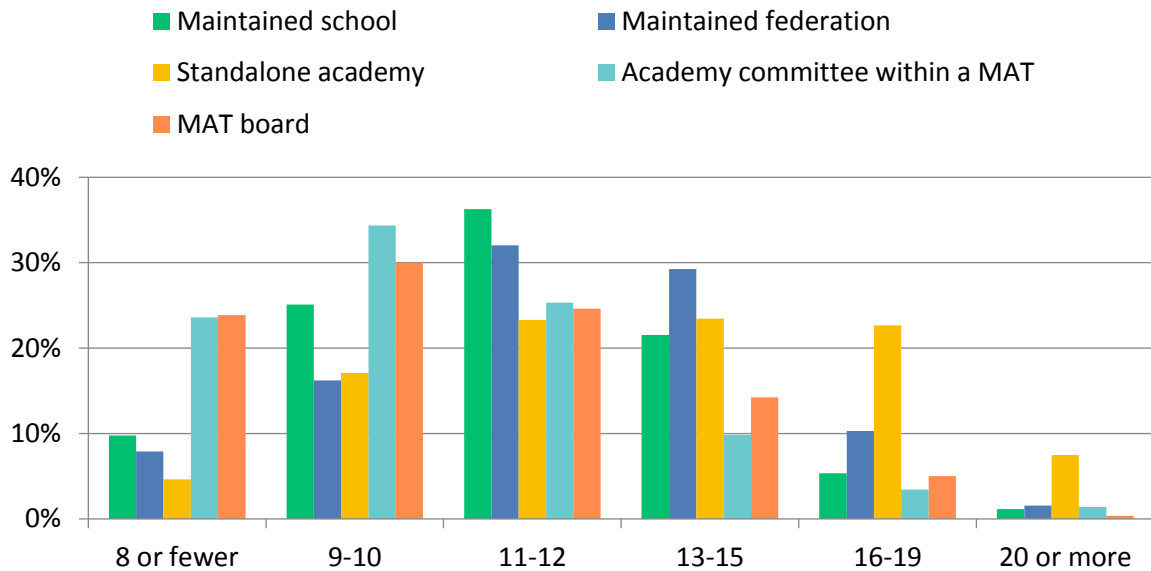
When we look at different school structures, it is striking that more of those governing standalone academies report larger boards than others (and this may be linked to the larger boards in secondary



schools seen above). By contrast, MAT boards and academy committees within MATs appear much more likely to have fewer people on the board.

Figure 17

How many governors/trustees do you have on your governing board when full (excluding associate members)?

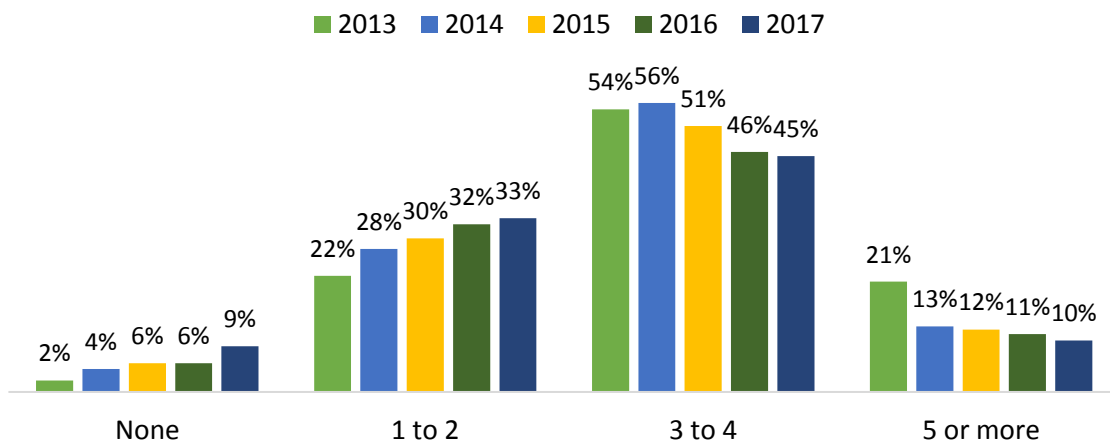


There also appears to be a trend towards governing with fewer committees among survey respondents. The proportion governing without any committees has risen from 2% in 2013 to 9% of single school governing boards in 2017, though this has partly been driven by an increasing number of responses from academy committees (23% of which do not have any sub-committees). The proportions of respondents whose governing boards have both three to four committees and five or more committees have dropped by around 10 percentage points over the four years.

Figure 18

How many committees do you have?

Do not include panels which have to be set up when required for employment issues, exclusions, headteacher performance management etc.



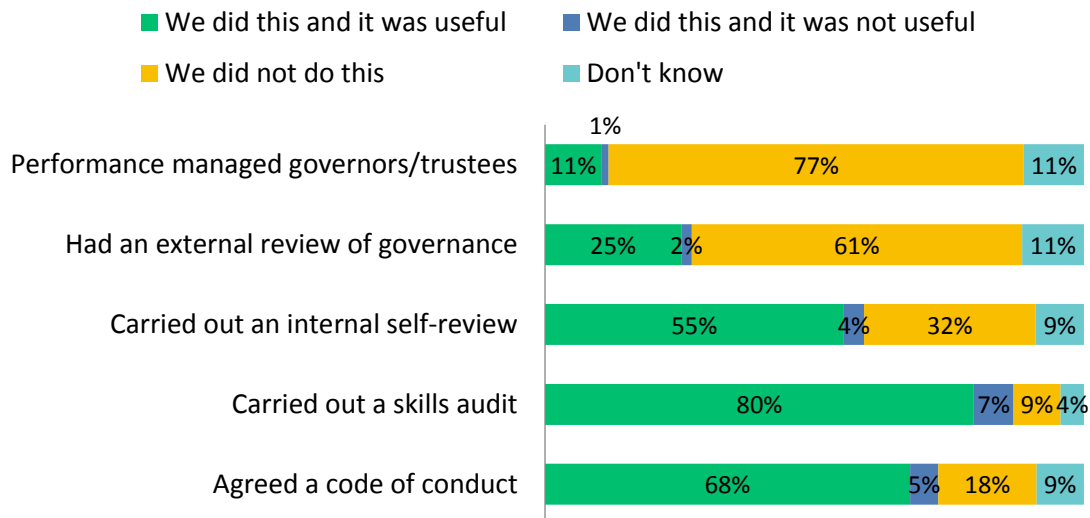


Governance practice

The survey provides a valuable opportunity for NGA to get a sense of how widespread some of the governance practices we try to promote are, as well as how useful respondents find them. Figure 19 shows the responses to this year’s survey on a number of these.

Figure 19

Which of the following has your governing board done this school year?



The least common practice among respondents appears to be performance managing governors and trustees, with just 12% reporting that their governing board has done this. Although low, this is a considerable increase on the 4% of respondents when we first asked the question in 2012. This reflects conversations we have with members and others around the country, which indicate that this is something that more and more governing boards are beginning to think about.

“The least common practice among respondents appears to be performance managing governors and trustees”

The proportion of respondents whose governing boards have had an external review of governance has also risen considerably in comparison with previous years. 27% said they had done so in this school year, compared to 14% of respondents to last year’s survey. The Charity Governance Code recommends that boards of trustees have an external review once every three years so this year’s responses are not far off what we would expect if all governing boards were following this advice.

An even greater increase has been seen in the proportion who had carried out an internal self-review: 59% this year compared to 37% last year. This is something that NGA recommends for all governing boards to do every year, so while it is encouraging to see the proportion of respondents who have done it rising, there is still a long way to go before the practice is universal.

This year, 73% of respondents told us that they had agreed a code of conduct in this school year. In previous years we have asked a slightly different question: “Does your governing board have a code of conduct for governors”. This had received consistently higher proportions saying yes – 87% in 2016.



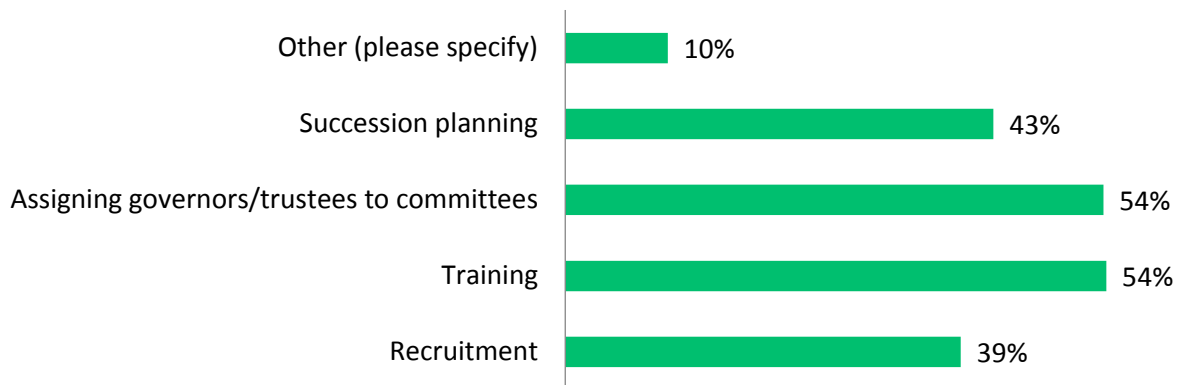
This may indicate that some governing boards have a code of conduct but do not review and adopt it on an annual basis. The NGA would recommend formally adopting the code of conduct annually, if only to ensure it remains at the forefront of governors' and trustees' minds. We will adapt questions in future surveys to find out whether this is the case.

The proportion of respondents who had carried out a skills audit has been consistently above 70% since the first survey in 2012 and was higher than ever in this year's survey at 87%. Of those who had carried out a skills audit, 8% told us that it had not been a useful exercise. While low, this is slightly higher than for any of the other practices listed and may be something to explore in more detail.

We asked a supplementary question to try and find out how governing boards are using skills audits to improve their effectiveness, and figure 20 below shows the findings (respondents could select as many as were applicable).

Figure 20

If you used a skills audit, what did you use it for?

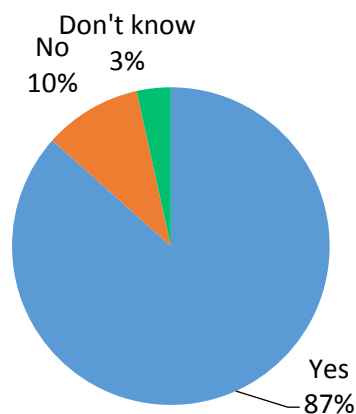


Clerking

It is widely recognised that an effective clerk is a key element in the success of any governing board. Through our Clerking Matters campaign, the NGA has been seeking to raise both the status and professionalism of governing board clerks and therefore it is encouraging that 87% of respondents tell us they have a clerk who can provide legal and procedural advice.

Figure 21

We have a clerk who can provide us with legal and procedural advice





Interestingly, trustees of MATs were least likely to say that this is the case (81% compared to 84% of standalone academy trustees and 88% of maintained school governors). This may be because some MATs use different language to describe the clerking role, such as governance manager or company secretary.

One cause for concern is that the proportion of respondents saying that they would consider paying more for a clerk who could provide legal and procedural advice has dropped from 68% in 2016 to 56% in 2017. This may be influenced by the level of anxiety among school governors and trustees about school finances (see section 6) but is nonetheless a worrying sign for clerking as a profession.

Chairing

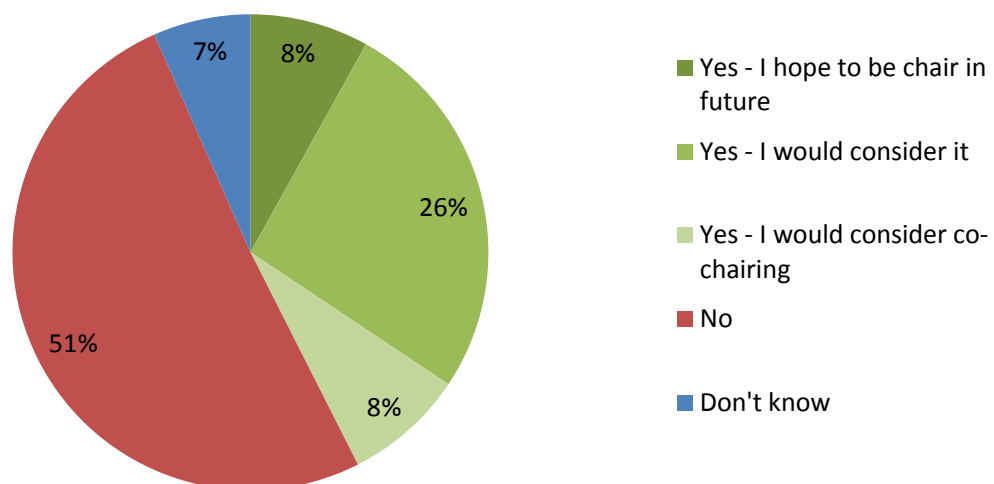
Attracting a good chair and vice chair was a concern for a smaller proportion of respondents but at 36% this was still a significant proportion.

