

# NATIONAL GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

## Conference and Annual General Meeting

Saturday, 8<sup>th</sup> November 2008

The Cumberland Hotel, London

Judith Bennett, Chair of NGA, opened the conference with a welcome to NGA members, guests and speakers, particularly anyone for whom this was the first NGA event. Before introducing the theme of the morning's conference, she referred to the recent announcement of the ending of KS3 SATs and the proposed introduction of a New York City style School Report Card. In case a separate part of the Secretary of State's message had slipped by without notice, she drew everyone's attention to the fact that the School Profile – time-consuming, mostly unvisited by parents and generally unloved – was to be abolished. The news was greeted with satisfaction.

Turning to the conference theme, *The Future of Governance*, the Chair spoke briefly of the background to the current review of governance – the PwC and Joseph Rowntree reports, which had commented on governing bodies and The Children's Plan, which stated that 'smaller governing bodies tended to be more effective and highly-skilled'. The DCSF had offered no evidence of this claim and it was interesting to note that the lauding of Interim Executive Boards as the model for all had ceased following the TES research in June which found that almost half of IEBs had failed to turn around failing schools.

Two of the morning's speakers, Chris Keates, General Secretary of NASUWT, and Stephen Adamson, Vice Chair of NGA, were members with Judith of the Ministerial Working Group on Governance, set up under Jim Knight to review school governance. The other speakers were David Triggs, DEO of six schools including Greensward College, Essex, Thamesbridge College, Reading and Unity City Academy, Middlesbrough, and Neil McIntosh, Chief Executive of CfBT (Centre for British Teachers).

The first speaker, Chris Keates, began by saying that governing bodies varied: many effective, some lost; some sinking through overwork and the immense time commitment. The demands were increasing and there needed to be clarity of expectation and purpose. Governing bodies must be well informed and there was a great need for communication with GBs from DCSF, LAs and Heads to be better. Without this, it was difficult to fulfil the challenge role and to ensure compliance with statutory duties. That there was a wide variety in schools' positions in regard to compliance (with PPA time, for instance) was no surprise when GBs were not as fully informed as they needed to be. Chris agreed with NGA's view on the importance of a professional, properly trained Clerk. She also supported the argument that training was essential and that induction training should be mandatory, but must also be of good quality. A session in which someone read out a series of slides was not what was required. Chris pointed out that sometimes there was a perception that a GB was not the school's GB but rather the Head's GB, and this would not help with the need for challenge. She had reservations about Heads being members of governing bodies. She disagreed with the ideas of reducing the size of GBs and departing from the stakeholder model. Having professionals, such as lawyers or accountants on GBs could be useful but they should not be there as legal or financial advisers. There was merit in the idea that not all schools needed their own GB; one GB for a cluster of schools might be more useful, make the challenge role easier and might solve recruitment problems. Finally, Chris praised NGA for its work for governors and said that she would strongly advocate that all governors must be members of NGA so that all could benefit from the strength in numbers and could be better informed through NGA channels.

Stephen Adamson followed Chris and began by showing three slides: photographs of a cricket team (in which he figured), the All Blacks (in which he did not figure!) and a Dragon Boat. The point being that a dragon boat is successful because it is not overloaded and the 'team' paddled together, and if a sports team had problems the remedy was not to make it smaller. You would look at the balance of skills needed. But DCSF had begun the desire to make GBs smaller – quite the wrong place to start. Stephen suggested that the reason that governance was in the Government's sites was that results, having risen over a number of years, had reached a plateau. Then the idea blossomed that GBs might be part of the reason. Certainly, there were GBs that did not work well. The Manchester survey (Joseph Rowntree) had identified this. The GBs were struggling, but they were in areas of real deprivation and the sample was only fourteen schools. In struggling schools, Heads struggle, teachers struggle, parents are not engaged and GBs struggle too. The recent Bath research was the largest survey of governance ever conducted. 5000 governors had responded, largely as a result of NGA's request to members to participate. In the survey, 75% of Heads felt their GBs were effective. This is in line with Ofsted results. We would all want the remaining 25% to improve and we don't deny there are problems, but the model is not broken: it only needs fixing. If there are failing Heads or teachers, no-one suggests a wholesale change in the headteacher or teacher model: what is done is to provide support, guidance and training. This should be the case with governors.

