

# inspiring governance



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## Are you a School Governor Champion?

New research explores the benefits  
to employers of supporting school  
and academy governance

Inspiring Governance connects skilled  
volunteers interested in serving as governors  
and trustees with schools in England.

Education  
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## School Governor Champions

# FOREWORD

## Lord Theodore Agnew, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the School System

I am delighted to support this drive to get more employers involved in school governance. This booklet makes the case for the benefits to employers large and small of enabling their staff to give some of their time to serve as governors and trustees.

I recognise the wide range of skills and perspectives that exist in the world of work, and employers of all sizes and sectors can make a vital contribution.

Many employers are already active in their local communities. Getting involved in school governance builds on that good work. Not only does the community benefit, it is good for staff too, who can bring the skills they've learned as a governor or trustee back into the workplace.

I would like to thank all businesses, charities and public organisations that support school and academy governance, and all individuals themselves who give up their free time.



There has never been a more important time for UK plc to support the next generation of school students who (when they leave) will become the employers and employees of the future.

**Theodore Agnew**  
Parliamentary Under Secretary  
of State for the School System



# The benefits to employers of supporting school governance

## INTRODUCTION

In 2008, Business in the Community undertook research into the nature of school governance in England. Over a decade on, the charity Education and Employers has revisited the themes of this research to look at what's changed in school governance ten years later. One of the most encouraging findings from this research is the continued view that volunteering as a school governor brings significant personal, professional and employer benefits.

Here we outline what the main findings of our research said about these benefits for employers. We also look at wider surveys and research that similarly promote the benefits to employers of getting their staff involved in supporting the governance of their local schools. We also look to launch our new campaign to encourage employers of all shapes, sizes and locations; to be a 'School Governor Champion'.

**'As a governor, listening to other people helps to improve your own listening skills and gives you a better understanding of people's needs. It's almost like free CPD for your own staff...!'**

# 10 key findings from our research about employers supporting school governance

The full *Governing our Schools: 10 years on research* report can be accessed by visiting [www.educationandemployers.org/research/governing-our-schools-10-years-on](http://www.educationandemployers.org/research/governing-our-schools-10-years-on) However, we have drawn out ten key findings about employers:

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

**2** There are now clearer recruitment pathways to support employers and their employees to become governors. Interviewees felt that a decade on employers now have clear options to promote governance to their staff, including those based on simple online technology such as Inspiring Governance [www.inspiringgovernance.org](http://www.inspiringgovernance.org) and

those focussed on recruiting academy trustees such as Academy Ambassadors [www.academyambassadors.org](http://www.academyambassadors.org)

**3** Employees' time for governance is often managed on an informal basis by the individual rather than under any organisational policy. This usually works on goodwill but there is scope for employers to introduce more formalised time and support for their staff who serve as school governors or academy trustees.

**4** Employer support for school governance differs by location and size of employer. Many larger private and public employers offer up to five formal volunteering days. Smaller businesses may not be able to offer this but often have more flexible arrangements. It seems size of employer is not a significant barrier to getting involved in supporting school governance.

**5** 10 years on, the business environment is under increasing pressure and this could lead to employers being less active in promoting governance.

This means we will need to keep making the case to employers for the benefits of school governance and continue to recognise and celebrate employers' valuable contributions to their local communities.

**6** Interviewees felt that being a governor was a good opportunity for connecting volunteers with their local community, helping them to potentially see life outside of the 'business/corporate' world and inform the way they relate to their customers.

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**'Governance is personally rewarding as well. A lot of people feel very passionate about education and passionate about their local communities.'**

**7** There are far more small to medium enterprises (SMEs) than large businesses in the UK and we need to be doing more to encourage SMEs to support school governance, particularly

in rural and coastal areas where schools often struggle to find governors with the skills they need.

**8** Interviewees made the important distinction that not only was governing a good CPD opportunity per se but that it was an especially good opportunity for those looking to advance in their careers into middle management and senior leadership positions. There is scope for employers to build school governance into their formal talent development programmes.

**9** The majority of people still become governors/trustees due to encouragement from peers or friends. Whilst this has many strengths it does highlight a need for working with employers to encourage more independent governors from outside these personal networks. This will ensure schools benefit from a broad range of skills and perspectives from a range of employers.

**10** The continued growth in self-employment over the last decade has not affected overall volunteering patterns. It seems the potential constraints of self-employment (time/capacity etc.) are offset by its' flexibilities and self-employment should be seen as no additional barrier to governing.



