

NGA external reviews of governance

1. NGA and external reviews of governance

NGA is at the forefront of knowledge and understanding of school governance in both maintained schools and academy trusts. NGA has been undertaking external reviews since they were introduced in 2013 and has built up extensive experience of supporting and improving governance practice in all types of schools and trusts.

2. Reasons for commissioning a review

It is good practice for boards to review their effectiveness regularly, but most especially if circumstances change, as outlined in the DfE's 2020 Governance Handbook:

An objective independent external review of the effectiveness of the board can be a more powerful diagnostic tool than a self-evaluation. This is particularly important before the board undertakes any significant change – such as conversion to academy status or before a MAT grows significantly.

In addition, in the DfE's Competency Framework for Governance, the sixth feature of effective governance focuses on evaluation:

It is essential for the board to reflect on its own effectiveness including the effectiveness of its processes and structures. This will assist in building relationships and improving accountability, and will enable the board to ensure that there is a clear distinction between strategic and operational leadership. It will also assist in setting the tone and culture of the board.

Specific circumstances that may prompt a board seeking a review also include:

- A new chair, or new governors or trustees, or new leadership of the school or trust
- There has been no history of board evaluation and so a starting point is required
- There are specific issues, for example with standards, financial management, complaints
- Ofsted, or some other body such as the Education and Skills Funding Agency, or the regional schools commissioner, has required an external review

Whatever the reason, commissioning an external review should be seen as a positive step.

3. The purpose and aims of a review

The purpose of any review will be to improve the effectiveness of the governing board in carrying out its core governance functions so that the organisation it is governing – be it a maintained school or an academy trust - achieves its purpose.

Each review aims to develop the board's understanding and practice of effective governance through:

- Thorough research into the board's structure and practice
- Capturing the views of all those involved with governance
- Engagement with the board in action
- Astute diagnosis of the areas where improvement is needed
- Realistic recommendations that can form the basis of an action plan for the coming year
- The option to book a progress review after two or three terms

Within a year of the review having taken place, the governing board should be:

- Effectively fulfilling its core governance functions
- Sustainable, with routine self evaluation established, and succession planning in place
- Seeing evidence of organisational improvement

4. Methodology

The precise methodology for the review will depend up on the context and circumstances of the governing board; the following details are illustrative of the approach taken:

- In order to build an understanding of the context of the school and key relationships, reviews start with a scoping meeting involving the chair and the senior executive leader.
- In order to build a picture of how the governance structure works, and the quality of the information that the board is receiving, the consultant will carry out a detailed document review.
- In order to capture the views of all those involved with governance, completion of NGA's online board self-evaluation, or short semi-structured interviews either by phone or video.
- In order to see the board in action, observation of a board meeting, committee meetings, or through a feedback session where initial findings are shared and the consultant leads some development work on governance structures and practice.
- In order to provide a summary assessment of board effectiveness, and to record the evidence that has led to this assessment, plus recommendations for improving practice, the consultant provides a quality assured detailed written report.

Engagement with the board can be face to face, wholly remote using videoconferencing technology, or a blend of both approaches.

Once the review is concluded, the board should seek to implement the actions in the recommended timescale, drawing on the three months of free access to the NGA telephone advice service, and/or externally sourced support as appropriate. NGA also has an option for a progress review, two or three terms after the review is concluded. Please contact consultancy@nga.org.uk for details.

5. Timescales

The aim is that all reviews are concluded eight to 12 weeks after the initial contact is made to NGA. However this is dependent on the extent of the review, the availability of governors and trustees, and how term times impact on the review timetable.

6. Quality assurance

All NGA consultants are carefully recruited, trained and quality assured. All reviews are quality assured by senior staff.

7. Fees

Fees are outlined in the table below; fees are inclusive and that VAT is not charged. Please note NGA's [terms and conditions](#) which include details of our cancellation policy.

Contact consultancy@nga.org.uk for more details.

NGA external reviews of governance Options and fees

Standard review For single schools	Progress review Two/three terms on	Multi academy trust reviews For the trust board and its committees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A scoping meeting with the chair and the senior executive leader ▪ A review of the governing board's documentation ▪ An online self review completed by all those involved with governance, or one to one interviews ▪ A board and/or committee observations and/or a workshop style presentation of findings and development session ▪ A detailed written report ▪ Three months free access to the NGA telephone advice service <p>Maintained school governing body £1,750</p> <p>Single academy trust board Schools which are part of a MAT £2,250</p> <p>ESFA required reviews, by arrangement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A review of the governing board's documentation ▪ A review of the governing board's action plan ▪ A meeting with the chair, the senior leader and other key personnel to discuss and assess progress ▪ A short written report summarising progress made and any key areas still to be developed <p>For single school governing boards £775</p> <p>For MATs, by arrangement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MAT governance reviews are bespoke according to the trust's governance arrangements ▪ Following discussion with NGA senior staff, a detailed proposal and fee is prepared ▪ For more details outlining NGA's approach, please contact consultancy@nga.org.uk <p style="text-align: center;">By arrangement</p>

Further information

Reviews will be conducted with due regard to the following expected behaviours and protocols:

- The review should be based on trust and mutual respect
- All parties should respect confidentiality and encourage transparency
- Wherever possible, the consultant will aim to build confidence and capacity
- Governors/trustees/academy committee members and senior executive leaders will actively contribute to the process
- Consultants will use their experience and skills to, wherever possible, help the board to identify appropriate priorities and solutions
- The governing board feels ownership of the outcomes of the review
- The organisation will provide the core documents that the consultant requests
- In exceptional circumstances where there may be serious concerns about the governance arrangements which can be evidenced, the consultant may make seek to make contact with the local authority, the regional schools commissioner, the ESFA or the monitoring Ofsted inspector
- All NGA consultants are carefully recruited and their work is quality assured
- Most consultants are able to be extremely flexible with their time, often working at short notice
- Unless specifically negotiated, NGA fees are inclusive of the consultant's travel, incidental expenses and materials
- There will be a charge for short notice cancellations
- Your feedback is important to us and on completion of the review we either circulate an electronic survey, or telephone for feedback. If there are any issues, we ask that you contact consultancy@nga.org.uk without delay.
- We value relationships and so if you would like a consultant you have already worked with to work with you again, please let us know and we will do our best to accommodate your request

NGA Professional Development's terms and conditions can be found on the NGA website: <https://www.nga.org.uk/Training-and-Development/Terms-and-conditions.aspx>