



GST Newsletter

Issue 3 – September 2023

Introduction

Welcome back to a new academic year! We hope governors/trustees have managed to take some time to enjoy a summer break and recharge batteries.

Headteachers and staff will be feeling the pressure which comes with starting a new school year. It is critical that chairs make regular contact with their headteacher throughout the year. This might be a phone call, a virtual meeting or face to face or a mixture of all three. Your support and duty of care to your headteacher can and should make a significant difference to their wellbeing.

If governors would like to refer back to any information in previous newsletters, please go to the Governor Support Team (**GST**) [website](#).

News/updates

Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete: guidance for responsible bodies and education settings with confirmed RAAC

DfE has produced guidance for responsible bodies and education settings with confirmed reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) in their buildings.

Length of the school week

The Department for Education (DfE) has replaced 'Minimum expectation on length of school week: information note' with 'Length of the school week: non-statutory guidance' and 'Length of school week: case studies'.

This non-statutory guidance and case studies are for schools in England wanting to increase the length of their school week, including those delivering below the minimum expectation of 32.5 hours by September 2024.

The following additional guidance provides a suggested framework for board discussions/consultation:
Changing the length of the school day: Guidance for governing boards



Ofqual's letter to governors and trustees

The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) has published **a letter** to governors and trustees, outlining the grading system for schools and colleges in 2023.

The letter follows Ofqual's announcement in September 2022 confirming a return to pre-pandemic grading, which will include protection built into the GCSE and A level grading process.

DfE publish Sport and Activity Action Plan

The Government has **published a two year plan** to improve equal access and the quality of physical education (PE). The School Sport and Activity Action Plan aims to support teachers and schools to deliver two hours of high quality PE and provide extra-curricular opportunities to both girls and boys.

The plan includes the introduction of a new digital tool for primary schools to "report on spending of their allocation of the premium" and a new equality criteria in the School Games Mark.

Working together to improve school attendance

This guidance has been updated by adding a link to school attendance for parents.

In addition, **Securing good attendance and tackling persistent absence - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)** may be of assistance for governing boards in their role of supporting and challenging pupil attendance.

Get help with flexible working in schools

There are many potential benefits to flexible working such as helping to recruit and retain staff, improving wellbeing, and promoting equality in the workforce.

To support flexible working in schools, the DfE have appointed Flexible Working Ambassador MATs and Schools (FWAMS), who are available to offer advice and support to school and trust leaders on implementing and embedding flexible working. They will also be delivering free workshops and webinars on the topic.

Searching, screening and confiscation in schools

DfE has updated their guidance explaining the powers schools have to screen and search pupils, and to confiscate items they find.

Standards for school food in England

Guidance on the standards for planning and providing food in schools has been updated to reflect that 'Compliance with the requirements for School Food Regulations 2014 is mandatory for all maintained schools, academies and free schools.'

Handling strike action in schools

DfE have updated the 'Directly employing individuals' section of the 'Handling strike action in schools' guidance.

Academy Trust Handbook

The DfE have published the new **Academy Trust Handbook** (effective as from 1 September 2023). The Handbook looks very different to previous years, as part of DfE's efforts to streamline their guidance and requirements for trusts.

Development/Training

Planning your board's self-review and continual professional development (CPD) for the next academic year

As we start another academic year, a topic that is likely (hopefully) to be discussed early in the autumn term is the CPD the board, individual governors, trustees and clerks (governance professionals) require. Ideally this planning is best being done in the Summer term in readiness for the new academic year.

As outlined in the Governance Handbook, boards are expected to carry out a regular skills audit and use the results to inform an evaluation of CPD requirements. The National Governance Association (NGA) provides a **skills audit and dashboard** to identify the strengths and areas where development of knowledge and skills is needed. There are also separate versions available for single school and academy committees and Multi Academy Trust (MAT) trustees.

The skills audit should also contribute towards a boards self-evaluation. There are several ways to conduct a board self-evaluation for example: commissioning an external provider (usually referred to as an External Review of Governance), alternatively (if your board has not done a review of governance before) as a no cost exercise, you could start with the Governing Board Health Check available on our website on the **Governance, Support and Development page**.

