

NGA Summer Conference Report

Saturday 9 June 2018

Maggi Bull, Chair of the NGA, opened the Conference with a welcome to delegates. Maggi spoke of the work NGA was doing with various partners, including the co-signed letter (NGA, NAHT and ASCL) about Volunteers' Week and the value of governors. She spoke of the DfE fully funding *Leading Governance*, and then the need for diversity on a Board and the struggle some GBs had to find recruits. There followed a video, in which governors from a wide diversity of backgrounds, spoke of their pride in the position of governor and their enthusiasm for the role.

Maggi then introduced the Keynote Speaker, Rt. Hon. Damian Hinds MP, Secretary of State for Education.

Rt. Hon. Damian Hinds MP

The Secretary of State began with a huge thank you – to you in this room, and to governors, trustees and clerks, up and down the country.

“ One of our undoubted strengths as a country, a very British quality ... is this sense of duty felt by communities towards our public institutions – we see our schools and the education of our children, rightly, as a shared responsibility, a shared enterprise.

But there are some people who take their share of responsibility to a much, much higher level. What you do as governors and trustees can't simply be measured in hours spent. Although, of course, I do recognise it is a large volume of hours, but it's also the weight of responsibility: making budgets add up, recruiting and retaining staff, helping to set your school's ethos and vision for the future, knowing all the while that these decisions will affect children's futures and, ultimately, our nation's future.

For some of you, the role of governor has also changed considerably in recent years, with around 2,800 academy trusts, which means even greater reach and capacity to improve the education of still more children but also more responsibility as well. So, once again – thank you. Whether you represent a primary or secondary school, an academy or local authority maintained school, a faith school, an FE College, or one of our incredible schools helping children with special needs or delivering Alternative Provision. Thank you for volunteering and for fitting being a governor around your other jobs, other commitments, and your families. Fundamentally this is a people business. There is nothing more important in education than the people delivering it. Great teachers, great heads – and of course great governors.

Good and effective governance is essential for any school – you can't separate it from educational performance or good management. So today I will talk about how I intend to support you, and support good governance and leadership.

I'll start with recruitment and retention. I know that for many of you teacher recruitment and retention is a live issue for many of you, and it's a top priority for me too. It is true that there are more teachers in schools than ever before – but also pupil numbers are rising. And with an improving economy, the strong recruitment market, the competition for bright graduates is intense. So I am determined to make sure that teaching is an attractive and fulfilling job by supporting schools to bear down on excessive workload; by strengthening professional development, in the crucial early period and throughout careers; and by promoting more flexible working – indeed there is a workshop here today.

I also want to do everything I can to help boost governor recruitment and retention – because we need more great people like you, so today I'm issuing a call to arms, appealing to people up and down the country to join you in this vital role. As Emma Knights has said previously, good governance needs a range

of voices, and that was powerfully on display in the video just shown – and I champion the work NGA is doing, through your *Everyone on Board* campaign, to encourage more diversity – and for more women in leadership roles.

Governing and trust boards should reflect the communities they serve, so, I want to urge people from different backgrounds, different professions, to come forward – to offer up their time, energy, skills, and expertise.

Parent governors continue to be crucial; and I'd like to see more young people get involved, more people from black and ethnic minority communities, more people from across society with the ability and experience to lead. Many people want to give something back to their community, and this is truly one of the most valuable and far reaching ways you can do that. Of course, it's not work to be undertaken lightly but there is great fulfilment to be found from it, as you know. Some of you start as a governor at your own children's school – but they grew up, and you're still involved, because you care, because you're dedicated to doing your best for your school and, in a sense, your 'other' children – your extended and very diverse family, all of whom you want to have the highest standard of education and the chance to fulfil their potential.

And now that we have trusts that cover groups of schools, there are many more lives that volunteers can influence, going beyond their own immediate community. Governors' own words on this will carry far more weight than mine, and that's why my department is launching a new recruitment video online for social media and asking you to add your voice to this call for more governors.

I'm also making an appeal today to the nation's employers: supporting your staff to be governors gives employers the opportunity to invest in their local community; the opportunity to shape the talent pool of the future; and, let's not forget, it is a great development opportunity for staff, with the strategic thinking involved, the challenge of managing resources, of recruiting and retaining the best people. How can you beat that for personal and management development? It's not just schools either – governors of FE colleges are key to providing the skills and training businesses need, and they will play a pivotal role delivering our new T Level qualifications.

So, that's why I'm writing to the 30,000 members of the Institute of Directors, urging them to encourage employees to take on this role, and give them the time it requires.