Interestingly, chairs were more likely to agree that it is difficult (40%) than other governors (32%). This might suggest that some people are staying on as chair longer than they would choose due to a lack of willing volunteers. The survey does suggest that nearly one in five chairs have been in the role for longer than the six years that NGA recommends though we cannot tell whether this is by choice or because no one else will step up.

We asked respondents who weren't currently chairing whether they would consider taking on the role in future. Just over half (51%) said definitively that they would not and just 8% said that they were hoping to be elected chair in the future. Around a quarter (26%) were willing to consider it while a further 8% said that they would consider co-chairing.

Figure 22

Would you consider becoming chair?



When asked why they would not consider becoming chair, many respondents identified the time commitment and workload as the key barriers. Answers such as **“I do not feel I could commit any more time to the role at this point in time”** and **“Too much of a responsibility these days”** were fairly typical.



Time taken to govern

Governing a school or group of schools is a significant responsibility and it is always important for those volunteering to be realistic about the time commitment. We asked respondents whether they agreed that the responsibilities given to governors/trustees are manageable within 10 to 20 equivalent days per year (a benchmark borrowed from the charity sector). Just over half (53%) agreed that they were, with 39% disagreeing (the remainder had no view).

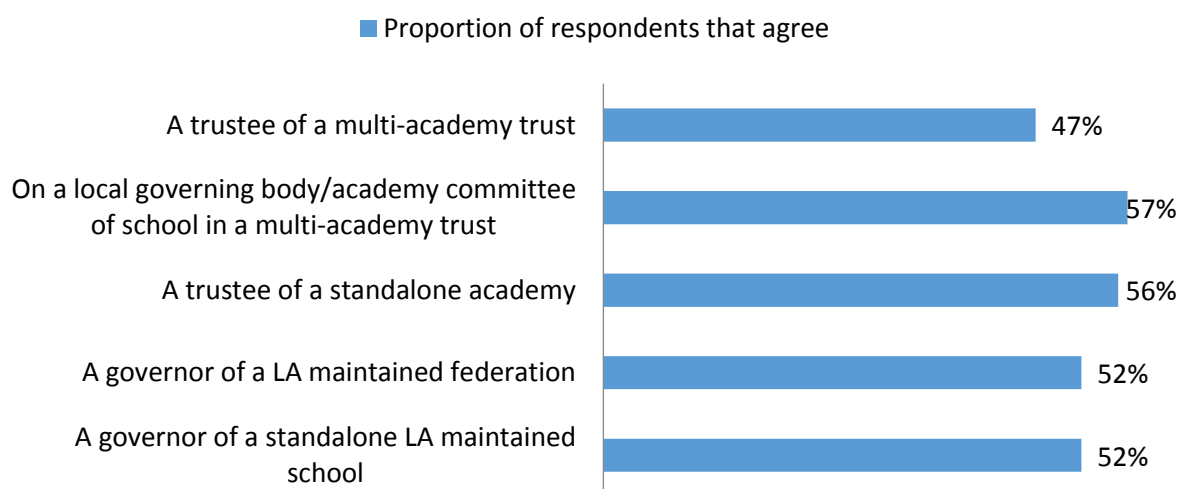
Interestingly, those governing secondary schools were more likely to agree that the workload was manageable (57%) than primary (52%) or special school (45%) governors and trustees. This could be seen as surprising, given that secondary schools tend to be larger institutions but it is possible that those governing smaller schools are more likely to be drawn into operational tasks.

“Only a minority of respondents support the idea that it should be a paid role”

Governing in different school structures can also be a different experience and figure 23 below shows that MAT trustees are the least likely to agree that the responsibilities are manageable within that timeframe. This makes sense given the complexity of these organisations. It is interesting that those governing single academies – whether as trustees of single academy trusts or on academy committees within a MAT – were more likely to agree than those governing in the maintained sector.

Figure 23

The responsibilities given to governors/trustees are manageable within 10 to 20 days per year



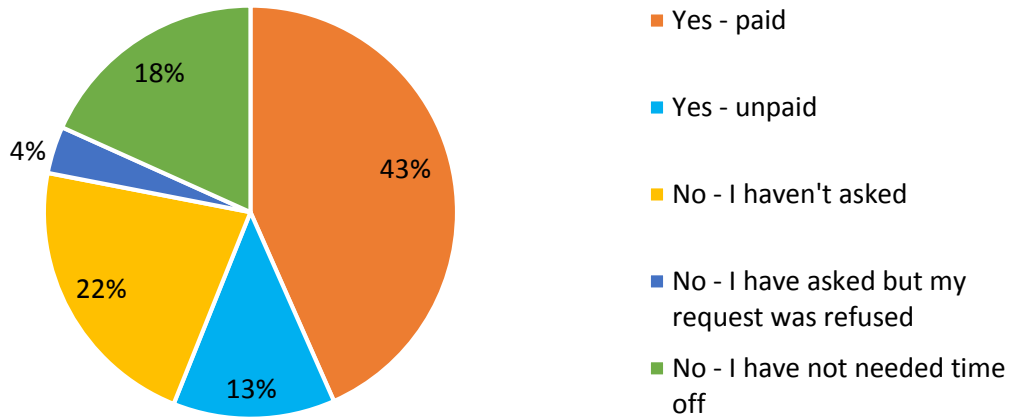
One thing that can help with the demands of school governance is support from employers. We asked respondents who are in work whether they receive time off work for governance and 56% reported that they had received time off. 43% had received paid time off while a further 13% had been allowed to take unpaid leave.

Governors of maintained schools are legally entitled to reasonable time off to commit to volunteering (though what is defined as reasonable has been left to employers and employees to negotiate). However, those governing in the maintained sector were actually slightly less likely than those governing in MATs to receive time off, indicating that it is not necessarily the law driving employer behaviour.



Figure 24

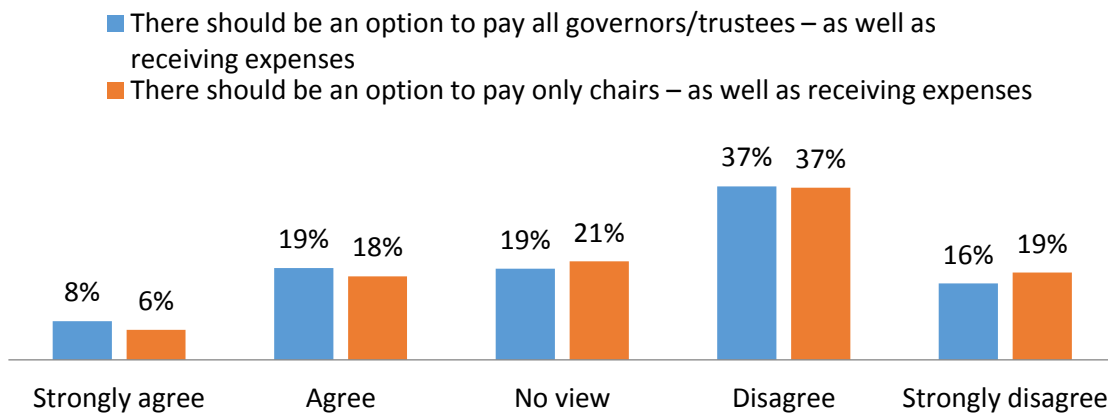
Does your employer give you time off work for governance?



It is notable that only 4% had actually had requests for time off refused, suggesting that there may be scope for governors and trustees to be more assertive when talking to their employers about governance duties.

Given the demands on their time, it is important to note that only a minority of respondents (28%) support the idea that it should be a paid role. Just less than a quarter (24%) of respondents believe that the chair should be paid.

Figure 25



This is despite recent suggestions from Ofsted and the RSA that it should be explored.² While the proportions who support the idea are not negligible, the NGA will continue to look at ways to ensure that governance remains manageable as a voluntary role rather than support a move towards payment.

² Ofsted, 'Improving governance' (15 December 2016) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-governance>; Tony Breslin, 'Who Governs Our Schools? Trends, tensions and opportunities' (September 2017) https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/reports/rsa_who-governs-our-schools-report.pdf



6 Funding and finance

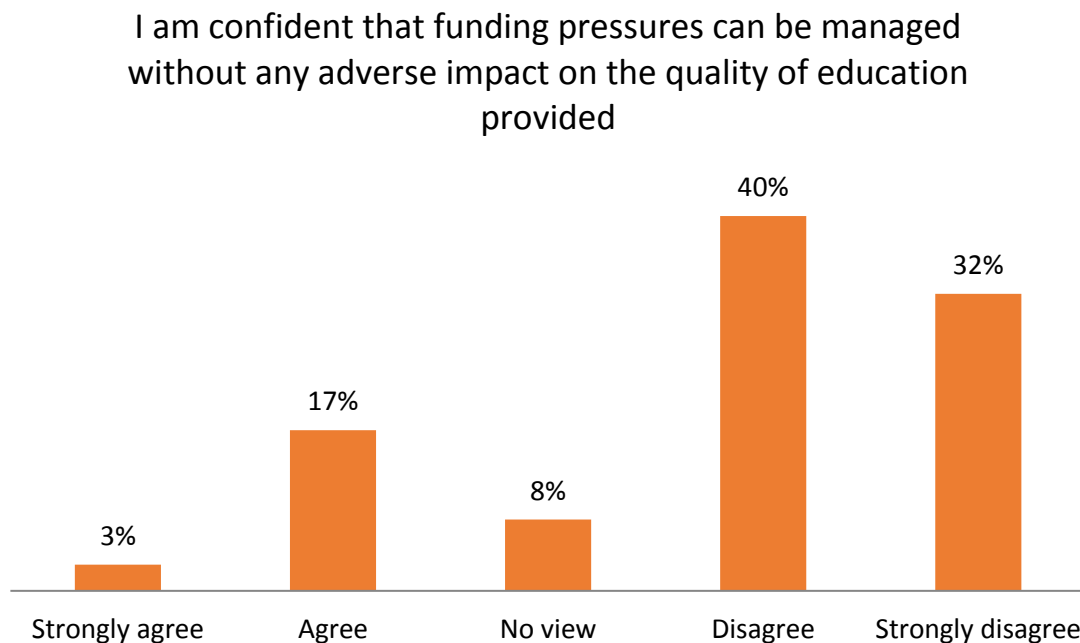
Funding and financial management has been among the most prominent issues for schools over the past year, with rising costs contributing to real terms cuts to school budgets and the forthcoming introduction of a national funding formula.

Funding pressures

“When you have already cut support staff, buildings and maintenance etc., all you have left is to increase class sizes, reduce subject choice and cut the number of teachers”

Among the most worrying findings in this year’s survey, as few as 20% of respondents were confident that they can manage funding pressures without an adverse impact on the quality of education provided. 72% said that they were not confident that pupils’ education would not be damaged.

Figure 26



Secondary schools were slightly more likely to disagree/strongly disagree (77%) than primary schools (72%) or special schools (67%). 71% of respondents in MATs also disagree/strongly disagree that funding pressures can be managed with no impact on the quality of education provided.

These responses were given before Justine Greening’s announcement of £1.3 billion additional funding for schools, which means that they may not reliably reflect current feelings. However, it remains striking as an indicator of the level of anxiety among governors and trustees about the potential impact of funding pressures on pupils.

We are aware that many schools are already experiencing difficulty balancing their budgets, so we also asked about the actions governors and trustees have taken or anticipate taking in order to do so. Figure 27 on page 28 shows the responses given.



The responses indicate that the real terms cuts to school budgets are already having a significant impact on schools, with almost half (47%) having reduced the number of support staff they employ and a further 36% anticipating doing this within two years.

Some of these actions are more relevant to secondary schools than primary schools and therefore the overall figures (shown in figure 27 below) obscure the true situation. In particular, 56% of secondary schools had already reduced the number of subjects on offer and 49% had reduced the number of qualifications on offer.

Primary schools were less likely than secondary schools to have taken each action and, with the exception of reducing extra-curricular activities, the same is also true of special schools.

Looking specifically at MATs, 83% of respondents in MATs had already reduced the number of support staff they employ or anticipate doing so over the next two years. Furthermore, over 50% of MAT respondents either anticipate or already have: reduced the number of teaching staff; increased class sizes; reduced spending on building and maintenance; and/or reduced spending on staff continuing professional development (CPD).