# What is school governance and why should employers support it?

## What is school governance?

The Department for Education explains school governance in their *Governance Handbook*. They describe its three core functions (regardless of school type and how many schools you govern over). These are:

- 1** Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
- 2** Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the effective and efficient performance management of staff; and
- 3** Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent.

There are already huge numbers of highly supportive employers and individual 'bosses' who support their staff to govern. We need to do more to celebrate them and thank them for their long-held commitment.

We also need to persuade more employers to follow their enlightened lead. To do this, we need to better articulate what's in it for them. In addition to the findings of *Governing our Schools: 10 years on*, there is now a growing body of evidence that highlights the personal, professional and employer benefits of staff getting involved in school and academy governance...

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**'I have gained a wealth of experience in board-level meetings – assisting with difficult processes such as exclusions, recruitment, staff wellbeing and financial management.'**

# OUR FEEDBACK SAYS IT'S A WIN-WIN SITUATION

## 1 INSPIRING GOVERNANCE SURVEYS

Inspiring Governance is the Department for Education (DfE) funded governor recruitment service. It is run by the charity Education and Employers and delivered in partnership with the National Governance Association. We place volunteers from the world of work into governor and trustee roles in schools and academies. We work alongside Academy Ambassadors who are funded by the DfE to support the placement of trustees onto multi academy trust boards. Each year, Inspiring Governance surveys the governors that we have placed about their developing experiences of governance and what they and their employers are gaining from governing. Feedback consistently shows:

- 92% are enjoying their role as a school or academy governor
- 97% would recommend the role to the right friend/colleague
- 92% of placed governors felt they had helped the governing body
- 75% described their motivation of 'wanting to give something back'
- 70% of volunteers felt they were transferring the skills they gained back into the work place (the true percentage is higher accounting for volunteers who were retired)
- The top skill sets that volunteers felt they were developing were leadership and strategy, professional, educational, communication, financial and soft skills

Individuals we have placed through Inspiring Governance often highlight the many transferable skills they gain from governing. They also talk about how they bring these skills back into their workplace:

**'Setting the strategic direction, constructive challenge; these are highly applicable to every workplace.'**

## 2 THE NATIONAL GOVERNANCE ASSOCIATION'S ANNUAL SURVEY OF GOVERNORS

Each year the National Governance Association (NGA) undertakes a survey of governors and trustees. The survey is the largest of its kind and in 2019 it had nearly 6,000 responses from governors across the length and breadth of the country. Part of the survey asks governors about the transferable skills they gain through governing. Fig 1 shows the most mentioned skills that governors say they develop through governing.

FIG. 1

### Transferrable skills gained through governing

- |                               |                 |   |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|---|
| ■ Analysis (of data)          | ■ Influencing   | ■ Performance and people management     |
| ■ Budget/financial management | ■ Interpersonal | ■ Safeguarding                          |
| ■ Chairing                    | ■ Interviewing  | ■ Strategic planning/oversight/thinking |
| ■ Collaboration               | ■ Leadership    | ■ Teamwork                              |
| ■ Communication               | ■ Listening     | ■ Tolerance                             |
| ■ Confidence                  | ■ Negotiation   | ■ Time management                       |
| ■ Diplomacy                   | ■ Organisation  |   |
| ■ Empathy                     | ■ Patience      |   |

Past NGA surveys have also shown 76% of respondents agreeing that they had gained skills that are valuable in their professional life, a figure repeated when you look at those respondents who define their background as managers, directors or senior officials (75%), which demonstrates that volunteers can benefit from being a governor at each and every stage of their career.

What emerges then, is a picture of double benefit for employers and their employees. Firstly, governance is an opportunity for employees to develop and sharpen their current professional skills in a different context. Secondly, it is an excellent opportunity for employees to further develop their 'leadership' and 'soft skills' for the future. Both of these benefits support the long-term performance of organisations who actively support their staff to govern.

### What does the wider research say about the benefits of employers supporting volunteering?

Employers who support their staff to govern in schools and academies make a significant investment of time into the UK's education system and

## LISTEN TO THE RESEARCH

ultimately its economy. This generous contribution should be recognised, and we thank all employers and individuals who offer their time. There are some compelling arguments from the wider research that make a strong case for companies and organisations to support volunteering with their employees (including governing). For example, a study undertaken by Deloitte found that millennials who frequently participate in their company's volunteer activities are:

**'Better listening skills and better management of meetings as I've had to bring some of our quieter Governors into the discussion whilst also limiting our more vocal Governors.'**