And I want to say thank you to Inspiring Governance and Academy Ambassadors for the work they do on recruiting and supporting new governors and trustees. If you are not aware of these organisations please do take a moment to look at their website and encourage others interested in volunteering to do so as well.

I also want to offer greater support to existing governors and trustees, so I'm announcing today that funding for governor and trustee training will be doubled to £6 million up to 2021; and we will continue to work with organisations, like the NGA, to develop and improve the guidance and other materials available to governors, trustees and clerks.

I recently spoke to heads from across the country, and I had a message for the many excellent schools, which was simply this: I trust you to get on with the job. My vision for these schools is simply that they are clear on what's expected of them – and largely autonomous from government.

I have also acknowledged that, vital as accountability is, the current system that we have can lead to stress and anxiety for some teachers, leaders and governors – the fear of inspection, of a single bad results year,

the fear of the school being made to convert to an academy. I want becoming an academy, with all the benefits that brings, to be a positive choice for schools. I don't want it to be seen as a punitive threat. I recently set out key principles for how I see the accountability system working in the future, on which we will be consulting in the autumn. I urge you and your schools to feed in your views.

In the future, an Ofsted Inadequate judgement alone would lead to hard action to convert a Local Authority maintained school to an academy: and schools will no longer face visits from Regional Schools Commissioners' advisers that can sometimes feel a lot like an inspection. On those rare occasions when a school is failing – be in no doubt, we will intervene fast and we will take the serious action necessary, but otherwise I want to trust governing bodies and school leaders to get on with the job. And that's why we'll also build on our offer of support to schools that need it. Here I want to recast accountability not as something to be feared, or a blame game - but rather analysing what's not working and then fixing it, collaboratively.

Let me say a word about multi-academy trusts. The vision behind these trusts is a simple one: it's about schools together doing more than they can on their own. It's about great schools widening their influence, getting the best teachers to where they are needed, sharing best practice across their local area and beyond. It's about finding more effective and more efficient ways of doing things.

Ultimately, it's about sharing knowledge and innovation, which of course is the basis of education and, indeed, all human progress. We pool our ideas, our experiments, our mistakes, and our successes, and we learn and improve.

We know the academies programme has had a transformational impact in turning round failing schools. Ofsted data shows that over 480,000 children now study in sponsored primary or secondary academies that are good or outstanding, the vast majority of which are part of a multi-academy trust – and these were, typically, previously underperforming schools.

In 2014, around 2,500 state-funded schools were in MATs. This has grown to around 6,200 this year and I do expect that's a trend which will continue. This doesn't mean we won't still have diversity across the education system, but increasingly I think we'll see more and more trusts being set up, growing to scale, and adopting the practices that, we know, quite simply, work.

We know that good governance, whether exercised at board or local level, is informed by meaningful engagement with parents to understand their views and listen to their feedback. It is vital that boards are connected with the parents, carers and communities they serve. We do not want to see boards become detached or distant from parents, but if Trusts have a growing and increasingly important role in our system we need to make sure that our system of oversight and decision-making keeps up with that development. Parents, carers – and indeed schools – want to know: what value are they getting for the money their Trust spends? And as a school system, we increasingly need to take decisions about Trusts as well: which Trust is best placed to take on and improve a particular failing school? How quickly should we allow a particular Trust to grow? And in rare cases, where the Trust itself is failing or providing weak governance, we need to take action.

Of course, we can get part of the answer by looking at the educational performance of schools already in a Trust. We already do this, through publishing MAT-level performance tables and working with Ofsted on batched inspections. And in addition we publish considerable financial information about Trusts: the latest academy Trust financial benchmarking data will be published next week.

Our RSCs use clear published criteria when deciding whether to allow a MAT to set up or expand, but I recognise these approaches only take us so far. They don't give the full picture of the overall contribution

made by the Trust – including in governance and overall financial management – and what this means for its capacity to take on more schools, so I have concluded that we need to have a transparent way of assessing the strength of individual Trusts and the services they offer – the value for public money of their offer to schools. This will make our decision-making more transparent and fairer. It will mean that schools and parents can easily access vital information about what being part of a particular Trust will actually offer them. We need to give careful thought to how this would work: which body or bodies are best placed to make this assessment of Trusts

The assessment will inevitably look different to an Ofsted school inspection – which will involve looking at very different things. I want to take time to get this right, and I will not introduce anything that adds to teachers’ and school leaders’ and governors’ workload, so I will work closely with the sector, with Ofsted, the ESFA, my regional teams and others in the coming months. In particular, I want to invite and listen carefully to proposals from MAT and school leaders across the country – before setting out a way forward later this year.