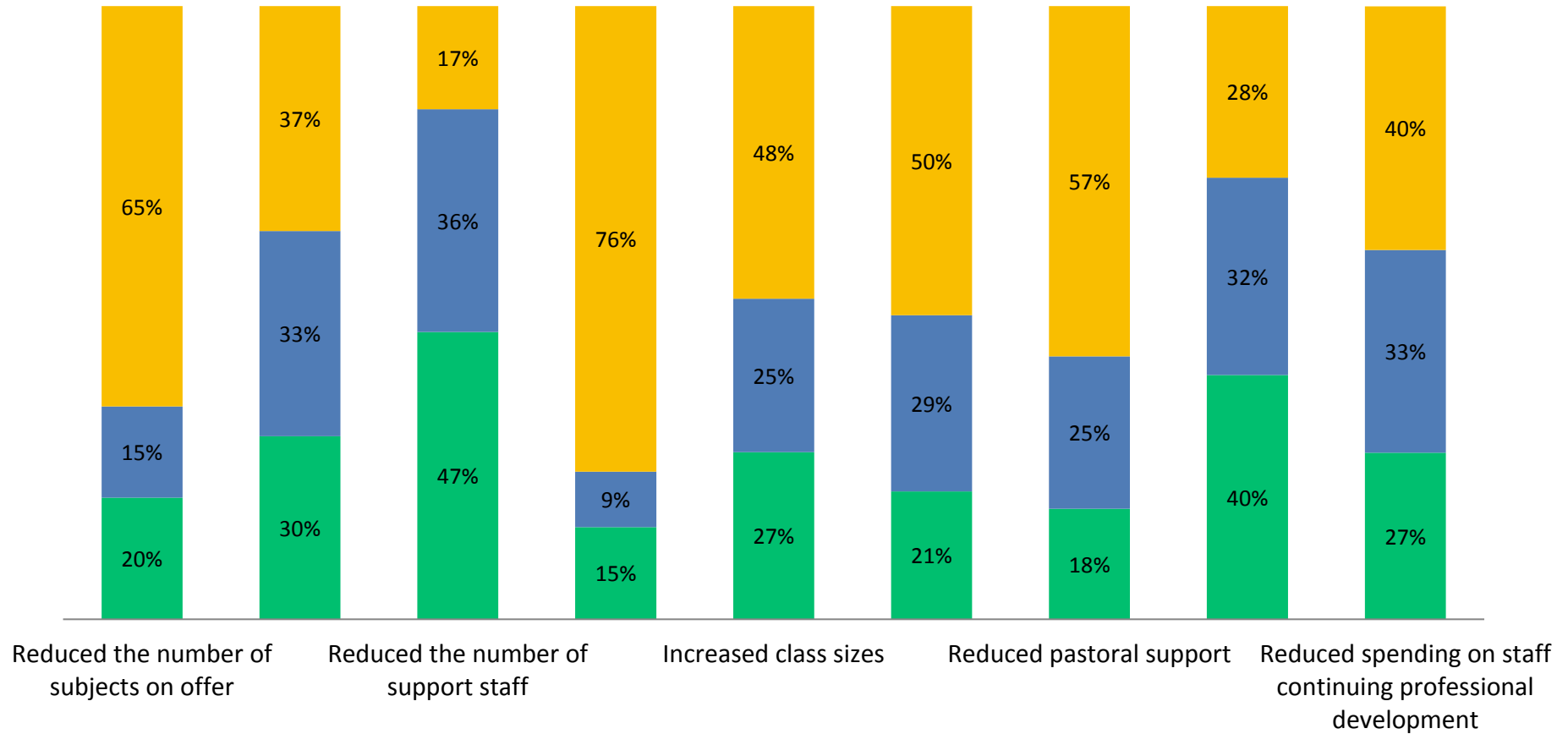
While some of the measures will have a direct short term impact on pupils' school experience, it is equally concerning that large proportions of schools have or are anticipating reducing spending in areas which support the longer term fortunes of the school(s), such as staff continuing professional development and buildings and maintenance.



Figure 27

How have financial constraints affected your school(s)?

■ We have already done this ■ We anticipate doing this in the next two years ■ Not applicable





National funding formula

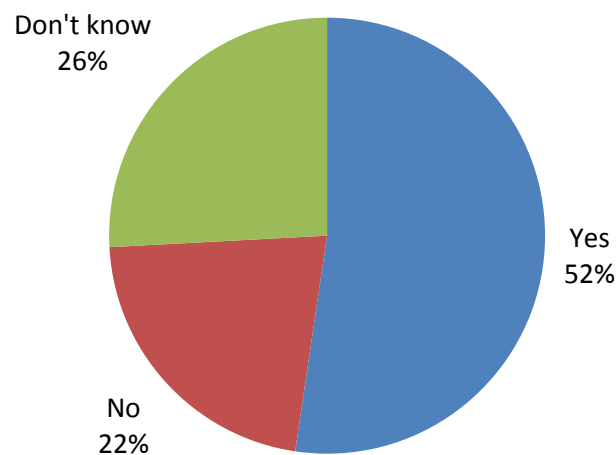
“In theory it is sound - but in practice it will cause problems because there is not enough money in the overall package”

During the survey period, the outcome of the second stage of consultation on a new national funding formula was unknown. We asked governors, trustees and academy committee members whether they support the principle of a national funding formula.

Overall, just over half of respondents said that they support the principle and just over a quarter said they were unsure:

Figure 28

Do you support the principle of a national funding formula?



The difficulty of separating the principle from the details of the proposed formula is illustrated by some of the explanations given for participants' answers:

- “The move to a national formula is fair - Gloucestershire is part of the F40 group. But the system still needs more money.”
- “I think the current system needs changing but the new one proposed by government is flawed.”
- “It is imperative that the core cost of running a school is recognised, that the cost of teaching per pupil is recognised and the importance of schools to communities, especially small rural communities is recognised, even if this increases cost, and that these features are fair, equal and transparent across the country.”
- “Only if it is a fairer formula than has been proposed”

These comments reflect common themes among the 2,305 free text explanations given.

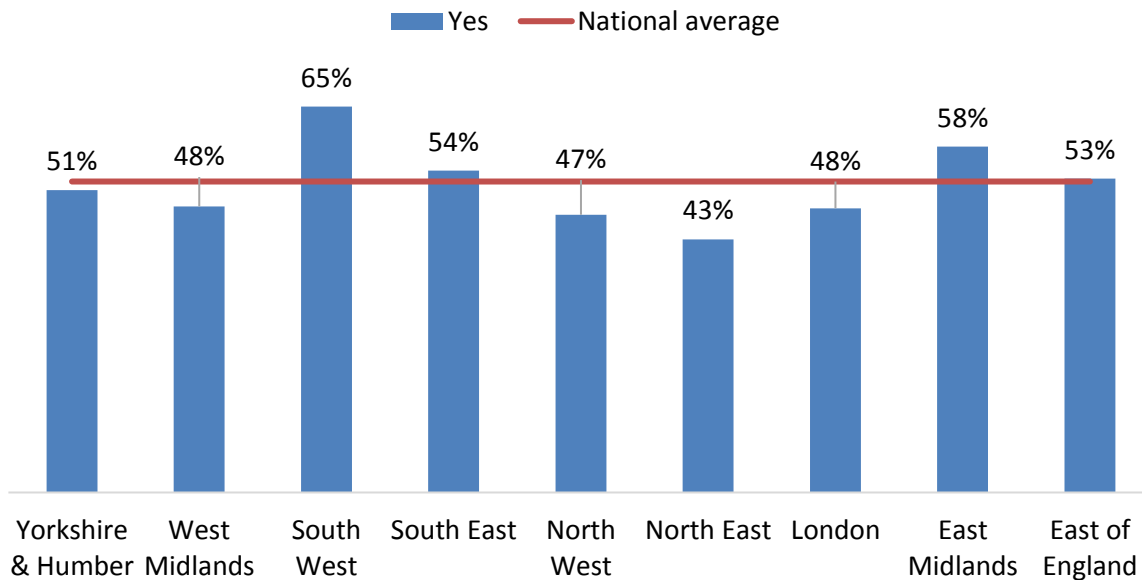
The impact of a move to a national funding formula will, of course, vary between schools and localities and we might expect different answers in different areas. The chart below shows that those



in the North East were the least likely to be supportive, with just 43% in favour of a new formula in principle, and those in the South West were most likely to be supportive, with 65% in favour.

Figure 29

Do you support the principle of a national funding formula?



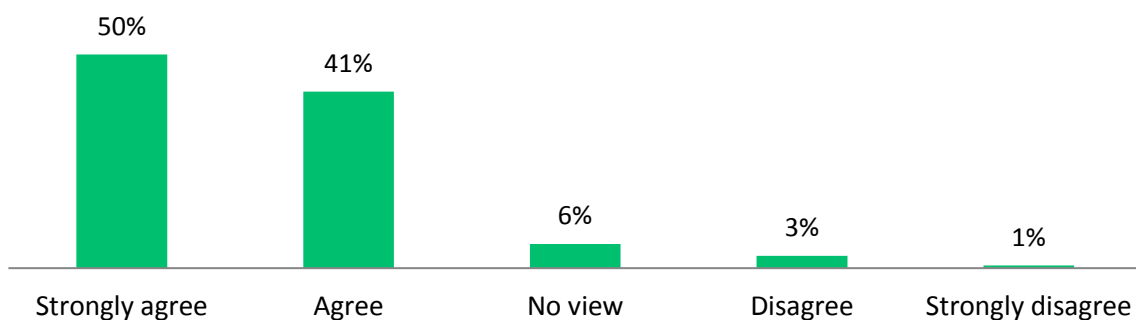
Within regions, we would expect notable differences between local authority areas, reflecting the current funding levels and the impact of proposed changes.

Financial management

‘Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent’ is one of the three core functions of a school governing board. 91% of those surveyed agreed they are confident in the systems their governing board has in place to reveal or prevent financial mismanagement. Given the centrality of this duty, it is perhaps surprising that as many as 6% don’t have a view.

Figure 30

I am confident that the systems the governing board has in place would prevent or reveal any financial mismanagement





7 Staffing

Recruitment

Teacher recruitment remains a concern but our findings suggest that governing boards may be finding it slightly easier than in 2016.

One third (34%) of governors and trustees responding to the survey said that they find it difficult to attract good candidates when recruiting to the post of headteacher. When those without a view (likely to be those who have not recently recruited a headteacher) are discounted, half of the remainder agree. 36% have difficulty recruiting to other senior staff posts while 46% have difficulty recruiting to teaching posts.

“The fact that the figures are lower in 2017 may indicate that the worst of the teacher recruitment crisis is over but it is not possible to say so definitively”

In 2016, the figures were 35% for headteacher recruitment, 42% for other senior staff posts, and 50% for teaching posts. The fact that the figures are lower in 2017 may indicate that the worst of the teacher recruitment crisis is over but it is not possible to say so definitively as responses may be influenced by a number of other factors; for example, if schools are not replacing staff due to funding constraints, they will have less difficulty in recruiting. We will be looking carefully at the results of next year’s survey to see whether the trend continues.

There is considerable regional variation in how difficult governors and trustees are finding it to recruit staff, demonstrated by the three charts below. The most challenging regions are London, the South East, the East of England followed by the West Midlands.

