

Twenty key questions for a school governing body to ask itself

Evidence Framework

This document seeks to provide an optional evidence framework to the *Twenty key questions for a school governing body to ask itself*, which was produced by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Education Governance and Leadership.

In its simplest form this is a RAG (red, amber, green) matrix that allows the governing body to think about areas that need improvement and record them in an easy format. At the bottom of the matrix is a resource section that provides prompts for the issues governing bodies should be considering in answering the questions and provides links to articles, advice and information on the various topics that fall under the Twenty Key Questions. You can find the Twenty Key Questions in their original form on the [NGA website.](http://www.nga.org.uk/Resources/Useful-Documents/Twenty-Key-Questions.aspx)

NGA’s consultancy service can help you conduct an evaluation of your governing body or if needed give training on a specific area/topic that the governing body finds that they are deficient in. For more information about our consultancy service, contact Clare Collins, NGA’s lead consultant, at clare.collins@nga.org.uk.





If you are a GOLD member of NGA and have a question about anything in this document, you can contact a member of the advice team at: GOLD@nga.org.uk or 0121 2373782.

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| **Rights Skills: Do we have the right skills on the governing body?**1. Have we completed a skills audit of our governing body?
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| Judgement | Evidence  | How this will be improved |
|  Red/Amber/Green    |       |         |
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|  1. Do we appoint governors based on their skills, and do we know how to find people with the necessary skills?
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| Judgement | Evidence  | How this will be improved |
|  Red/Amber/Green       |         |            |
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|  **Effectiveness: Are we as effective as we could be?**1. Do we understand our roles and responsibilities?
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| Judgement | Evidence  | How this will be improved |
|  Red/Amber/Green       |         |            |
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|  1. Do we have a professional clerk and run meetings effectively?
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| Judgement | Evidence  | How this will be improved |
|  Red/Amber/Green       |         |            |
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|  1. What is our training and development budget and does every governor receive the support they need to carry out their role effectively?
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| Judgement | Evidence  | How this will be improved |
|  Red/Amber/Green       |         |            |
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|  1. Do we know about good practice from across the country?
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| Judgement | Evidence  | How this will be improved |
|  Red/Amber/Green       |         |            |
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|  1. Is the size, composition and committee structure of our governing body conducive to effective working?
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| Judgement | Evidence  | How this will be improved |
|  Red/Amber/Green       |         |            |
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| 1. Does every member of the governing body make a regular contribution and do we carry out an annual review of the governing body’s performance?
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| Judgement | Evidence  | How this will be improved |
|  Red/Amber/Green       |         |            |
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| **Strategy: Does the school have a clear vision?**1. Have we developed long-term aims for the school with clear priorities in an ambitious school development plan which is regularly monitored and reviewed?
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| Judgement | Evidence  | How this will be improved |
|  Red/Amber/Green       |         |            |
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| 1. Does our strategic planning cycle drive the governing body’s activities and agenda setting?

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| Judgement | Evidence  | How this will be improved |
|  Red/Amber/Green       |         |            |
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| **Accountability of the executive: Do we hold the school leaders to account?**1. Do we understand the school’s performance data well enough to properly hold school leaders to account?
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| Judgement | Evidence  | How this will be improved |
|  Red/Amber/Green       |         |            |
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|  1. How effective is our performance management of the headteacher?
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|  1. Are our financial management systems robust and do we ensure best value for money?
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|  Red/Amber/Green       |         |            |
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|  **Engagement: Are we properly engaged with our school community, the wider school sector and the outside world?**1. How do we listen to and understand our pupils, parents and staff?
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| Judgement | Evidence  | How this will be improved |
|  Red/Amber/Green       |         |            |
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|  1. How do we report to our parents and local community regularly?
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| Judgement | Evidence  | How this will be improved |
|  Red/Amber/Green       |         |            |
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|  1. What benefit do we draw from collaboration with other schools and other sectors, locally and nationally?
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| Judgement | Evidence  | How this will be improved |
|  Red/Amber/Green       |         |            |
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| **Role of the chair**1. Do we carry out a regular 360 review of the chair’s performance?
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| Judgement | Evidence  | How this will be improved |
|  Red/Amber/Green       |         |            |
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|  1. Do we engage in good succession planning?
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| Judgement | Evidence  | How this will be improved |
|  Red/Amber/Green       |         |            |
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| 1. Are the chair and committee chairs re-elected each year?

