

NGA Summer Conference Report

Saturday 14 June 2014

Duncan Haworth, Chair of the NGA, opened the Conference with a welcome to delegates, and some words about Governance: the statutory guidance, which will see many governing bodies reconstituting, closer Ofsted inspection of governors, the *Trojan horse* issues and financial probity concerns. And, of course Sir Michael Wilshaw calling for mandatory training for governors – something that has been our argument and aim for years.

Duncan then turned to the business of the day and was delighted to introduce the Keynote speaker, Neil Carberry, Director for Employment and Skills at the CBI.

Keynote speaker: Neil Carberry: *Employers and Schools: working together*

Neil began by sharing his opinion that it was important to reflect on personal experience when talking about governance. He was a governor of a single form entry primary academy.

He had spent recent years reshaping his views on education, and a business narrative in education. He had been asked to lead on education for the CBI, and had accepted this post, provided that the CBI stopped the 'guilt-free whinge'. He came to the job from the trade union /business side, with a background in organisational behaviour. In a wide-ranging speech Neil shared his thoughts.

He took issue with the newspapers' view that young people were 'rubbish'. Businesses told us that young people were impressive but the more complex environment meant that they needed help to make the transition into employment. He agreed with Niall Ferguson's view that Education was the currency of the 21st Century. Those with high performance in education would also be prosperous and successful. The DfE had never articulated education's role in the growth strategy but it was massively important to the country.

To achieve this growth you needed to address various issues:

1. How to:
 - a. engage pupils at primary school
 - b. keep them engaged into and through secondary education
 - c. deal with the long tail of low achievement – though the average was reasonable
2. Attitude and aptitude
3. How to help young people to appreciate and understand the opportunities available to them.

There were issues with this last. For instance, if you added 'forensic' to science, more applied for the course; but jobs in forensic science went to those with degrees in Chemistry. A mismatch. Equally, there was a tendency to reform exams 'a bit' and hope that everything would follow and success would be achieved. In reality structure followed strategy, but where was the strategy?

Neil referenced the *First Steps* report on the CBI website, where there is no mention of structures. We needed to develop the cultural strategy, set signposts and progress from there. Schools needed vision and they needed to be confident about their vision. SLT teams in schools were often brilliant but could be defensive; they felt 'slightly hunted'. Governors needed to probe this further. Governors should foster the SLT and encourage its success – this could change schools. Governors at Neil's school were aware of Ofsted, but this didn't define how they worked. They also knew the challenges. Schools needed to be action orientated, and thus to develop young people to be inquisitive and to aspire. Neil then referred to an excellent 'Butterflies' video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgh1MRWZjms&feature=kp>).

Governors needed to be in control, finance is ever more important. This kind of agenda was music to the ears of those in the business community. And, in fact, employability skills were not much different from the social skills our communities required.

Young people of today were going to have a long working life (18-70, perhaps). Technology would lead to a different world, a life that would be always changing. Neil quoted the question, 'what are your strengths now and how will you leave them behind?' That is, whatever you were good at now may not be relevant as the world changed. Neil couldn't imagine how it would be in the future. But

young people would need to be prepared for work in this new world. Who young people 'are' was important to employers.

Neil recalled a comment made about the long-dead National Coal Board: '*The NCB was bad but we never worried about (there being enough) engineers*'. In our world we no longer had an adequate supply of engineers: in the future there must be a workforce to deal with a world of technology. Business needed this to be accomplished.

We needed to help schools help themselves and Neil returned to his own experience at this point. His primary school was part of an umbrella trust of five free-standing academies. His governors had had valuable support from the others in the trust in appointing a new Head. This support had been 'light years' away from LA support in past times.

Returning to school governors, Neil spoke of a survey of the senior leadership in schools in regard to governor involvement and engagement. 15% felt that, as long as governors didn't get in the way, things would go along fine; 15% at the other end felt they needed governors around as things were not so good; the remaining 70% varied between the two ends of the spectrum. The CBI saw leadership as critical and this year was running a conference on this topic. It was important to have 'business' governors in schools, but in the past, half of the business governors appointed had walked away in disgust. However, things had moved on. It made sense for business to think senior leadership was important – for individual governors, for the students and for the community. The link between business and schools was of great importance. . But business-school involvement did not mean business governors *per se*. If we got business and schools together, it would be better for governance and better for schools and young people. We must build better systems, as so many young people would benefit if *different* courses were available, but Neil was not sure that Government understood this. An obvious improvement would be in careers' advice, which needed to be impartial and well-informed. Teachers were not necessarily best placed to implement this, particularly as it was an additional role imposed on schools with no commensurate budget. Neil once more referred to his own experience, this time at school in Edinburgh. He had two abiding memories: one was the day the school burned down: the other was a visit to the postal sorting office, where they subsequently engaged him as an employee! He endorsed Robert Peston's initiative to get inspiring speakers into schools at no cost to the school.

Summing up, business needed to step in to support schools: this could be on the operational side in a facilitating role, and also in supporting governance. It was also important to bring younger adults into governance, and business was in a position to encourage this. It provided a development goal for the individual and it was great for schools.

Neil then took questions:

Questions:

Qu 1 (Brian Patterson, Dudley Association): As you are a governor at a primary school, how do you prepare the children at the top of the school for the world of work?