Figure 31

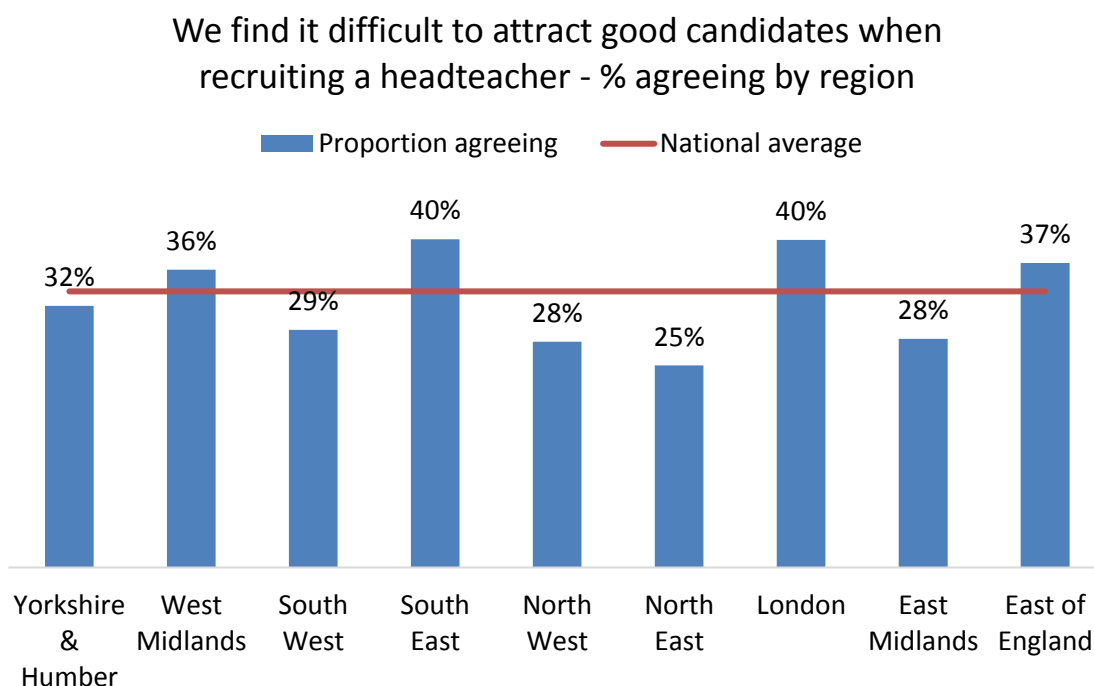




Figure 32

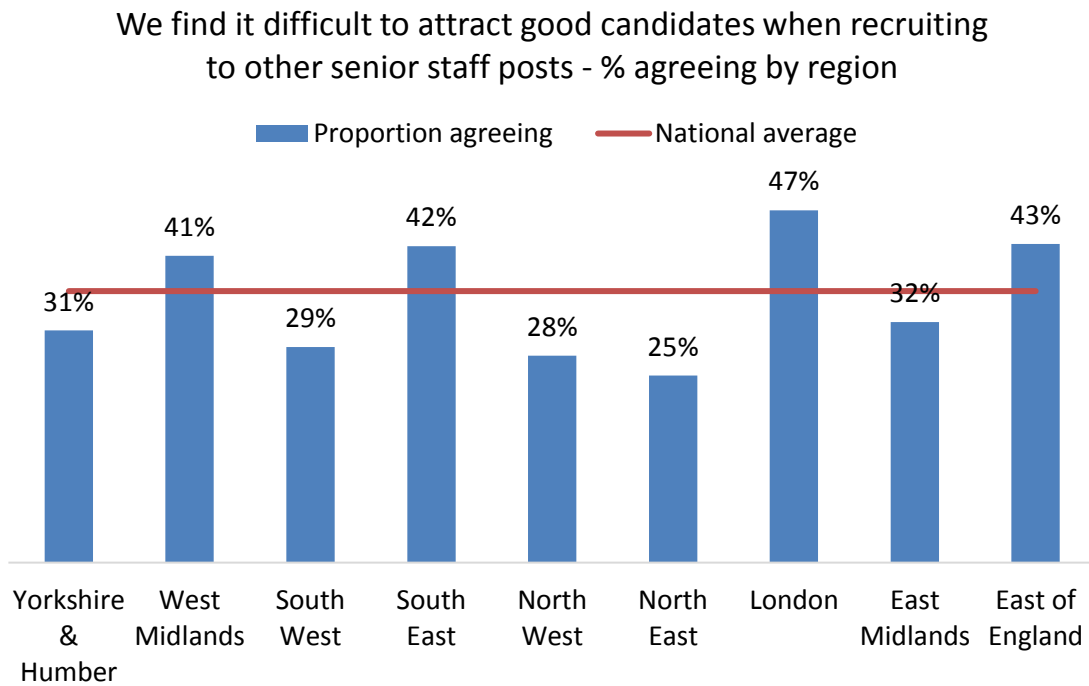
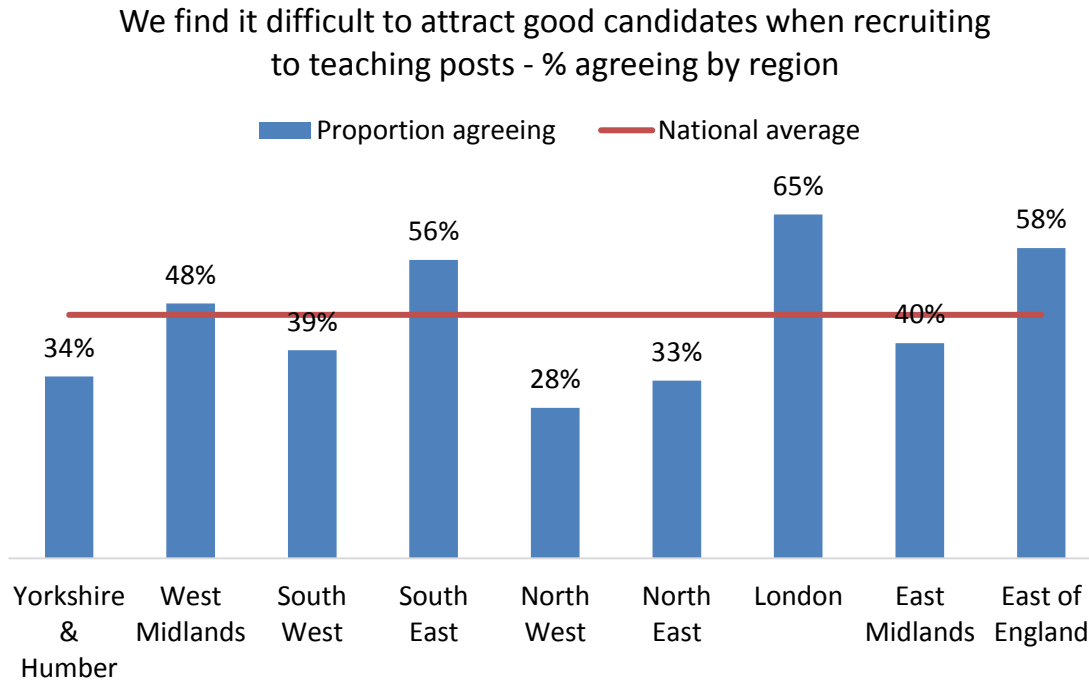


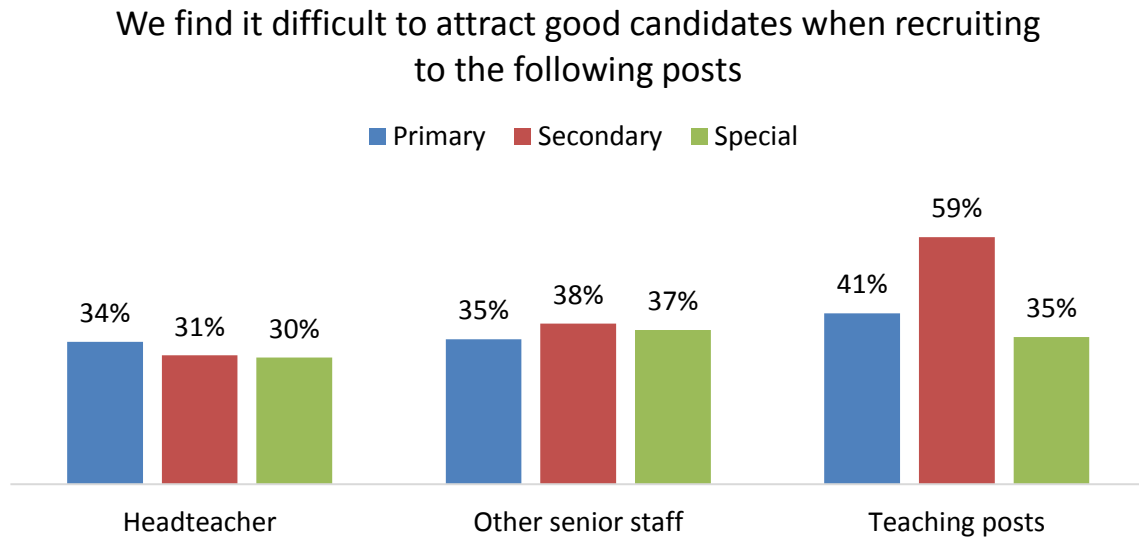
Figure 33



While the level of difficulty of recruiting senior leaders appears similar across phases, it is clear that recruiting to teaching posts is particularly challenging in secondary schools.



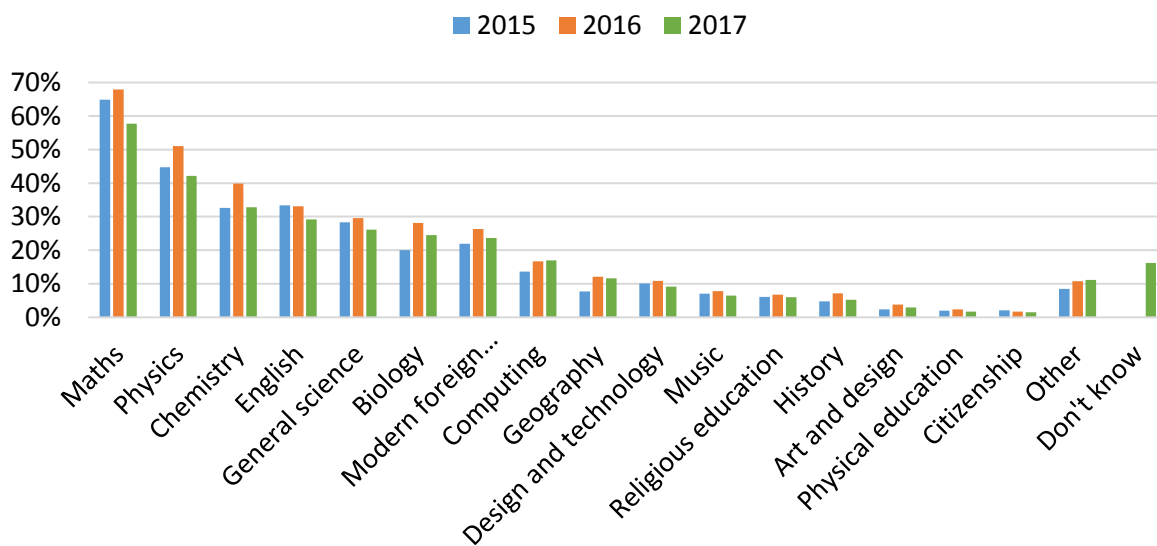
Figure 34



We asked those governing secondary schools whether they have difficulty recruiting teaching staff in particular subjects. As the chart below shows, the proportion having difficulty was slightly lower than in 2016 in every subject apart from computing. This may suggest an improvement in the supply of teachers but may also be influenced by other factors (for example, tighter budgets meaning schools are carrying out less recruitment) therefore it will be interesting to see whether this trend is sustained in future surveys.

Figure 35

Secondary only: do you have difficulties recruiting teaching staff in any particular subject(s)? Select all that apply.



However, it is clear that a significant proportion is still finding it hard to recruit teachers in core subjects, particularly mathematics and the sciences. As a significant minority also have difficulty recruiting English and modern foreign language teachers, this may cause problems as schools attempt to meet the government’s target for entry into the EBacc qualifications.



Retention

“Trust in teacher professionalism and knowledge – let them do their jobs”

In addition to recruitment, we know that staff retention is a major concern for many schools. The information that governing boards receive about staffing is vital in allowing them to identify and address issues affecting retention.

While a majority of those governing receive data on staff turnover (76%), summary reports of performance reviews and how they link to pay awards (69%) and data on staff absence (65%), a far smaller proportion are receiving summary reports of exit interviews (22%). This is of concern because governing boards need to ensure that their schools have effective human resource processes in place and that they are responding to the feedback gathered through these processes.

Valuing staff

Although there was no specific questions on this subject in the survey it was clear from the free text responses of respondents that concern for staff wellbeing was very much at the fore front of their thoughts. Typical of which were:

“Trust in teacher professionalism and knowledge – let them do their jobs”

“Cut workload and unnecessary paperwork and trust teachers to teach as they have been trained to do!”

