Human resources self-assessment

A tool for governing boards

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Contents

National Governance Association

The National Governance Association (NGA) is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and governance professionals of state schools in England.

We are an independent, not-for-profit charity that aims to improve the educational standards and wellbeing of young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. We are expert leaders in school and trust governance, providing information, advice and guidance, professional development and e-learning.

We represent the views of governors, trustees and governance professionals at a national level and work closely with, and lobby, UK government and educational bodies.

Introduction

Staff are the most valuable resource in a school or trust and exercising employer responsibilities is a key aspect of school governance. Effective human resource management and a healthy workplace culture are crucial to making the school or trust a great place to work. These factors also influence the recruitment and retention of leaders, teachers and support staff.

This tool is designed to support governing boards in all types of school or trust to be exemplary employers. It encourages boards to step beyond their compliance duties and consider how they influence the workplace culture in their school or trust. We hope this self-assessment leads to discussions about the board's approach in specific areas, such as evaluating the staffing structure, recruitment, retention, professional development, staff workload and welfare.

How to use this self-assessment tool

Each section of this tool contains questions and statements for the board to discuss and consider the extent to which they are carrying out their responsibilities in an effective way. We expect boards to use the tool in a flexible way, focusing on the areas where most attention is needed (rather than as a rigid checklist).

We hope that this self-assessment will increase the board's understanding of workplace culture in the school or trust and help identify opportunities for improvement. Improvement may be achieved through modifying policies, adjusting resource allocation, monitoring arrangements and/or building governing capacity through further CPD.

We suggest that this tool supports the work of a small group of governors/trustees (such as the staffing committee) who report to the full governing board as appropriate. We recommend that they adopt an outward facing approach, engaging with and seeking views from:

- the leadership team in the school or trust
- the staff who govern
- the wider staff group as appropriate
- the specialist HR advice and support available to the school or trust

An HR checklist detailing the key areas of compliance, basic obligations and good practice that every board should maintain is included as an annex to this document.

The tool includes links to a range of guidance available on the NGA Knowledge Centre, to support governing boards fulfil their employer responsibilities.

NGA is here to help

- NGA Learning Link provides access to flexible e-learning on a broad range of topics
- NGA consultants deliver a range of HR support including performance management advice
- If your board has GOLD membership, you can get timely and bespoke advice from our GOLDline team

HR self-assessment tool

1. Evaluate data and information

How does your board gain insights into employment issues and workplace culture?

Data / insight	Expectation	Development opportunities
Staff absence data	Boards should receive data on staff absence levels. High levels of absence could suggest problems with morale or the school's policy for handling absences and may have financial implications.	
Staff turnover data	Data on staff turnover is used to measure retention. It can be helpful to consider staff turnover for specific groups.	
Staff CPD (continuous personal development)	Boards should receive an overview of training attended by staff, so they can have strategic oversight of the development of the staffing body.	
Benchmarking data	The Department for Education's financial benchmarking platform includes a section on workforce. It is important that data is benchmarked against previous years and/or similar schools to provide context.	

Staff survey	Development opportunities
Are regular (at least annual) surveys conducted of the staffing body?	
Does the governing board access the full survey results?	
Does the board approve survey questions in advance?	
Does the board compare results to previous surveys to identify trends?	
Is the survey adapted to prioritise relevant issues such as workload?	

Exit interviews	Development opportunities
Does the school conduct exit interviews with all departing staff?	
Does the board receive summary reports from exit interviews?	
Do members of the governing board conduct exit interviews for the departure of senior leaders?	

2. Workplace culture

Does your board value and support its employees, and is this reflected in its approach to wellbeing and retention?