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| Judgement | Evidence  | How this will be improved |
|  Red/Amber/Green       |         |            |
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| **Impact: Are we having an impact on outcomes for pupils?**1. How much has the school improved in the last three years, and what has the governing body’s contribution been to this?
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| Judgement | Evidence  | How this will be improved |
|  Red/Amber/Green       |         |            |
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Resources

Here we highlight some of the resources that are available through NGA and elsewhere to help governing bodies improve the areas highlighted above by the *20 Key Questions.*

1. Have we completed a skills audit of our governing body?

NGA has a model skills audit available on the [NGA website](http://www.nga.org.uk/Members-Area/Guidance/The-Governing-Body-%281%29/Governance-Tools/Skills-Audit.aspx). Many governing bodies now use a skills audit but the key thing in is not that the governing body has completed it, but how the information is then used. The results of the skills audit can be used to identify gaps which can then be remedied either by training or by appointing new governors with those skills.

In filling out the evidence section – think about whether you have skills audits for all your governors, whether the overall findings have been discussed and whether the minutes of governing body meetings reflect this.

2. Do we appoint governors on the basis of their skills, and do we know how to find people with the necessary skills?

This goes back to what use you have made of the skills audit. Carrying out such an audit is only the first step – actively using it to assist in recruitment and/or training and development is the next step.

* How do you recruit your governors?
* When you are seeking to elect new parent or staff governors do you let them know that you are looking for particular skills/experience?
* Likewise when you are seeking to appoint governors do you advertise for people with particular skills?
* Have you taken out adverts in a local paper – or have you used SGOSS?

[SGOSS](http://www.sgoss.org.uk/) are a great place to start if you are looking for skilled individuals who are looking to become governors, but if this doesn’t work, you could also try a large local employer, such as a bank or hospital. Other local (possibly larger) schools could also be approached to see if you can advertise a vacancy there. Some schools have formed links with local chambers of commerce in order to get individuals from the business world on the governing body. Even for academies, the local authority may well have a list of people interested in becoming governors.

What is important is that anyone you recruit regardless of their skills is committed to being a governor. On a number of occasions NGA has come across the situation where someone with a highly skilled background has been recruited only for them to rarely turn up to meetings. This is why NGA recommends that governing bodies interview potential candidates for appointment by the governing body, in an informal manner, to establish whether the applicant is suitable for appointment, but also to explain to the candidate what it means to be a governor and the responsibility that comes with it (see also notes to Q3 below).

3. Do we understand our roles and responsibilities?

This is crucial for all governors, but is a must for new governors.

* As part of your recruitment material do you include a clear role description which makes clear the responsibilities that governors take-on?
* Do you have an induction programme for new governors to make clear not just what the over-arching responsibilities of governors are, but what that looks like in your school?

Welcome to Governance, NGA’s introductory guide for new governors which can be purchased directly from the NGA - if the school is a **GOLD** member, the school can request free copies for new governors.

Do you have Code of Practice which all members of the governing body are required to sign up to? As well as roles and responsibilities this will set out expected conduct and behaviour. NGA has a model [Code of Conduct](http://www.nga.org.uk/Resources/Useful-Documents/Code-of-Practice.aspx) that can be tailored for your governing body.

In terms of the relationship with the Headteacher and the line between the operational and the strategic, we have a document entitled [*What governing bodies should expect from school leaders and what school leaders should expect from governing bodies*](http://www.nga.org.uk/Members-Area/Guidance/The-Governing-Body-%281%29/Governance-Tools/NGA---ASCL---NAHT-Joint-Guidance.aspx) which can be used to help understand the respective roles.

* Do you have a clearly agreed procedures for delegating decision making – are these properly recorded?
* Are your committee terms of reference clear?
* Have you undertaken whole governing body training? (see notes on Q5 below)

4. Do we have a professional clerk and run meetings efficiently?

A professional trained clerk is vital component in ensuring that governing body meetings are run as effectively as possible. If your governing body doesn’t have a professional clerk then NGA strongly recommends that you appoint one. Trained clerks can provide advice and ensure that the governing body is more effective. We often get asked where to find a trained clerk, and there is no easy answer to this. Some local authorities still provide a clerking service that schools, including academies, can buy into. Alternatively you could ask other local schools for recommendations.