I want to make sure that every pound of public money for our schools is used in the best possible way for the good of our children and for our society. That means taking a tough approach in the rare cases where those involved in running schools break the agreements we have in place with them. We will have a new more robust process to manage related-party transactions made by academy Trusts. Of course, some related-party transactions are perfectly legitimate and represent good value for money, but I think pretty much everyone would agree that a situation where board members could simply hand out contracts to companies that they or their family and business contacts have an interest – that is not okay; which is why from April, Trusts will have to seek approval from EFSA for related-party transaction payments of more than £20,000. Transactions below £20,000 will need to be formally declared.

We also want to be clear about our expectations on high pay – for all schools not just academies. There is no doubt that our school system has many great leaders; and for large and complex organisations, pay, of course, must reflect the scale of the task. However, pay needs to be proportionate, and I am clear that pay rises for non-teaching management should not exceed those awarded to teaching staff. And when considering what’s fair, Trusts and boards should not just compare pay rises over a single year, but look and compare over a number of years, at a time when public finances have been really stretched.

This is public money and, frankly, I think that for a head or Chief Executive to be paid more than the Prime Minister, this should be only in exceptional circumstances for exceptional leadership, so I want to urge all Trusts to take a lead here and bear down on excessive salaries – you have our backing on that. In fact my department is today setting out clearer expectations around executive pay so you have the guidance you need. We will be requiring academy accounts returns to detail all staff paid over £100,000 and the percentage of teaching time those individuals undertake. And, rest assured, where salaries are too high – we will publicly challenge Trusts and boards to justify themselves.

I’ve also said I want to work with schools of all types to help them with budgets and cost pressures. And let me just acknowledge once again that, while it is true there is more money going in to schools than ever before, society asks more of schools than ever before; and budgets are tight. I have pledged to work with schools as best I can to reduce some of the cost pressures, and as we enter negotiations in the run-up to the Spending Review, I will be making a strong case to the Treasury to ensure our school system has the resources it needs.

We know that there are great suppliers out there – but frankly there are also companies that will take advantage. Equally, individual schools can find it hard to get the best deals and find economies of scale. A few years ago schools were paying £75 per pupil for all their insurance requirements, but DfE worked with the market to create a core cover protection offer, meaning that schools that join the scheme can save £40

per pupil, while even for schools not taking part, market prices have dropped by an average of £20 per pupil. And we're expanding the range of deals to help schools save money on goods and services that they buy regularly. For example, these can save schools up to 10% on their energy bills and up to 40% or more on printers, photocopiers and scanners.

And a new national deal on supply agency fees will be launched later this year. We know that schools have reported supply agencies demanding as much as 30% of a teacher's annual salary as a finder's fee where the school wishes to hire them permanently. Our new deal will drive down agency margins and restrict the use of finder's fees.

This year the government has been piloting two new approaches: buying hubs in the North West and South West which provide free procurement advice to more than 600 schools; and school resource management advisers providing hands-on support to schools that need it most. We also have our top 10 planning checks and online benchmarking service, which help governors ask the right questions and check how their school or Trust compares with others in similar circumstances.

Ladies and gentlemen, we want – we need – all schools to be offering world-class education to every child, in every classroom. As society progresses, it's right that we are even more ambitious for children and especially for the most disadvantaged – including those with special needs, disabilities and children in the care system.

Once again – thank you. Without you our schools simply wouldn't run. I pledge to work with the NGA and with businesses to encourage people to volunteer to become governors and do what you do. I'll help governors to access the training they need, and, I'll support effective governance, making sure that our accountability system doesn't create unnecessary workload, but instead identifies where things aren't working and how we can fix it; helping more schools to work together including through MATs and making sure that every pound counts.

Across all of this, there is only one aim, that we all share, to improve education for every child, whatever their background, wherever they live. I will work with you, with the NGA, with all governors and all schools, to seek to make this shared ambition come true".

The Secretary of State then took questions:

Qu 1: (Brian Patterson, Dudley Association): We all know that many children of all ages have mental health issues. The PM promised to address this. What is being done?

DH: This is an area of great concern and awareness of it is rising. Every year more resources are going into it. Education and Health systems need to focus on the issues. We have run pilots to try to address the matter. Schools are offering counselling. There are two new things: a Mental Health Green Paper, proposing £200m funding to go into training Designated Health Leads in schools and support teams; and early intervention through relationships education in primary schools, including looking at families, friendships and online relationships, all of which can be linked to mental health.