Area of focus	Expectation	Development opportunities
Does the governing board engage with and make itself visible to staff?	A visible board helps develop shared ownership of the strategy and vision. Regular, open and transparent communication builds relationships and ensures staff feel valued. Find out about how governing boards can engage with staff.	
Do board members, especially the chair, build strong working relationships with senior leaders?	Build professional relationships that allow for honest conversations and help ensure accountability. Develop working practices which are mutually supportive and respectful of each other's roles and responsibilities.	
Does the school/trust have a flexible working policy and workplace culture that encourages flexible working?	Flexible working can offer modern solutions for growing workforce diversity, nurturing talent, succession planning and retention. A culture that embraces flexible working does so at all levels of the organisation and is open to finding solutions that work. See our guide to flexible working.	
Do staff have access to the CPD they require to develop competencies and capacity?	CPD can be a powerful way of improving retention and reflects a culture of investing in your workforce. A staff development policy is a way of formalising your approach to CPD.	
Does the board work with leaders to support opportunities to reduce workload?	See our guidance on managing workload and wellbeing and evaluation tool on promoting a wellbeing culture.	
Does the organisation value its employees and consider their wellbeing?	Staff wellbeing should not be an agenda item, but an organisational culture which takes wellbeing into account whenever a decision is made.	

3. External support

How does your board use independent external support?

Service	Expectation	Development opportunities
Does your external HR support meet your needs?	External HR support should provide the board with independent, specialist advice and procedural guidance. Governing boards should regularly review the support in place to ensure: ■ the expertise and services offered is appropriate and comprehensive ■ the level of service is adequate and provides value for money	
External adviser for executive leader performance management	Maintained schools are required to appoint an external adviser for the executive leader's annual appraisal. We advise all boards to use independent and professional support for this process. External adviser appointment should not be delegated to the headteacher.	
Support in handling allegations against staff	Boards should have access to support when faced with allegations about members of staff (for advice on the appropriate process to follow and when suspension is advisable).	
Support in conducting staffing hearings	Many staffing procedures culminate in hearings before a panel of board members. Boards should access support when conducting these hearings for procedural advice, guidance on possible outcomes, and their appropriateness in your context.	
Confidential support for staff	As an employer, boards should ensure that their staff have access to a confidential support service.	

Annex: HR checklist

The key areas of compliance and good practice activities that every board should maintain and build upon to develop exemplary practice:

Check	Details	Required action
Have some board members received safer recruitment training?	At least one of the persons conducting an interview should receive this training – this is a requirement in maintained schools and advisable in academies.	
Are those governing aware of relevant statutory guidance, and consulting it where appropriate?	■ Keeping Children Safe in Education ■ Staffing and Employment ■ STPCD ■ more specific guidance where appropriate	
Are some board members willing and able to sit on staffing panels?	Many staffing processes (pay, grievances, performance management, flexible working, disciplinary) can culminate in hearings before a panel of board members.	
Are some board members (the chair, for example) trained in handling safeguarding allegations?	While most safeguarding allegations will be dealt with by senior leaders initially, allegations about the senior leaders themselves will need to be handled by a board member, usually the chair.	
Are all statutory staffing policies in place?	A list of statutory policies is available on the Department for Education's website. Boards should have access to model HR policies, which can be adapted to their context, rather than try to draft these sensitive processes from scratch.	

Thank you for using this tool. If you have any feedback you'd like to share, please email kcfeedback@nga.org.uk.

More from NGA

Knowledge Centre: best practice guidance

NGA members get exclusive online access to best practice school governance guidance from NGA's Knowledge Centre. Go to NGA's Knowledge Centre and log in to browse and download guidance, templates, model policies, information summaries and more.

GOLDline: bespoke advice

NGA's GOLDline advice service provides independent and timely advice to governing boards with GOLD membership. Our advisers guide members through topics including governance roles and responsibilities, admissions, exclusions, complaints, and board constitution.

Find out more about NGA GOLD membership and sign up.

Don't miss out on membership benefits

If you're an NGA member, check your account details are correct by logging in at nga.org.uk and visiting the account management page. Every member of your governing board needs an up-to-date account to access benefits including our Governing Matters magazine and weekly e-newsletter. If you don't have an account or you're not sure, talk to your clerk or chair or contact us.

Learning Link: e-learning anytime

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