* What does the clerk’s job description say?
* Are the agendas, papers and minutes circulated in a timely fashion in accordance with statutory/contractual procedures?
* Would someone not associated with the governing body be able to read the minutes and understand what was discussed and what the outcomes were?
* Does the clerk receive an annual review of her/his performance?

5. What is our training and development budget and does every governor receive the support they need to carry out their role effectively?

Governor continuing professional development is vital to ensure that the governing body’s knowledge and skills are up to date. NGA view is that governing bodies should set aside an amount each year for development of the governing body.

* Does the governing body buy into a training package?
* Do you keep a list of all the development/training activities individual members of the governing body undertake – have you carried out an evaluation of what impact these have had?
* Is there any correlation between the skills audit and the training/development that governors have undertaken?
* Does it have a separate budget for governing body CPD?

NGA offers a bespoke consultancy service and training for governing bodies – contact Clare.collins@nga.org.uk

Many local authorities, academy chains and other organisations also provide training.

The governing body might also want to consider online training through [Modern Governor](http://www.moderngovernor.com/) and [Governor E-Learning](http://www.elc-gel.org/home/) (GEL).

For chairs of governors, there is the National College’s Chairs of Governors’ Leadership Development Programme for which NGA with Eastern Leadership Centre, is one of the licensees - <http://www.leadinggovernance.org/>

6. Do we know about good practice from across the country?

This can be achieved through a number of different avenues.

* Membership of a national organisation such as the NGA.- NGA offers regional meetings and annual conferences which give an opportunity to share regional and national practice with other governors. In most editions of *Governing Matters* we cover good practice in the *In my Experience* page. These range from governors whom [have just taken the chair](http://www.nga.org.uk/Guidance/Workings-Of-The-Governing-Body/Chairs-of-Governors/10-Experience.aspx) to getting [from ‘good’ to ‘outstanding’](http://www.nga.org.uk/Members-Area/Guidance/School-Improvement/From--good--to--outstanding-.aspx). In addition the Governing Matters includes articles from a wide range of education organisations which help keep your governing body up to date.
* Membership of a local association of governing bodies.
* Ofsted and National College often produce guidance based on experience of governing bodies, inspectors and schools. For example, Ofsted in 2011 produced a guide on outstanding governance entitled, [*School Governance: Learning from the best*](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-practice-resource-%E2%80%93-school-governance-learning-best)*.*
* Is your chair undertaking the chair’s development programme run via the National College’s licensee system – this provides opportunities for networking and good practice sharing.

7. Is the size, composition and committee structure of our governing body conducive to effective working?

It’s worth considering periodically whether the structure of the governing body is working as effectively as it could be.

NGA has published body following regulations introduced in 2012 that relaxed some of the requirements around governing body constitution for maintained schools. Academy governing bodies similarly have flexibility in the makeup of their governing body, although in stand-alone academies, this might require a change to the articles of association.

* When did the governing body last undertake a thorough discussion of the membership and terms of reference of its committees (as opposed to simply re-adopting the existing terms of reference)?
* Does the structure of the governing body and the composition of its committees reflect the priorities in the school development plan?
* Do the minutes of the governing body/committees reflect this?

8. Does every member of the governing body make a regular contribution and do we carry out an annual review of the governing body’s performance?

Having a governing body where each governor brings something to the table is important. Being a member of a governing body is an important job and if a governor isn’t contributing very much, it can be a good idea for the chair to have a chat with them to see if there is anything that they don’t understand and if there is anything else that can be done to increase their involvement. It may be that the governor doesn’t understand what is required of them, and training/development might help.

But, a governor’s contribution should not be purely judged on how often they speak – some governors may be very garrulous but not add a great deal to the discussion. On the other hand some governors will only speak when they have a specific point to make and if someone else has already made it they may not feel the need to reiterate it?

* Does the chair ensure that all governors are given the opportunity to speak – seeking views from those haven’t previously spoken?
* Do you appoint a buddy/mentor to new governors to give them confidence to speak up in meetings?
* When did you last carry out a governing body self-review? Did this involve reviewing the performance of individual governors?