Qu 2: (Fee Stagg, Meadow Primary Academy, Stoke): There are 12 Opportunity Areas with related funding, aimed at tackling social mobility. Will there be an extension of the programme into other areas?

DH: We're finding out in these areas if the system works collaboratively, and how far it needs Government support. One thing regarding governors in this: in Doncaster, Sheffield Hallam University is providing governors to schools in that Opportunity Area, where they can make a difference.

Qu 3: (Vice Chair, South End Infants School): Most schools are having to cut back on TAs, and yet TAs are so essential to disadvantaged pupils. Don't you agree that these pupils need the best resources?

DH: Yes, we should put most resources into areas with the most disadvantaged children. There has been a programme to address narrowing the gap, and there has been a 10% reduction since 2010, but we need to do more. The EEF's work is very important in this area. I hope you use the EEF information on the use of Pupil Premium. We should constantly challenge ourselves on how to improve. Children in Care are not making the progress we should like to see.

Qu 4: (V Clifford, Surrey): What is the Government doing to alleviate the teacher recruitment crisis? Have you considered putting more support into teacher training?

DH: Recruitment in general is a big challenge. There is the bursary programme, student loans, flexible working. Teaching should be a profession that lends itself to flexible working, but there is a lack of this. I'd like to see more job-shares and part-time teaching. It would make it more attractive to returners and may retain others too.

Qu 5: (Ariana Yakas, (Manchester): Government states that there is more funding in schools, but our experience is of an ever-growing shortage of money. Where would you make the cuts to save money?

DH: Funding: there is more money going into schools, but there have been significant increases in costs, with great pressures caused by National Insurance increases and teachers' pension increases. We want to try to bear down on costs – recruitment costs, supply costs; and workload, which is top of my list to tackle. The latter has gone up and DfE wants to address this, as I mentioned in my speech. In the next Spending Review, I will make a strong case for more funding for education.

Qu 6: (Judith Bennett, Oxon. Association): The Conditions Improvement Fund aims to help schools with essential repairs and maintenance. 40% of the secondary schools receiving CIF money over the past three years have been grammar schools. As these schools make up only 5% of all secondary schools, can the Secretary of State justify what looks disproportionate and like favouritism?

DH: There is no bias towards grammar schools. I don't recognise this issue. Overall there is £23bn. for schools and for their expansion. There is lots of expansion across all schools.

Qu 7 (L Furnell? Herefordshire?): You need to recognise that schools value LAs and there are still many LA schools. Will you ensure that LAs have enough money to do their work?

DH: I value LA schools. I don't think they should be driven to become academies and join a MAT. It should be a positive choice.

Qu 8: (Richard Stainthorp, Reading Association): I am governor of two primary schools. Where can we get comprehensive information on MATs, if we are looking to join one we feel is suited to us and our ethos?

DH: We do need good clear information. There is some available but we can do better. We want to work with colleagues to achieve this.

Qu 9: (Julia S?): The media seem to have little knowledge of governors. What can you do to improve this?

DH: This is an area we need to do much more in. If you have ideas and views, let us know.

Qu 10: Katie Paxton-Doggett, Oxon Association/NGA Trustee): I'm a Clerk as well as a Chair of Governors. Clerks are essential for advice, information and support to GBs, but in some areas it is very difficult to find clerks. What will you do to support clerking as a profession?

DH: Clerking is very important. Training and development is very important in the Government's planning. In the earmarked a budget for training, some could be used for clerks' training

The Chair thanked the Secretary of State and gave the opportunity for the questioners to respond to the SoS's replies. The general view was that it was good that he had come to speak to NGA, but that he had not provided sufficient detail in his answers, or had avoided answering some points (just like a politician . . .) Several delegates spoke with him on his way out, and were impressed that he did give them time rather than rushing away as is the usual form.

Following Damian Hinds's presentation, delegates participated in a series of workshops as is usual at these events. At the end of the afternoon, however, they came together for the final presentation of the day, given by Angela Rayner MP, Shadow Secretary of State, who gave Labour's vision for education governance and leadership.

Ms Rayner began by thanking some of 'her governors' (from her constituency). She then widened her thanks to include all present as volunteers working for children.