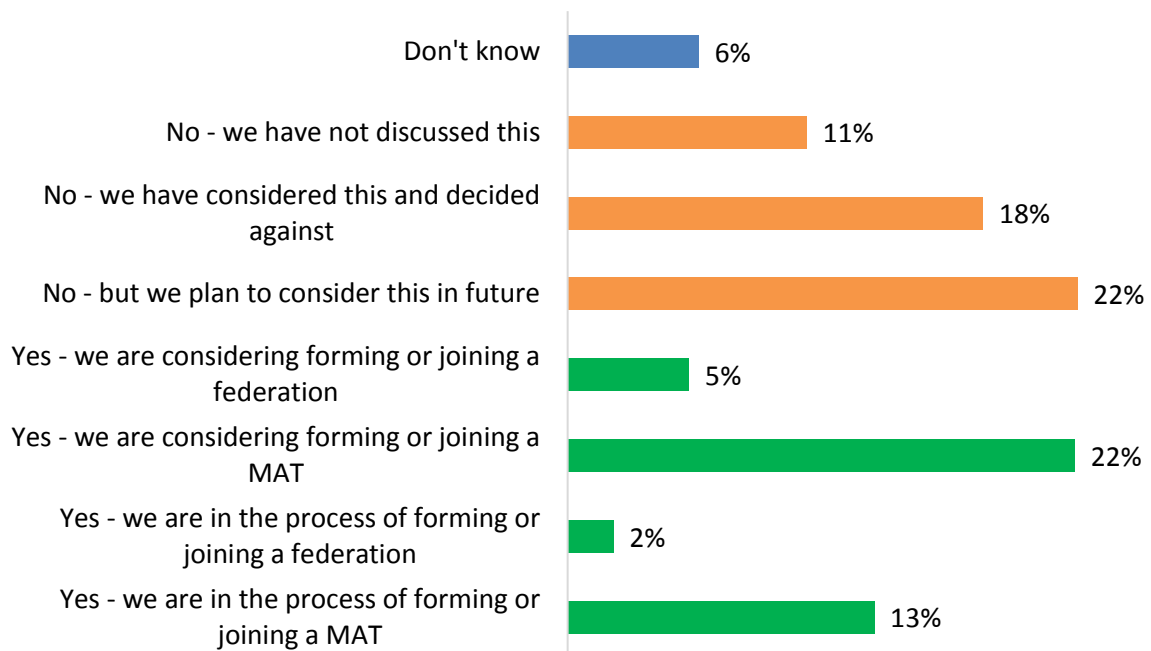


8 Groups of schools

We asked the 3,584 respondents governing a single school (whether a maintained school or a single academy trust) whether they plan to move towards a group structure in future. It has clearly been on the agenda of a majority of governing boards, with just 11% saying that they have not discussed it or planned to discuss it. However, less than half are actively considering forming or joining a group or in the process of doing so.

Figure 36

Is your governing board considering forming or joining a group of schools?



Federations

As we might expect due to the messages that have been coming from government, more schools are considering forming or joining a MAT than a federation (group of maintained schools sharing a single governing body). The fact that 5% of respondents were considering federation and a further 2% were actually in the process of federating shows that this option remains relevant. This is a view that NGA has been trying to promote through the Federation First campaign. **It doesn't close the door to becoming a MAT in due course**, but it is a simple process which does not require lawyers and it has many of the same advantages for school improvement as a MAT.

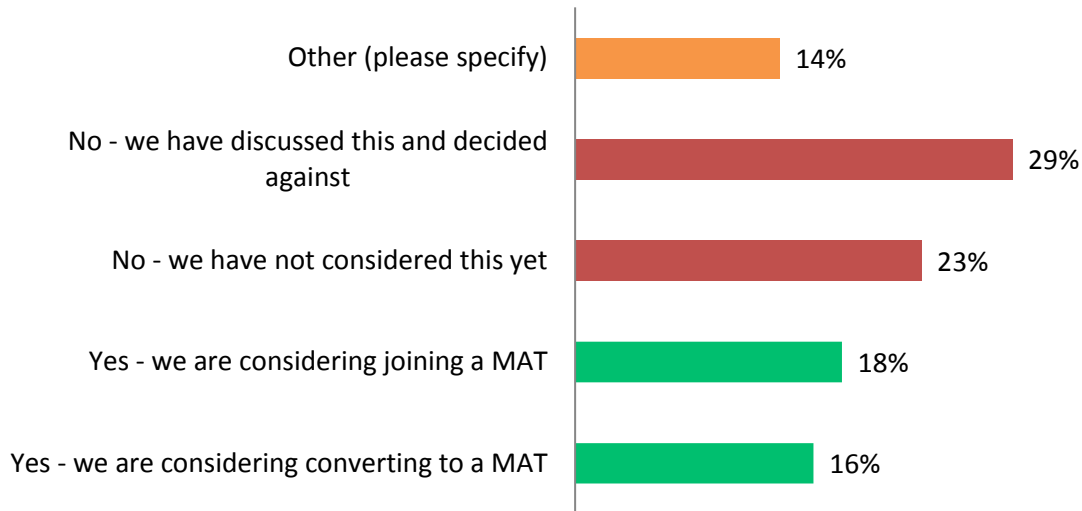
The survey received 306 responses from governors of federations. These ranged in size from two school federations to one which reportedly had 15 schools. The majority were small, with two being the median size.

Given the push towards academisation coming from the Department for Education over the past few years, we asked federation governors whether they are considering becoming or joining a MAT. The graph below shows that just over half have either not considered it or decided against.



Figure 37

Is your federation governing body considering becoming or joining a MAT?



Of those that responded ‘other’, most reported that they were considering future options generally but not specifically moving towards a MAT.

Multi-academy trusts

The survey received 327 responses from MAT trustees and 807 responses from people sitting on academy committees (often referred to as local governing bodies) within MATs. These ranged in size from ‘empty MATs’ with just one school to a large MAT with in excess of 40 schools and 23,000 pupils.

“MAT trustees must govern in the interests of all the schools in the group”

The majority of MAT trustees told us that they have academy committees for every school (84%). A further 10% have them for some schools or clusters of schools. Just 6% of respondents reported that their MAT does not have academy committees and these tended to be smaller MATs (the majority were either ‘empty MATs’ with one school or two school MATs; the largest comprised five schools and had “academy advisory boards”).

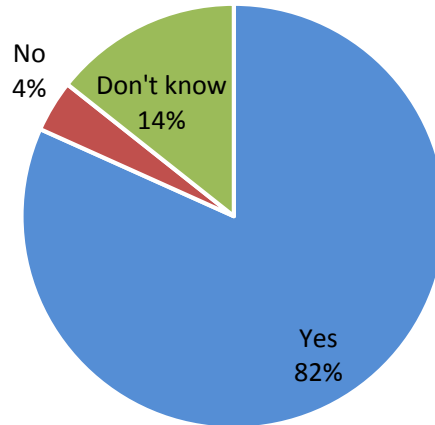
Our findings suggest that in most MATs there are trustees who also sit on academy committees: 76% of MAT trustees told us that this was the case in their organisation. From experience working with MATs, this is particularly common soon after the formation of a MAT when the board is sometimes made up of individuals from the predecessor school governing boards. However, there is a risk of creating conflicts of interest as MAT trustees must govern in the interests of all the schools in the group and this can be difficult to balance with a role.

It is striking that most MATs have an appetite for growth, with 82% of MAT trustees saying that they plan to expand the number of academies in the MAT. However many were small and growth is often an expectation of the DfE. Just 4% said definitively that they did not plan to, with the remainder not knowing at this stage.



Figure 38

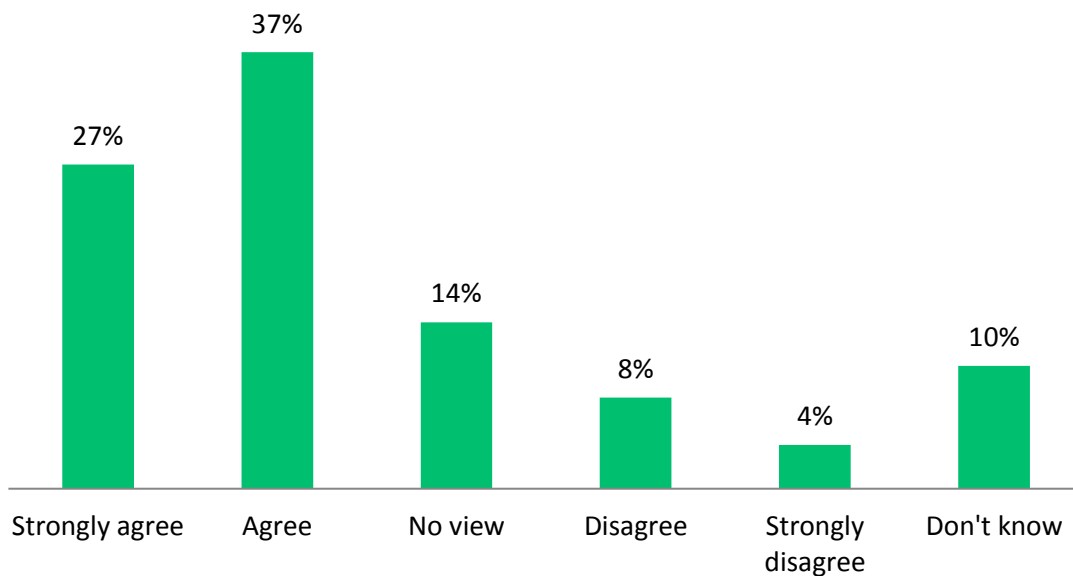
Do you plan to expand the number of academies in the MAT?



The findings give a broadly positive picture of the experience of governing at school level within a MAT, with the majority of those on academy committees saying that their MAT adds value to the work of the academy (64%) and just 12% disagreeing.

Figure 39

The MAT adds value to the work of the academy.



A quarter of respondents said that they had no view or did not know whether the MAT adds value to their academy, and the free text responses suggested that in many cases the academy had recently joined and they felt it was too soon to say. Once those respondents are discounted, 85% of those with a view agreed that the MAT adds value.

“Only around two-thirds of academy committees have responsibility for engagement with stakeholders”



To some extent this may be influenced by the fact that those on academy committees have chosen to volunteer within the MAT, suggesting some level of ‘buy in’. In some cases, they may have been on predecessor governing boards and involved in the decision to join the MAT.

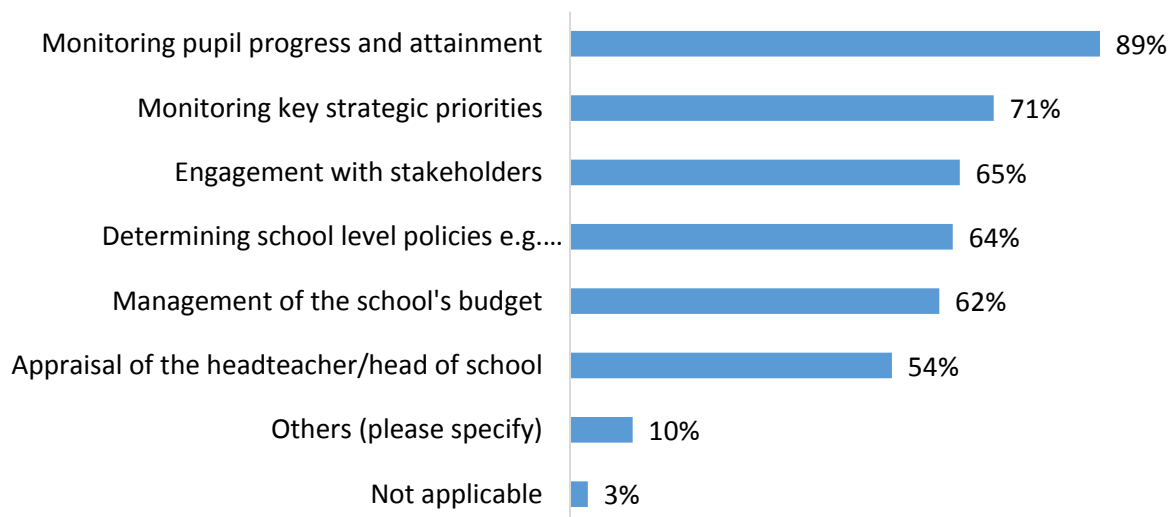
Our findings suggest that academy committees usually have significant responsibilities delegated to them. The vast majority (89%) play a role in monitoring pupil progress and attainment, which is the most commonly delegated responsibility. The majority (62%) also said that management of the school’s budget was delegated to academy committee level.

Perhaps surprisingly, only around two-thirds (65%) have responsibility for engagement with stakeholders such as pupils, parents and staff. This is an area in which we would expect to see MATs utilising the capacity and potentially closer ties to the school community of those on academy committees.

Over half were responsible for the appraisal of the headteacher or head of school, which suggests that many MATs have not moved away from ‘traditional’ line management structures familiar to maintained schools. The NGA recommends that only the lead executive in an organisation should be appraised by a governing board; the academy committee might contribute feedback but the appraisal itself should be carried out by the line manager (usually an executive headteacher or chief executive). This is important to avoid individuals being managed in multiple directions.

Figure 40

Which of these responsibilities are delegated to your academy committee (sometimes referred to as local governing body)?