9. Have we developed long-term aims for the school with clear priorities in an ambitious school development plan which is regularly monitored and reviewed?

The GB should ensure that the school’s improvement strategy focuses on key priorities which are expressed as high level measurable targets which the GB can monitor throughout the year. These should drive the school’s detailed development plan which should be a well-used document, with clearly defined responsibilities and monitoring arrangements.

* Are all members of the governing body clear about the strengths and weaknesses of the school?
* How do these translate into an improvement strategy with high level measurable targets? How often does the governing body a) discuss and b) review the school development plan – do the minutes of your meetings reflect this?
* Is there a section in the development plan which relates specifically to governing body development?
* Are the school’s ethos, aims and priorities clear to parents, pupils and staff? How do you know?

10. Does our strategic planning cycle drive the governing body’s activities and agenda setting?

* Does the governing body have a clear timetable for strategic planning?
* Does the timing of the governing body’s meetings fit with this cycle?
* Do the agendas for meetings reflect the school’s strategic priorities?

It is imperative that the governing body has an annual planning cycle, which directly impacts on the work of the governing body.

The [Policy Clock](http://www.nga.org.uk/getattachment/Members-Area/Guidance/The-Governing-Body/Policy-Clock/Policy-Clock.pdf.aspx) which was produced by Regina Paul and Henry Brickell gives an example of the way in which aims and objectives should be used to drive the processes of the school.

The Wellcome Trust, in collaboration with NGA and others, has produced a [pilot Code of Governance](http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/About-us/Publications/Reports/Education/WTP041390.htm) that can help governing bodies in planning how the activities of the governing body should fall.

11. Do we understand the school’s performance data well enough to properly hold school leaders to account?

One of the key roles of the governing body is to hold the senior leadership to account and one of the most important ways to do this is by understanding and being able to interpret school performance data.

* Does the governing body have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school – how do you know?
* What data sources do you have access to?

The main data set currently is RAISEonline which governors can be given direct access to, with student information remaining anonymous. NGA has two Knowing Your School guides on RAISE, one for [primary governors](http://www.nga.org.uk/Resources/Knowing-Your-School/Knowing-Your-School.aspx) and one for [secondary governors](http://www.nga.org.uk/Resources/Knowing-Your-School/Knowing-Your-School---Secondary.aspx).

There is also the Ofsted data dashboard which governors are expected to be familiar with – these can be found on Ofsted’s website – if you search for the latest inspection report for your school the data dashboard will be on the same page.

The Fischer Family Trust, in collaboration with NGA and Wellcome Trust, recently released a governor dashboard which is available to all schools who subscribe to FFT. The dashboard is designed to give governors an overview of their school which is more comprehensive than the Ofsted dashboard, but not as detailed as RAISE. NGA and FFT have produced two briefing notes on the dashboard, one for [primary governors](http://www.nga.org.uk/getattachment/Resources/Knowing-Your-School/Knowing_your_school_5b_NGA_FFT_Primary_FINAL-%282%29.pdf.aspx) and one for [secondary governors](http://www.nga.org.uk/getattachment/Resources/Knowing-Your-School/Knowing_your_school_5a_NGA_FFT_Secondary_FINAL.pdf.aspx).

Further to the above, governing bodies should be looking too at in-year information to understand how the school is performing for its current pupils.

* Does the governing body receive regular information about the progress of pupils in-year?
* Does the governing body receive regular reports from the headteacher about the quality of teaching and anonymised information about the outcomes of staff performance appraisals?
* What other external evidence does the governing body have access to (i.e. Ofsted inspection, LA/academy chain review, external adviser report)?
* Do the minutes of the governing body meetings demonstrate scrutiny and challenge of the school’s leadership?

12. How effective is our performance management of the headteacher?

An effective headteacher is a necessity for an outstanding school and performance management which includes appraisal and development forms a key part of this. LA maintained school governing bodies must receive external advice when conducting the appraisal of the headteacher. In academies the procedure for performance management is a matter for each academy trust.

* When did you last review the membership of the headteacher's performance review panel?
* How do you know panel members have the right skills to carry out the review – have they received any training?
* Do you use the skills audit to determine the most suitable governors to be carrying out the head’s performance appraisal?
* LA maintained schools – when did you last review the appointment of the external adviser?
* Has the performance of the school improved over time?