- Twice as likely to rate their corporate culture as very positive, as compared to millennials who rarely or never volunteer *(56 percent versus 28 percent)*
- More likely to be very proud to work for their company *(55 percent versus 36 percent)*
- More likely to feel very loyal toward their company *(52 percent versus 33 percent)*
- Nearly twice as likely to be very satisfied with the progression of their career *(37 percent versus 21 percent)*
- More likely to be very satisfied with their employer *(51 percent versus 32 percent)*
- More likely to recommend their company to a friend *(57 percent versus 46 percent)*

(DELOITTE LLP, (2011) EXEC SUMMARY OF VOLUNTEER IMPACT SURVEY)

These findings should not be underestimated in the obvious implications they have for both employee productivity and retention (and their impact on the bottom line). Research from the Chartered Institute

of Personnel and Development (CIPD) has also looked at a wide range of studies in the US and UK focussed on the benefits to companies of supporting volunteering. In their 2014 meta-study they found:

- Employees who actively volunteer gain leadership traits, regardless of volunteers' experience or profession
- A survey of staff at Barclays Bank found that managers saw the greatest impact from volunteering in the development of communication and leadership skills (55% of managers reporting gains in both skills)
- Over 50% of managers believed volunteering helps employees build professional and leadership skills and abilities

### **Becoming a governor is also positive for those seeking employment and promotion**

We should also recognise the transformative impact that becoming a governor can have on confidence and skills. The benefits of becoming a

governor are not just for employees currently in work – governing can have an important role in supporting people seek (re)employment and progression. For example, in Ellis' 2003 study into barriers to under-represented groups in school governance, respondents were frank about its impact:

'It is important to emphasise the benefits of volunteering for the volunteer. I moved from being a shop-floor factory worker to a volunteer manager within an NHS trust, via a degree. But it wasn't the degree that fitted me for the job, but being a school governor, which introduced me to strategic planning, management, staff issues, budgeting etc. We should emphasise the transferable skills which you can learn from being a school governor.'

'For young people I think it is really good for job applications and CVs. It (being a governor) has been one of the most significant factors in me getting interviews. People are really impressed, and I can talk about it a lot during interviews, especially as job applications have changed with more need to talk about positions of responsibility and roles in the community.'

# ENABLING EMPLOYERS TO MAKE A REAL CIVIC DIFFERENCE

At Education and Employers, we have been working closely with the British Legion and the Department for Work and Pensions to look at how we can encourage more service families to engage in school governance and how it might be helpful for those transitioning from the armed services into civilian roles.

We have also been working closely with universities, many of whom see school governing as an opportunity for their staff to forge civic links; to work with schools in all areas to widen their access and participation pipelines; and to build employability skills in their students.

## **The well-being and 'feel-good' benefits of school governance**

It is also important that we don't overlook the 'feel good factor' that volunteering can have on our everyday lives. The opportunity to make a civic difference through school governance is there for both individuals and organisations. Organisations get a chance to show their corporate social responsibility and commitment to local schools and communities. Individuals get the feel-good benefits and camaraderie of tackling tough issues as a team with a range of people and personalities you might not meet in your own professional or personal lives.

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**'I've enjoyed working with people from many different backgrounds with a broad range of experience who nonetheless are working towards a single goal.'**






# How can your organisation become a School Governor Champion?

According to the National Governance Association's annual survey, most governors were asked to become a governor by a friend or peer. Only 5% have indicated that an employer encouraged them to become a school governor.

At Inspiring Governance, we have worked with lots of forward-thinking employers who have recognised the benefits of supporting their staff to govern in schools. However, we are keen for more and are looking for more employers to join our new Be a School Governor Champion campaign to promote school governance to their staff.

We think the best way to do this is via a simple charter where employers can pledge to do five simple things to promote school governance throughout their organisations and show their public commitment to their local schools and communities.



**We would like employers to consider signing up to the School Governor Champion pledge**



## Want to find out more?

To hear more about how we could support you please watch our film by visiting our employer pages at [www.inspiringgovernance.org/employers/](http://www.inspiringgovernance.org/employers/) where you can find further resources to support you.



**School Governor Champions**

## OUR SIMPLE ASK FOR EMPLOYERS

- 1** Act as an advocate and supporter of school governor volunteering and the Inspiring Governance recruitment service. Encourage and support staff to be governors and to register their interest with Inspiring Governance.
- 2** Nominate a named lead as an internal school governor champion and to liaise with our named contact at Inspiring Governance.
- 3** Create a Be a School Governor space in the workplace, either on a noticeboard in a staff area, on the intranet or through internal communications to staff – or all three!
- 4** Provide the opportunity for Inspiring Governance to visit your organisation to explain the role of school governor.
- 5** Consider how you might support staff who govern – this could be supporting a governor network or ensuring staff have time to govern.