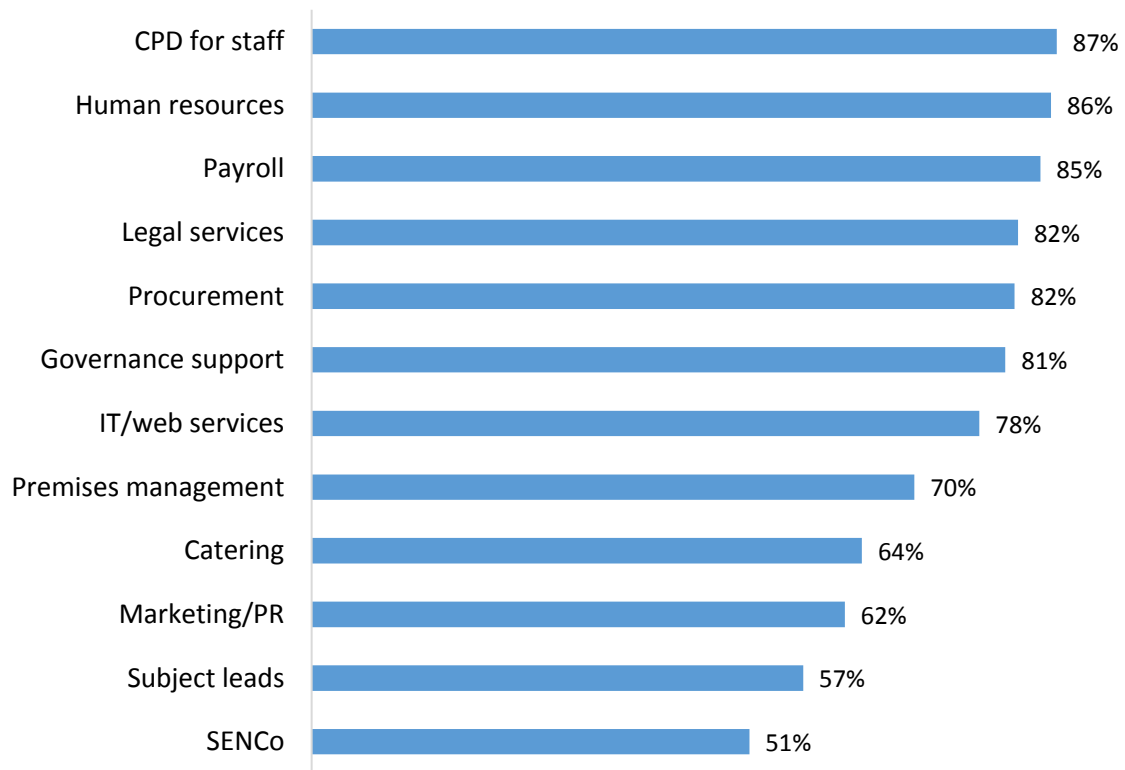
We also asked about the services MATs provide for their schools. The most commonly provided service was continuing professional development (CPD) for staff, which demonstrates that many are taking advantage of the opportunities for joint training and development within groups.

The least commonly provided service was a joint Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo). This is not surprising given that it is only likely to be practicable to share a SENCo between smaller schools which are geographically close together as there is a limit to how many pupils one member of staff can effectively ensure support for.



Figure 41

What services does your MAT provide?



As MATs are still a fairly new innovation in the schools sector, we will look with interest at answers to this section of the survey over time.



9 Fulfilling the core functions

Governing boards have three core functions: to set out the school’s (or group of school’s) ethos, vision and strategy; to hold the headteacher to account for the quality of education provided; and to ensure financial probity. The NGA has suggested that a fourth core function could be added: engaging with stakeholders.

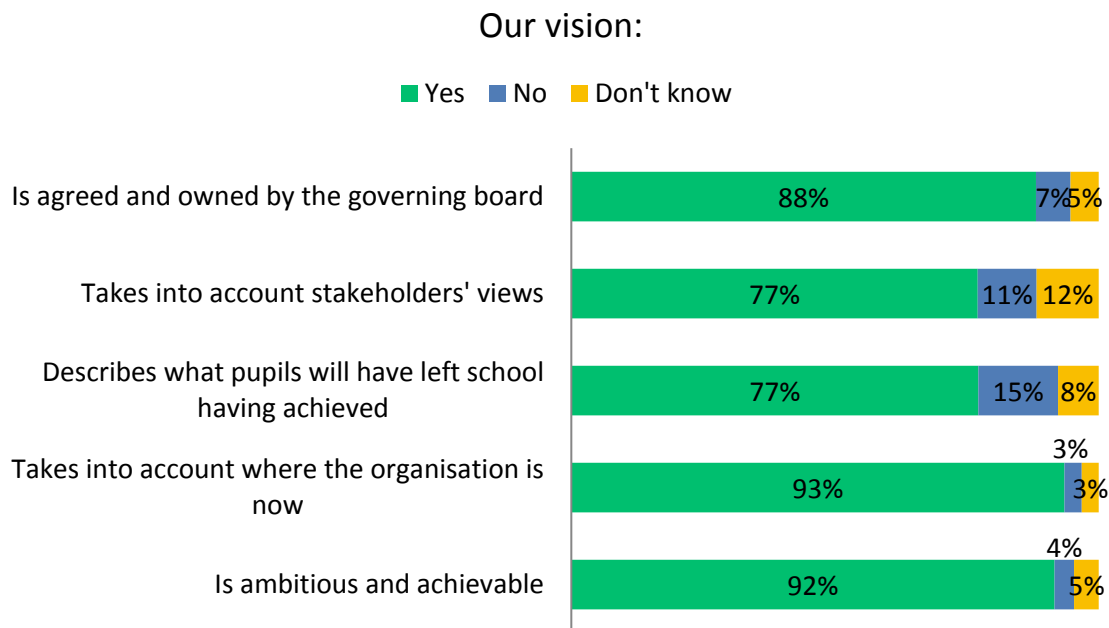
How well are governing boards fulfilling these functions? Financial management is discussed in section 6 above, so this section will look at the other three issues in turn.

Vision and strategy

Confidence is high among respondents on this topic, with 91% agreeing that their governing board effectively ensures clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction.

When it comes to the content of the vision, a majority report that it contains each of the key elements recommended in *A Framework for Governance* (guidance developed by NGA in partnership with the Wellcome Trust), show in figure 42 below:

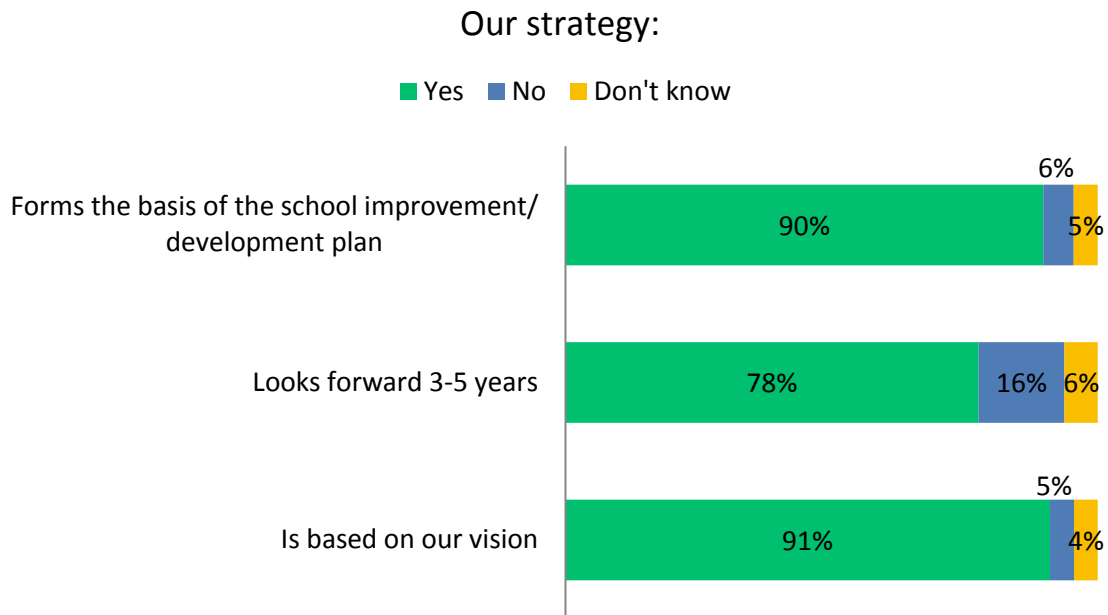
Figure 42



The majority of respondents said that their school’s strategy is based on their vision. A slightly smaller majority have a strategy that looks forward three to five years which suggests that some governing boards are only strategically planning on quite a short term basis.



Figure 43



In order to effectively monitor the implementation of a strategy, governing boards need to set a number of strategic priorities for which they can identify key performance indicators. 17% of respondents did not know how many key strategic priorities their strategy includes. The most common range was three to four (52% of respondents), with 20% having five to six and 7% having more than six.

Holding to account

“10% said that their headteacher tables the report at the meeting, a practice which impedes effective challenge”

In order to hold the headteacher (or other lead executive) to account for their role in managing the school(s), governing boards need to receive high quality papers which report against the strategic priorities. As with any governing board papers, these should be received at least a week in advance.

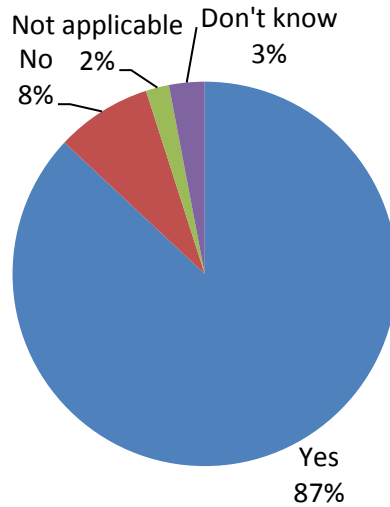
The vast majority of respondents (87%) said that they do receive a written report from the headteacher in advance of every governing board meeting. However, 10% said that their headteacher tables the report at the meeting, a practice which impedes effective challenge as governors and trustees do not have the chance to reflect on the information and prepare questions. 2% said that they do not receive a headteacher’s report which raises questions about how they are getting the information necessary to fulfil their duties.

The majority of respondents reported that they do receive reports against the key strategic priorities, though almost one in ten were not receiving such reports.



Figure 44

The headteacher reports against the key strategic priorities



Engaging with stakeholders

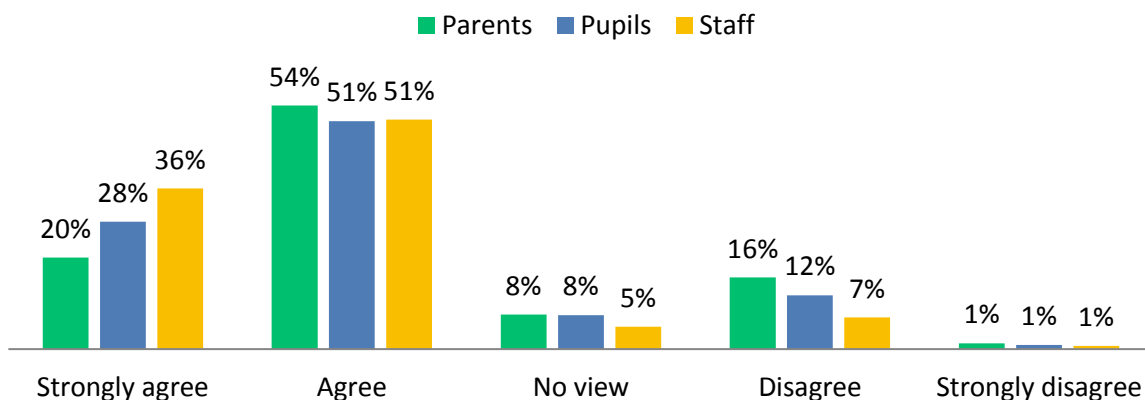
There are three key groups of stakeholders that governing boards need to engage with in order to be effective: parents, pupils and staff. Each of these have different needs and different strategies will be required.

“It is striking that less than half had conducted staff surveys or held meetings with staff on a particular issue”

Respondents to the survey were broadly confident that their governing board engages effectively with each group, as shown in figure 45 below. The highest level of confidence was reported for engaging with staff and the lowest with engaging with parents, a topic that governing boards often ask NGA for guidance on.