The **NGA Learning Link** e-learning, that the Local Authority (LA) has purchased for all Westmorland and Furness Schools to access, is an effective way for governors, trustees and clerks (governance professionals) to develop the knowledge and skills they need. Use the **list of modules** and module collections to help draw up a training plan for the year ahead.

If you are not sure where to start, visit the **NGA Learning Link page** and scroll down the page, where NGA has provided suggested development plans for **MAT trustees, maintained school governors, local academy committee governors** (also known as Local Governing Boards). These development plans could be included as part of the annual review of governor's contributions.

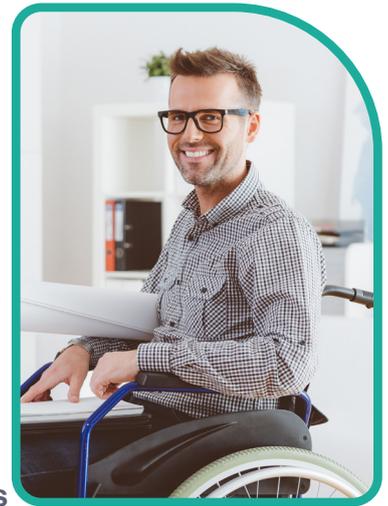
Being Strategic: updated guide to strategy development

NGA have updated the popular strategy development guide for those leading and governing in schools and MATs.

Being Strategic explains how strategic priorities are identified, resourced and monitored throughout the year. It also provides valuable advice on vision setting, self-evaluation, risk assessment, and communicating the strategy to stakeholders.

There are now two versions of the guide: one for single schools, single academy trusts and federations, and one for MATs who implement their vision and strategy across schools.

To accompany the refreshed guidance, the **Being Strategic webinar** covers how boards and leaders collaborate over strategy development, questions to ask, and creating the right culture for the strategy to succeed.





NGA report finds common challenges facing governing board

Board composition, scrutiny, and vision and strategy setting are among the top challenges facing governing boards, according to a new report from the NGA.

Over 400 external reviews were conducted through the National Leaders of Governance program, coordinated by the NGA and funded by the DfE. The report, based on the thematic analysis of 200 reviews, outlines the ten most widespread problems impacting governance practice.

The report along with a **webinar**, also explores how board effectiveness is impacted by:

- Insufficient clarity on roles and responsibilities
- Ineffective communication
- Absence of training and development
- Lack of time.

Clerking (Governance Professional)

All boards must have a clerk (governance professional) in place. If you have an effective clerk (governance professional) in post, this will contribute significantly to effective governance.

Over the years there has been a drive to raise the profile of the clerk (governance professional). The NGA working with the DfE, has developed a **Governance Professional Career Pathway**.

If your board currently has a clerk (governance professional) vacancy there are a number of ways to advertise for example, school website, local press/newsletters, Social Media, libraries, LA vacancy listings, schools Human Resources provider, explore if there is another clerk (governance professional) within the school cluster who may be interested in supporting another school, recruitment agencies, any public facing noticeboard etc.

Westmorland and Furness, Governance – Role of the chair, Developing Leadership

The GST are delivering the above session (virtually), This session provides delegates with a greater understanding of the role of the chair in leading the governing board to fulfil its strategic responsibilities. It will also consider ways in which to strengthen the team to lead to effective succession planning.

The event will consist of a presentation followed by an opportunity to ask questions. The dates are:

- 7 November 2023
- 27 February 2024
- 11 June 2024

All sessions will run from 6.00pm – 7.00pm. Bookings are made via the Westmorland and Furness **SLA online**.

School to school support

Further to our article ‘School to School Support’ previously, the GST wish to remind any governors/ trustees who feel they may be in a position to provide governance support to other boards on a voluntary basis, to contact the GST for an informal conversation.

We would like to extend this invite to include clerks (governance professionals).

Please contact either your Governor Support Assistant or drop an email to **GST.mailbox.WAF@cumbria.gov.uk** to discuss further or if you would just like a little bit more detail.

GST Contact Details

The GST continues to offer advice, support, and guidance, specific to your boards needs and can be contacted as follows:

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