In another of our [Knowing Your School briefings we cover staff performance](http://www.nga.org.uk/Resources/Knowing-Your-School/Knowing-your-School--Governors-and-Staff-Performan.aspx), including that of the headteacher.

13. Are our financial management systems robust and do we ensure best value for money?

* What did your skills audit tell you about the financial skills/experience of the governing body?
* Are the school’s development plan and annual budget linked? Does the development plan include costings?
* LA maintained schools – was the Schools Financial Value Statement submitted on time. Is there an action plan in place to redress any shortcomings?
* Do the minutes of meetings demonstrate challenge about proposals and their costs?
* Has the governing body considered the risks to the organisation – i.e. reduction/growth in pupil numbers?
* Does the governing body know how much Pupil Premium money it receives, agree what it should be spent on and evaluate the impact of the spending?

The Department for Education has written a lot of good guidance on procurement and getting value for money, [which is may be helpful.](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/procurement)

In relation to spending, the [Educational Endowment Fund](http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/) has collated research into areas in which schools spend money – specifically at interventions to improve the progress and attainment of pupils and given them a ranking both against impact of the spend and the amount, in an easy to use table.

14. How do we listen to and understand our pupils, parents and staff?

Taking feedback from parents and staff is important, and it is not uncommon to have a parental group that feed any concerns or problems to the governing body. Another way to receive feedback is via stakeholder surveys, which can provide a snapshot of the way the school is viewed and areas for improvement, from the people using or working in the school. With GL assessment, NGA produced a [Knowing Your School Briefing on conducting parental surveys](http://www.nga.org.uk/getattachment/Resources/Useful-Documents/Knowing-your-School---Getting-to-know-your-parents/Knowing-Your-Parents_high-resolution_21-September-2012.pdf.aspx).

* What mechanisms are in place for consulting parents, pupil staff and the local community?
* Has the governing body requested that surveys of parent, pupil and staff views be carried out?
* What action has been taken as a result of any consultations/surveys?
* Are the governing body aware of Ofsted’s Parent View – do you promote its existence to parents?
* Do the governing body attend school council meetings?
* Do the minutes of governing body meetings demonstrate how stakeholder views are sought and record any action taken as a result?

15. How do we report to our parents and local community regularly?

Engaging with the schools’ main stakeholders is critical to ensuring that the school functions properly. While schools no longer have to directly report to the community on the performance of the school in an annual report (although academies’ accounts do include an annual report from the trustees), the NGA thinks they should, both to help promote the school, but also to engage and explain how the school is performing.

* Do parents know who the governors are and how to contact them?
* Do governors attend parents’ evenings to enable parents to speak to them directly?
* What information do you publish on the website – is this regularly updated?

16. What benefit do we draw from collaboration with other schools and other sectors, locally and nationally?

* What partnerships does the school have with other local schools?
* Do these just involve the professional staff or are the governors involved?
* What information does the governing body receive about the partnership working?
* Has the governing body evaluated the effectiveness of these partnerships?

NGA openly encourages schools to collaborate together, including governing bodies, as this has been shown to have a number of benefits, including sharing good practice and resources.

Ofsted looked at federations in their document [*Leadership of More than One School*](http://www.nga.org.uk/Members-Area/Research/Leadership-of-more-than-one-school.aspx)which looked at some of the impact of federating on the schools surveyed. NGA has is currently producing a Q&A on federations and collaborations which gives advice to governing bodies considering this. We have also undertaken research into [governing bodies that consider federation](http://www.nga.org.uk/Guidance/School-structures-and-constitution/Federations/The-Road-to-Federation.aspx).

17. Do we carry out a regular 360 review of the chair’s performance?

* Has the governing body ever carried out a review of the chair’s performance in any format?
* Is the chair undertaking the National College’s chair’s development programme?
* If yes, what were the outcomes – has it resulted in any action?

The National College Chairs of Governors’ Leadership Development Programme, for which the Eastern Leadership Centre (ELC) in partnership with NGA is a licensee, contains a full 360 review of the chair’s performance at the beginning of the programme. More information on the Chairs of Governors’ Leadership Development Programme can be found on the [National College website](https://www.gov.uk/school-governors-professional-development) and more information on the ELC and NGA license and can be found at [www.leadinggovernance.org](http://www.leadinggovernance.org).