Angela Rayner MP

"I know you don't feel appreciated. I was a governor and a parent governor at two schools; and I fought for the negotiating body for support staff as a union rep. and fought academisation. I want to make sure that all schools give every child the best chance. A previous Secretary of State for Education tried to remove parent governors from governing boards. There are too many challenges and changes from above, and too much to be accountable for especially in a fragmented system. GBs are best when they are challenging and supportive. In the education family we have shared goals. I spoke at the School Support Staff Conference. It reminded me of President Kennedy visiting NASA. He asked a man in overalls, a janitor, what he did. The answer was: 'I send rockets to the moon'. So thank you for your incredible contribution to children's education.

At the heart of the school system we find re-organisation and cuts. A Labour Government will bring about change, but we don't want to make the job harder. There is too much stick and not enough carrot. The Government declares it has put in more money, but it ignores the list of pressures, National Insurance changes etc.

Labour's vision: I'll start with the NGA list of priorities before the last election and the realities of what has happened:

No cuts – but these continue

Pupil Premium – continued but decreased

Recruitment – target number of new recruits missed

The Government asks schools to do more with less; but in fact it amounts to doing less with less.

A Labour Government will end cuts. Spending on education will return to the last Labour Government levels but will increase in real terms. There will be no Apprenticeship Levy on those who don't derive benefit from it. The agencies will no longer be able to line their pockets. Support Staff will be paid enough. There will be extra funding for public sector pay rises, so that schools do not have to find the money.

'Handing over to schools' has been to burden not to empower. The Secretary of State cannot run all schools. As politicians, we don't know all the answers, so teachers, governors, parents should all contribute. Last year we launched a Charter for a National Education Service. Visit the website and help to shape the NES. We need to get the principles right. John McDonnell has called me the 'Nye Bevan of Education'. We're in listening mode so that we don't make the same mistakes as former Education Secretaries in forcing change onto schools. We want to make your voices heard so that the NES works for the many not the few.

You know more than I do about challenges, so we need to work with you to ensure we get it right. We want collaboration and all schools rooted in their communities. Governors play a key role in this. I'm asking NGA and you all to respond to our consultation, so we can have shared principles.

It is a challenge, but the NES is a once in a generation opportunity. The Labour vision, based on our values, is that all children, regardless of background, should reach their potential. Chances should be shared by all not just by a few. Knowledge and power is the greatest gift to children. The next Industrial Revolution is

upon us. Unless all children reach their full potential we all lose out. Those with bad home backgrounds must reach theirs too. At 16, I was in a 'tough' school. Without the support of teachers, I wouldn't be the Shadow Education Secretary.

And you, despite differences with political parties, remain true. We share a vision for the many, not the few.

Ms Rayner then took questions:

Questions:

Qu.1: (Governor, Reading): At the primary school where I'm a governor, half the children are having coaching to get into one of the two local grammar schools. Most will not get in, and those who do still need coaching.

AR: An issue of recruitment and retention. We need experienced teachers. If schools are state funded, then they, grammar schools as well, must abide by the principles or they will be in trouble. If schools abide by the principles, neither perks nor disadvantages will apply. In the London Challenge there were no grammar schools. Pupils didn't need to go to grammar schools. We will prioritise expertise and funding into schools that need it.

Qu.2: (Former LA Adviser): How much does your plan rely on how far LAs still have functioning structures? Many have almost nothing left.

AR: LAs' support of education was always vulnerable, so we'd hesitate to reintroduce LAs. We want to think outside the box and not necessarily look to the local government footprint. There are mayors now and we need to see that LEPs work with the education sector too. We are still consulting on these matters.

Qu.3: (Susan Marsh, Tameside Association): LAs are now operating with only one or two officers to support schools. What support is this now to help provide relative information to do a good job? It's left to schools and heads to support each other.

AR: RSCs can't do the job nor Ofsted. Damian Hinds is going in the right direction on this.

Qu 4: (Member of NGA Special Schools Advisory Group/Cheshire): I haven't heard of support for special needs pupils. More support is needed to help them into work when they reach that stage. Once there were careers officers: now there is nothing.

AR: There are real issues here. Sometimes young people find it a challenge to get through a school day, so we need to address special needs within and beyond school.

The afternoon drew to a close with the Chair thanking speakers, workshop leaders, sponsors and stall holders; the NGA staff; and of course, all the delegates for giving up their Saturday.

{DAGB, being completely non-political, neither endorses nor condemns the statements made at the conference by these two speakers. We do however believe that ALL governors and trustees should be made fully aware of what is being said by the Nations representatives at Westminster. This is only the second time that the National Governance Association has secured a Secretary of State for Education as their key-note speaker; it is certainly singular to have the Shadow Secretary of State on the platform at the same meeting. Ed.}