Over the following pages, some of our existing businesses involved with our school governance initiative explain how the benefits can be considerable:

## Benefits to businesses

### **BANK OF AMERICA**

Ian Ferguson, Head of Investment Banking UK & Ireland for Bank of America "I have had a remarkable experience that has genuinely opened my eyes to aspects of society, the economy and, yes, politics that I would not have believed possible...

I am very pleased that several of my friends and colleagues have followed the same path, probably in part to stop me nagging them about how important and rewarding it is. I'm still sadly amazed when people ask me: "Why on earth would you do it (govern)?" My experience tells me simply: "Why wouldn't you?"

 Darren Vertigan has run the Aviva governor network for the last five years. He explains:

"As Aviva employees, we have a broad range of skills to offer and we know governing boards need these skills. Each of us contributes a vital discipline to our board – be that in marketing, human resources, procurement or something else. We are used to sitting in business meetings, managing people, tracking projects and being strategic.

"That said, we all get something out of it too – skills and experiences that are directly relevant to our careers. For example, my discipline is financial management. I am used to working on relatively short-term projects of three to six months. But by governing have the opportunity to contribute to strategy development and I'm responsible for an organisation with over 200 employees."

# A supportive partnership delivering outstanding benefits

Sheffield Hallam University and Inspiring Governance have been in partnership since 2018 working on a number of joint-enterprises to raise the profile of governance with university employees. Here is how it works:

## **Raising attainment and aspiration**

As part of the South Yorkshire Futures Social Mobility programme aimed at raising aspirations across the area, Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) is committed to raising awareness of the importance of school governance. Their aim is to galvanise the excellent knowledge and talent in the region to support these aims. As SHU are playing the lead-role in South Yorkshire Futures, they wanted to start a recruitment drive internally, before rolling this out widely.

'Inspiring Governance provides us with the matching and brokering service that we need to match volunteers to vacancies, as well as delivering us excellent relationship management – IG have always taken the time to understand our social mobility programme drivers.'

## **Well networked with Local Authorities**

'IG were also extremely well networked with Local Authorities and governing bodies which enabled our governors to access a wide range of support as well and gives us confidence that we are adding value and not duplicating any work in this space'.

## **'Rewarding experience'**

SHU felt that becoming a governor is a rewarding experience which offers staff a chance to contribute to the region by supporting school leadership, raising educational attainment in the region, as well as to further enhance professional and personal development. 'The role enables our staff to develop a range of skills such as; strategic leadership; project management; budget control; teamwork and communication;



**Sheffield Hallam University**

problem solving; recruitment, and much more'. There is huge opportunity to develop understanding of education policy and practice and how this in turn impacts on our students at Sheffield Hallam as well as our regional social mobility aspirations.

## **Community outreach benefits employees**

Community outreach benefits employees' personal and professional development – in utilising their knowledge and transferable skills across the region, building up new insights, networks and experience 'It is also a demonstration of our commitment to being a 'civic university' and the important role the university and our staff and student bodies can play in supporting development and outcomes across the region'

SHU have also created a new HR policy to reflect the University's commitment to the role, this includes

**"Inspiring Governance were extremely well networked with Local Authorities and governing bodies which enabled our governors to access a wide range of support."**

dedicated staff time being provided to fulfilling the role. Furthermore, SHU have delivered profile raising and recruitment events for staff, and run information stands in staff areas. 'We have created case studies of existing and new governors and created a dedicated staff intranet page with more information about the role and links to other useful information, including more information about our relationship with Inspiring Governance'.

On top of this, SHU have developed a Governors Network who meet during the year and also have a shared mailing list to share any useful information and best practice, as well as acting as a support network for one another.

# How can your staff get involved?

## **BECOMING A GOVERNOR THROUGH INSPIRING GOVERNANCE**

Inspiring Governance is the national online recruitment service for volunteers and schools and is funded by the Department for Education. Volunteers can register their interest in becoming a governor via a simple online platform at [www.inspiringgovernance.org](http://www.inspiringgovernance.org)

Schools can register their governor vacancies on the same online platform and search for volunteers in their local areas via Ordnance

Survey mapping technology. Both volunteers and schools can contact each other and have a dialogue over taking up any specific governor role.

If an appointment is made new governors can immediately access a free support offer from the National Governance Association to help them in the first 12 months in the role. This includes a 'Welcome to Governance' handbook, 'hot topic' newsletters and online CPD training that could benefit both the newly appointed governor and their employer.

[www.inspiringgovernance.org](http://www.inspiringgovernance.org)



**'It's great to do something positive for my community – I feel good about gaining new insight and skills from my governance role.'**