18. Do we engage in good succession planning?

Has the governing body discussed when and what will happen when the current chair steps down – do the minutes of meetings show this?

Do you have a maximum length of service for the chair (NGA recommends six years)?

Have prospective chairs undertaken or started the National College’s chair’s development programme?

Succession planning is important in any organisation to ensure a smooth transition from one period of leadership to another. As Philip Wood explained in his [Governing Matters article in March/April 2013](http://www.nga.org.uk/Guidance/Workings-Of-The-Governing-Body/Chairs-of-Governors/NGA-Mar-Apr-13-29.aspx) governing bodies sometimes get in touch with NGA at the last minute after realising that no-one on the governing body wants to stand for chair. The National Co-ordinators of Governor Services (NCOGS) produced a toolkit entitled [*Succession Breeds Success*](http://www.nga.org.uk/Guidance/Workings-Of-The-Governing-Body/Chairs-of-Governors/SBS-2nd-edn-%282%29.aspx), which explores in some depth how to grow leaders in a governing body.

19. Are the chair and committee chairs re-elected each year?

* Do you have a rule about maximum length of service for the chair of governors/chairs of committees?
* Do you have a written election procedure for the election of the chair and vice-chair of governors, which includes a secret ballot?
* Are the results of the skills audit taken into account in considering the chair of governors/chairs of committees?

Although this is commonly the model used for academy governing bodies, LA maintained schools can choose a term of office between one and four years. NGA thinks that it is good practice to re-elect the chairs and vice chairs every year. This allows the governing body an opportunity to assess the performance of the chair/vice chair at yearly intervals. In addition, when you are seeking a new chair it may appear a less onerous position if the governor is only being asked to take on the role for one year.

In most circumstances, the NGA does not think it is sensible for a chair of governors to be in post [longer than six consecutive years in one school.](http://www.nga.org.uk/About-Us/Policies/Governance.aspx)

Limits for both the chair and the trustees are common in the charity sector, indeed NGA’s board of trustees has limits on the chair (three years) and limits on the trustees of the board (nine consecutive years). The NGA also thinks it is a good idea to restrict the number of terms individual governors can serve in one school to two (i.e. eight years).

The thinking behind this is that it prevents the board becoming stagnant and failing to innovate. That’s not to say that we think that chairs of governors whom have served six years should quit governance altogether – far from it – but it might be a good opportunity for an experienced chair to use their knowledge and experience to improve another governing body. Such a policy also takes the ‘personality’ out of succession – both the chair and governors know s/he will be stepping down and so there are no awkward conversations in corners about how to ‘replace’ x.

It is good practice to have a written procedure to enable candidates to submit names in advance so that no-one feels intimidated at the meeting into not standing. Equally if you ask for nominations in advance you will know whether there is a dearth of candidates.

20. How much has the school improved over the last three years, and what has the governing body’s contribution been to this?

Assessing governing body impact is notoriously difficult – governors after all aren’t in the classroom directly affecting the education of the pupils. But governors can affect outcomes through the staff they recruit, the decisions they make and the questions they ask of the professional leadership.

* Do all members of the governing body have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school?
* Do the governing body challenge the school leadership about: pupil outcomes, behaviour, safeguarding and well-being?
* Do the minutes of meetings demonstrate this?
* Have the school’s strategic priorities been met?

Tools like RAISEonline can be used to track improvements in raw attainment, progress and attendance over a number of years. It’s important though that governors do not just look at the outcome data but that some of the details that are harder to quantify such as pupil welfare, parental engagement and satisfaction are also taken into account.

In relation to governance, systems like [Target Tracker](http://www.targettracker.org/) can help you track some of the data as well as assess what has been achieved against its standardised comprehensive framework and [Governor Mark](http://www.glmpartnership.org/governor_mark.html) have a freely available framework to self-assess your governing body. There is also the option of accreditation through the Governor Mark system. Governor Mark puts a lot of emphasis on governing bodies being able to show impact on the school and so governing bodies considering their impact may well benefit from looking at the materials.

If you are a GOLD member of NGA and have a question about anything in this document, you can contact a member of the advice team at: GOLD@nga.org.uk or 0121 2373782.



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