Figure 45

I am confident that the governing board engages effectively with:

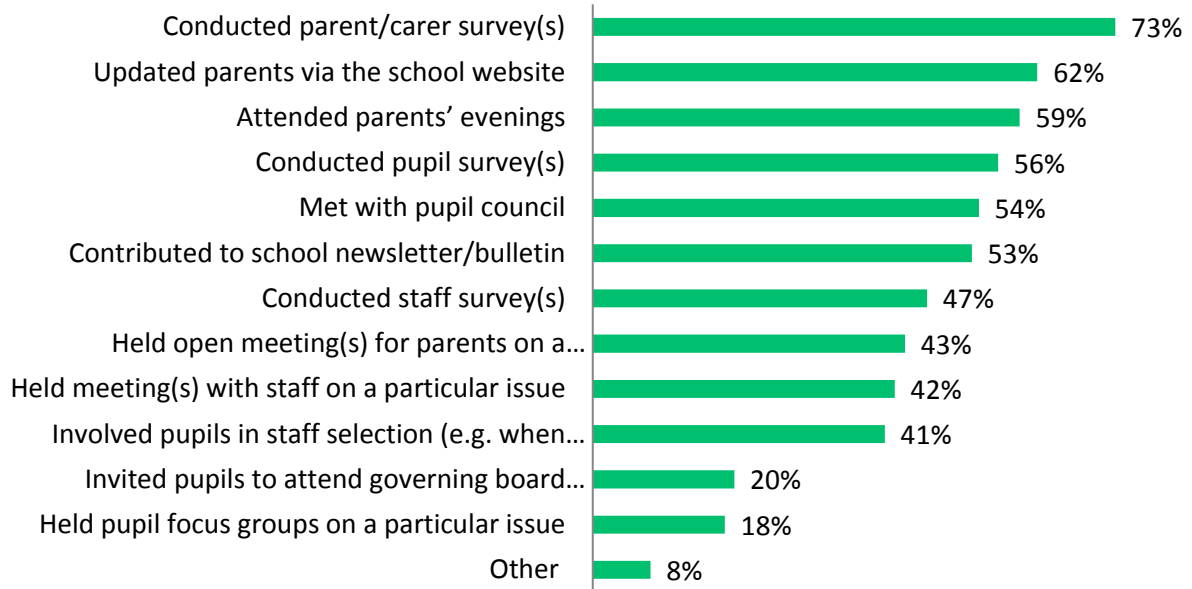


We asked respondents what methods they had used to engage with stakeholders in the previous year:



Figure 46

What strategies has the governing board employed to engage with stakeholders in the past year? Please select all that apply.



The three most common strategies related to parental engagement, suggesting that this is something that requires more effort, perhaps because parents are not physically on site for the majority of the time.

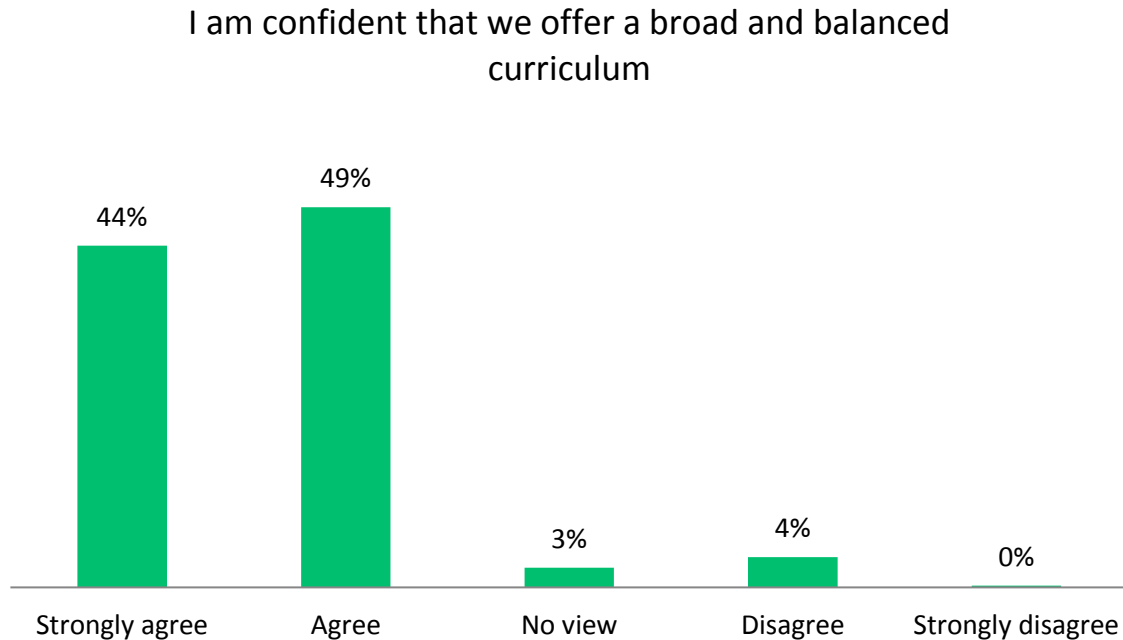
It is striking that less than half had conducted staff surveys or held meetings with staff on a particular issue, which may indicate that staff engagement tends to be less formal. This might indicate that respondents are overconfident about their engagement with staff.



10 Curriculum and assessment

The vast majority of respondents (93%) told us that they are confident that their school (or schools) offer a broad and balanced curriculum.

Figure 47



The figure was higher for primary schools (95%) than for secondary schools (90%) but the overall picture of one of confidence across all phases.

This is despite the significant proportion of those governing secondary schools who told us they had reduced the subjects or qualifications on offer as a result of funding constraints (see section 6). The introduction of new performance measures are also having a sizeable impact (see below). These findings appear somewhat contradictory with the confidence of those governing in the breadth and balance of their school(s)'s curriculum but may indicate that despite changes efforts are being made to offer a range of subjects.

Changes to assessment

A number of changes to assessment over the past few years have created new challenges for governing boards of all school types.

The removal of national curriculum levels from September 2015 has meant that governing boards have had to work with school leaders in order to adapt to new systems. Having an effective system for tracking pupil progress within schools is vital to facilitating effective governance so this has been an important change for governing boards to get to grips with.

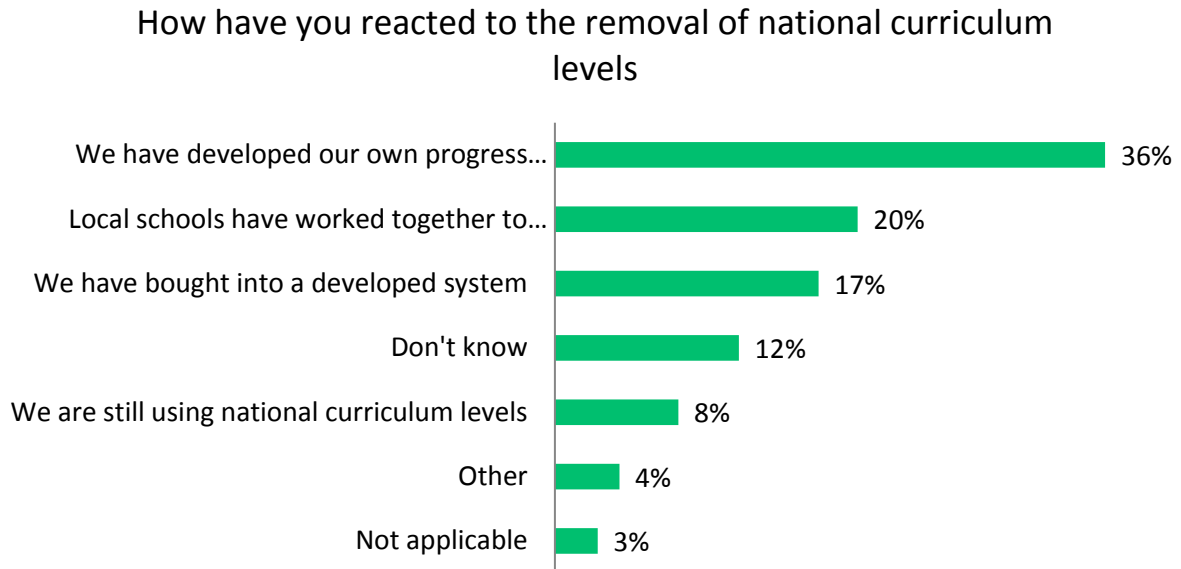
“It has shaken up the system”

We asked respondents what their school (or group of schools) has put in place as a replacement for national curriculum levels. Worryingly, 12% did not know what their school was doing and 8% said that their school is still using levels; the old levels are not compatible with the new curriculum and therefore this is not a robust way to track pupils' learning. Over a third of respondents said that they



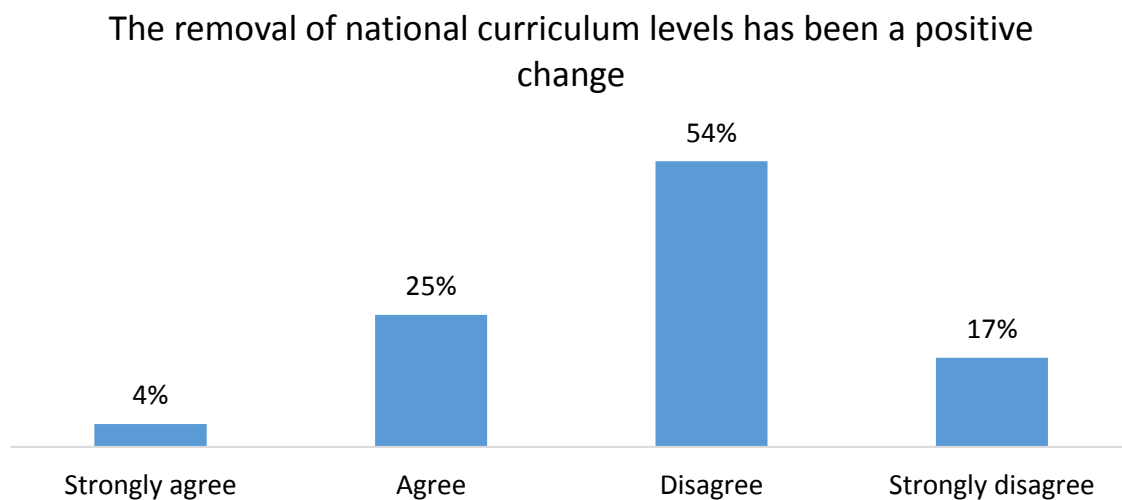
have developed their own progress measure independently, which may be limiting when it comes to benchmarking against other schools. One fifth of respondents had worked with other schools to develop a measure together and 17% had bought into a developed system (such as those offered by commercial providers or other schools).

Figure 48



We wanted to find out what governors and trustees think about the change and therefore we asked respondents whether they agree that the removal of national curriculum levels has been a positive change. Just 17% agreed that it had been positive, while 41% disagreed; it was striking that 42% did not have a view (including 39% of those governing primary schools). When those without a view are excluded from the analysis, 29% of remaining respondents agreed that it had been positive.

Figure 49



Respondents had the opportunity to give a reason for their answers and these give the impression that the change has been experienced very differently in different schools. Some people explained their lack of an opinion with comments such as “Too early to say” or “Haven’t really had time to



evaluate this change”. Some positive comments such as “We are now talking about children’s learning rather than numerical data”, “It has shaken up the system” and “Freedom to think and organise” suggest that the change has improved the culture around measuring pupil progress in these respondents’ schools; others focus on the benefits for teachers and pupils (“More challenging and it ensures there are not 'gaps' in the literacy and numeracy in a child's education”).

“It has created a lot of uncertainty for staff”

There were a number of themes among the negative comments, including lack of clarity for parents (“Very hard for parents to understand the changes”), difficulty making comparisons between schools (“there are no benchmarks for children across the country, everybody is grading work/progress differently”), lack of guidance provided for schools (“I think it could have been positive if more time and guidance and resources had been given to schools to undertake this”), and the extra work involved for staff (“It has created a lot of uncertainty for staff as well as causing a significant increase in workload”).

Despite this, 86% of respondents are confident that their governing board understands the progress made by all groups of pupils (this fits with findings elsewhere in the survey, as respondents tend to report confidence in their boards’ effectiveness).

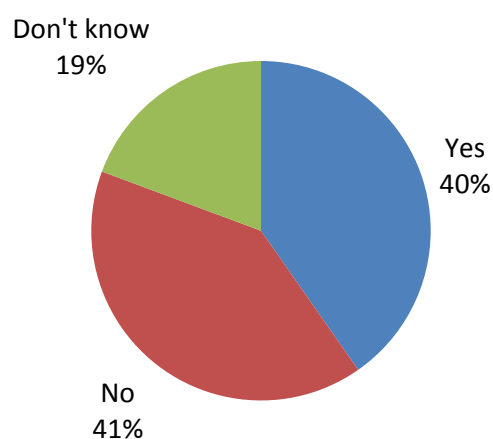
Changes to accountability

The replacement of RAISEonline with a new service (Analyse School Performance) is another issue asked about. When the survey took place in June and July, 79% of respondents were aware that this was due to take place from 31 July but just 20% felt well informed about the new service. As there has been a much greater degree of communication from the Department for Education since the launch of the new service, **our hope is that if re-surveyed now, more respondents would feel well informed.**

Secondary schools have seen considerable changes to the accountability system in recent years and our survey suggests that this is driving changes to the curriculum in a proportion of schools. 40% of respondents governing secondary schools said that they had changed their offer in response to the introduction of the English Baccalaureate and Progress 8 performance measures.