Ans: There is evidence of a drift in KS2 in lots of schools. You need to challenge this situation and aim for independent learners, who understand the relevance of what they are doing: to make them curious; to keep the interest alive and keep it relevant. In my school the children write the curriculum in the first week of September, so they are fully engaged with it. There is a national shortage of scientists so we need to keep young people inspired and interested.

Qu 2 (Andrew Walker, Bucks Association): There is an issue of the quality of governors. In the '80s, the CBI did a lot of work on Non-Executive Directors (NEDs), to encourage growth in numbers, and provided guidance. How did you train them, as there is a lot of common ground with governance?

Ans: A lot of interesting things here. I see governors as NEDs in schools. There is not as much development of NEDs as there should be. I hope to look at the axis between short-termism and long-termism. No answer yet but I'm working on it.

Qu 3 (Name unknown): How do you get the SLT to open up?

Ans: If emails are used for communication between SLT and governors, things get lost. You need to make time for discussion, build trust within a safe space and then they'll open up, if you let them know they are not in danger. Governors need to understand the situation a school is in at any point

and learn the idiosyncratic elements of the SLT. Things are different in different schools: this is why we need governing bodies and why governance matters. There is an issue with developing leaders – when recently appointing a Headteacher there were 17 vacancies within a 50 mile radius.

Qu 4 (Mike Greenacre, Stoke-on-Trent): In regard to NEDs, NED rôles come about because of people's rôles in life and experience. If so, can this be transferred to being a governor – or do these people need training? Is life experience enough and do you need training?

Ans: If you are a governor and are not encouraged to go for training, this is a bit of an issue. You need life experience and confidence, and not just education experience, to ask the questions that are important, but you need training too to get up to speed. Useful is a risk register to spot where the school is being stretched, but governors can only deep dive on limited issues.

Qu: (Name unknown): I am Chair of a Multi-Academy Trust and a governor of a CTC. We invited students to GB meetings and asked them to contribute at the end, indicating what they liked or disliked about the meeting. We are now thinking of electing a student to the GB. Is this a good idea?

Ans: This may be found to be important. Almost all companies now use board observation as part of their staff development. Diversity is important. There is a difference between student governors and student observers of a GB meeting: which you opt for depends on where you are as a school. (The first woman to be appointed to the board of a large supermarket business asked, at her first meeting, what was going to be done about wonky trolley wheels – an important question for customers. This is why you need different perspectives.)

Duncan Haworth drew the questions to a close and thanked Neil. He then explained that the next item on the conference agenda should have been a response from Nick Chambers, Director of the Education and Employers Taskforce charity. However, Nick could not be present after all, so Duncan asked Emma Knights, NGA's Chief Executive, to speak in Nick's absence.

Emma explained that the EET was a small organisation, of similar size to NGA, and with a similar culture. She spoke about the *Inspiring Governors Alliance*, which was supported by many education and business bodies. The aim was working together to improve school and college governors, and to raise the profile of governors. And, of course, the Secretary of State had told employers to work and engage with schools.

Emma also urged schools to sign up for *Inspiring the Future*, a national network of volunteers from different professions, jobs and sectors, who were keen to be invited into schools to talk to pupils. And *Inspiring Women* was a campaign to encourage girls to look wider at careers, especially in science. The spokesperson was Miriam González Durántes. Through NAHT the organisation was looking at working with primary schools.

The recent report, *The State of School Governing in England 2014*, acknowledged that governance was a fundamental part of school leadership. And while governors found governing challenging, 75% found it rewarding, and enjoyed it. The angry reaction to the SoS's words about sherry, cake-cutting and *Kumbayah*, was understandable! And there were also obvious concerns about more challenged schools, about Trojan horse and other issues that had implications for governors. NGA was involved with the Birmingham City Council's review.

The Chair then asked EK and NC to take some final questions.

Questions:

Qu 6 (Comment): (Name unknown): As a grammar school girl and the Chair of a comprehensive school GB, I do recognise the issues in planning so that you help students become resilient. The high ability also don't apply for apprenticeships, when this might in fact be a good idea.

Qu 7: (Katie Paxton-Doggett, Oxon): I am constantly amazed by very hard-working and talented governors. I wonder what your thoughts are on payment for Chairs (or governors).

Ans:

NC: A personal view: I worry about monetising things that people do. As an example, a nursery school in Israel started to charge parents by the minute for arriving late. Lateness went up ...

EK: NGA's research (TES Survey last year) shows that governors do not want to be paid, although some are concerned for Chairs because of the time they give to their responsibilities. Of course, Sir Michael Wilshaw agrees with paying governors.

NC: How compatible is the rôle of Chair with holding down a full time job?

Qu 8: (Name unknown): We have given up work experience for Year 10 because of the cost and administration involved. There is some in Year 12.

Ans (NC): I disagree with the abolition of pre-16 work experience. It is clear that more young people will be staying on, but they need more experience of the workplace – perhaps one day a week rather than a single block. But business needs to step up to the mark: work experience does not mean making the tea and doing photocopying.

Duncan Haworth thanked both Neil and Emma, and outlined details of the workshop sessions. As there would be no conference plenary session before the close, he wished delegates well, thanked the sponsors and NGA staff and invited NGA members to stay on for the EGM at 3.30.