Figure 50

Secondary schools only: Have you changed your curriculum offer in response to the introduction of the English Baccalaureate and Progress 8 performance measures?





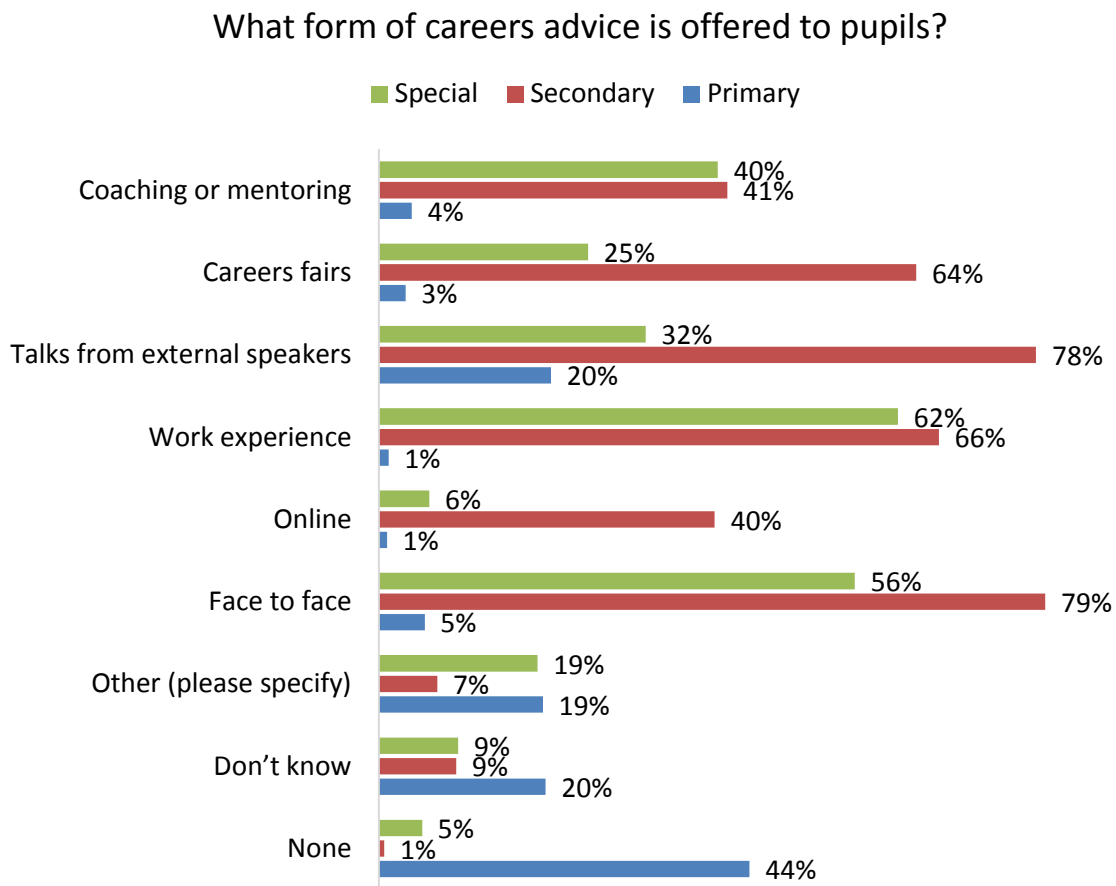
Careers guidance

“It is striking that 44% of those governing primary schools say they offer no careers guidance”

Beyond the subjects taught, providing high quality careers guidance is one of the most important things a school does to prepare pupils for life after school. This is true in both primary and secondary schools, the type and nature of careers advice needs to be age appropriate.

We asked our respondents what form of careers advice is offered to pupils in their schools and it is striking that 44% of those governing primary schools say they offer no careers guidance and a further 20% do not know. Some forms of careers provision, such as work experience, may not be appropriate for younger children; however, primary schools should be actively broadening their pupils’ horizons and encouraging them to see the connection between their learning and their futures.

Figure 51



Sixth forms

There can sometimes be a conflict of interest for schools with sixth forms when it comes to offering careers guidance. Sixth forms are funded on a per-pupil basis and therefore in many ways it is in the school’s interest to retain pupils for post-16. We asked those governing institutions with sixth forms whether they allow other schools or further education institutions to visit and speak to pupils about the qualifications and courses they offer. Approximately two thirds (65%) said that they did and 12% that they did not (the remaining 23% were unsure).

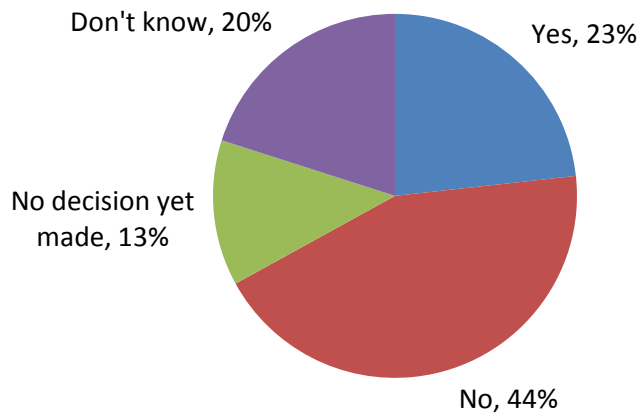


“A considerable number of young people are narrowing their subject choices at an earlier stage”

Sixth forms have also seen significant changes to qualifications, with AS levels ‘decoupled’ from A levels in September 2015. Over the past three years, we have asked survey respondents whether their school (or group of schools) is continuing to offer AS levels following this. This year’s survey showed a significant drop in the proportion that were, from 45% in each of the past two years to 23% this year.

Figure 52

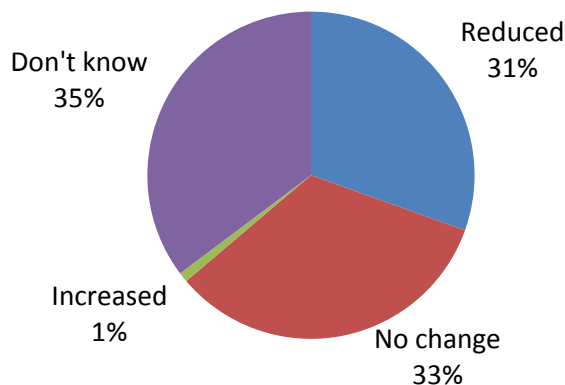
Is your school continuing to offer AS levels following the decision to decouple them from A levels?



58% of respondents reported that pupils attending their sixth forms typically study three subjects, while 35% said that they typically study four. Almost a third (30%) said that the number of subjects pupils study in year 12 has reduced as a result of the changes to AS and A levels, suggesting that a considerable number of young people are narrowing their subject choices at an earlier stage of their education.

Figure 53

How has the number of subjects pupils study in year 12 been affected by the decision to decouple AS levels from A levels?





11 Governance and government

“Financial cuts. It is profoundly depressing to see brilliant, life-transforming strategies being whittled away”

We asked respondents what government policy or action has impacted most on their governing board over the past year. By far the most frequently cited issue was funding, with 55% of the 2,882 free text responses focusing on this.

- “Financial cuts. It is profoundly depressing to see brilliant, life-transforming strategies being whittled away; it evokes disgust when this crime is compounded by government steadfastly maintaining that they are putting more money into schools.”
- “Not fully funding pension costs for staff.”
- “Funding has been our biggest challenge, with it has come many difficult decisions affecting the whole school.”

In addition to the direct impact of school funding, some governors and trustees spoke about the effects of cuts to local authority funding. For example:

- “Reduction in funding for local councils has reduced funding for social care. This places more burden on school to support vulnerable children. Schools makes referrals and gets a lot of push back from social care as "thresholds not met"”
- “Financial constraints to the LA resulting in loss of support services.”

The second most prominent issue was the assessment system (cited in 16% of responses), with those governing both primary and secondary schools discussing the impact of the changes. While not all responses presented changes to assessment in a wholly negative light, it indicates that many schools have been challenged by the changes:

- “Changes to GCSE and AS & A2 exams. We have no clear picture of where we will be with results and comparison year on year will be impossible. We will only have comparisons to other schools.”
- “The move to Progress 8. This has had a positive effect on the school's performance, but being unable to judge how the school will perform on this measure in the future creates uncertainty.”
- “Change in assessment and levels, more difficult for governors and staff to interpret data.”
- “Removal of levels has continued to impact, but the new framework developed is now starting to be helpful.”

The third most frequent issue was academisation (15% of responses), with many responses highlighting uncertainty about the government’s policy and therefore the future of their schools. For example:

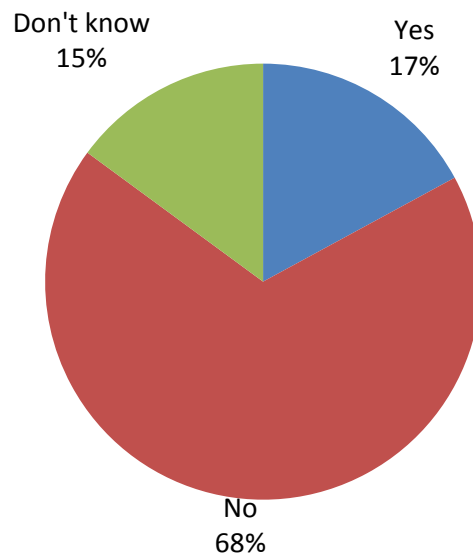
- “Lack of clarity re academisation.”
- “Academisation is a cloud hanging over us. We are one of only 4 maintained secondaries in the county now. And as a secondary modern we suffer from having grammar schools nearby”
- “Threatened imposition of academisation has caused uncertainty and concern.”



At the time the survey was conducted, the government had not formally dropped plans to allow new selective schools to open. We wanted to know how widespread support for this policy was among school governors and trustees. Responses indicate that a majority (68%) were opposed to the plans, while fewer than one in five (17%) were supportive.

Figure 54

Do you support the proposed plans to allow new selective (grammar) schools to open?



Looking to the future, we asked governors and trustees what one thing they wanted the government to do to improve the school system in the next parliament. **Once again, funding was the biggest issue identified** by the 3,324 free text responses, with 63% making a related request. Many of these touched on different facets of the funding system, such as per pupil funding, the move to a national funding formula (NFF) and rising costs. For example:

- “Funding - NFF and increase funding in line with inflation”
- “Sort out funding in relation to present pupil numbers and type; plus take into account effects of house building”
- “Fund it properly, including 6th form. In real terms, we are having to cope with so much less than previously. It's short sighted.”
- “Funding to be increased in line with school costs (pensions, building maintenance, Apprenticeship Levy, National Living wage, better measures of social deprivation - Pupil Premium should be mainstreamed with other funding for avoid the ridiculous double payment for FSM!).”

“A period of stability would be appreciated”

After funding, the second most prominent ‘ask’ among the responses was for greater stability in the education system (cited in 21% of comments). This is something that NGA members have been asking for a number of years and was included in our ‘manifesto’ at each of the last two general elections. Typical comments on this theme include:



- “Stop tinkering and allow schools, with additional funding, to consolidate what they are doing.”
- “Don't steamroller through initiatives which are clearly politically motivated and short term by definition.”
- “I think the school system should be left alone for 3 years to evolve itself.”
- “Avoid introducing too many changes. A period of stability would be appreciated so that schools can plan forward with some certainty.”
- “Stop constantly changing things - let teachers teach”

The third most prominent theme in the responses picks up on this last request, to “let teachers teach”: listening and valuing the profession. This was mentioned in 5% of the free text responses, for example:

- “To recruit/inspire more high class teachers. They should be made to feel more valued for the amazing job they do in society.”
- “Listen to the teaching profession.”
- “Raise status of teachers”
- “Trust in teacher professionalism and knowledge- let them do their jobs.”
- “Cut workload and unnecessary paperwork and trust teachers to teach as they have been trained to do!”
- “Have an teacher rather than a politician as Secretary of State for Education”

Other comments touched on staff pay, with a number of respondents suggesting that the public sector pay cap should be lifted to ensure that teachers are remunerated for their work.

These issues – funding, stability and valuing the teaching profession – are all issues that NGA will continue to raise and address with the government and others in the sector.