In the DCSF Decision Planner, there are 85 tasks for GBs and it is difficult to whittle these down, and some obvious omissions – SEN, the SDP, yet these are important and time consuming. Stephen suggested that the DCSF had lost its grip on governance. What were needed for an effective governing body were the right people, with proper instruction and a job that was do-able. Governors did not need to be accountants to ask relevant questions about school budgets – sometimes naïve questions elicited the important answers. Stephen believed that the stakeholder model was not under threat, but a relaxation in the proportionality would be helpful. Training must be addressed. The Bath research had shown that 50% of governors had not undergone induction training and 40% had done no training in the past year. The NGA's belief in mandatory induction training was sound. In regard to how 'do-able' the job was, the Bath survey had declared that governance was 'overloaded, overcomplicated and overlooked'. To this should be added: 'undervalued, under-trained and under pressure'. Finally, if governing bodies were to be strategic, they must be allowed to make decisions that the Government might not like.

The third speaker was Neil McIntosh talked a little about CfBT and its work as an educational charity and shared some reflections on governance. He saw NGA as part of the civic society which CfBT aimed to see developed. Boards of Trustees did not have in membership the CEO or staff and Neil felt that Heads and staff should not sit on GBs. He was concerned about professional clerking and seemed to assume that the Clerk would be advising the Head. (He did seem to see this as an imposition from outside, rather than our interpretation of someone who is properly trained for the job rather than a note taker or the Head's PA.) There was a lack of clarity in the English education system about who does what. No-one seems able to define the roles and this was a flaw. He felt that GBs (and schools) should either opt for independence or to become wholly part of the public sector, thus having less autonomy.

In regard to CfBT and NGA, Neil said that he hoped for future collaboration between the two. He declared the importance of NGA in the education world – its name and its status. However, it had no substantial delivery capacity. The latter was something that CfBT did have and he hoped that it could offer this to NGA in working with it in the future.

The final speaker, David Triggs, CEO of the Academies Enterprise Trust, talked about his view of effective governance. Interestingly, he pointed out that in the academies set up in Essex, the Government had wanted only five governors in each institution and legislation states that three governors is the minimum); David had insisted on seventeen in each. How could you have stakeholder representation in such small groups as three or five? The GB and Head should have vision and direction. The Head provided the vision and the GB provided the direction. 85% of GBs think they are effective – but how do they know? Ofsted's view was that a GB was ineffective if it 'failed to hold the school to account'. One important element of effective was a good headteacher report. The report must deal with standards and teaching and learning, not just a list of sporting and other events. Using a series of slides, David illustrated how each of the schools in his charge had a system of evidence provision by staff and how this was presented to the GB to allow it to monitor performance. The 21 Ofsted performance indicators were used as a basis for much of this process so that the SEF drew on this data and preparation for Ofsted was an ongoing process.

The morning ended with a panel (Chris Keates, Stephen Adamson and David Triggs) taking questions from the delegates. Questions and comments asked included:

- The problem of staff governors attending training (Chris said that she did her best to promote training with her members)
- The difficulty of recruiting governors with sufficient skill or capacity in deprived areas
- The need for Heads to attend governor training so that they understand what the role of the GB is (general loud agreement!)
- The need to give governors the confidence to carry out their role effectively, particularly the challenge element.

Lunch was followed by the Annual General Meeting. The Chair presented apologies from Directors and candidates for election, who were absent through illness or other commitments: Gillian Stunell, Susie Hall, Lionel Stewart (Beds)– and from NGA's President, Baroness Howe of Idlicote.

After the appointment of tellers and scrutineers, Clare Collins, Vice Chair of NGA, presented the Report of NGA Activities during the year November 2007 to October 2008. Clare drew attention to various aspects of the organisation's work. The two conferences run this year had been extremely successful: the January NGA/NCSL Recruiting School Leavers event, which had been substantially over-subscribed, and the June event, run in collaboration with QCA *Whose curriculum is it anyway?* In regard to publications, the NGA papers were being re-written, to ensure up-to-date guidance for members. NGA continued, and was extending, its lobbying and representational work. Its views were constantly sought by DCSF and others. And in October, the Chair and CEO had worked with members of the House of Lords to draft two amendments to the Education and Skills Bill.

The next business of the meeting was the results of the election of General Directors. Those elected were: Judith Bennett, Carol Woodhouse, Stephen Adamson, Clare Collins, Paul Mason, Colleen Arnold, Terry Douris, Duncan Haworth and Richard Thompson.

The Chair expressed her sympathy for those who had failed to be elected. She thanked the three Directors who had not been re-elected for all their work, support and commitment to NGA. She thanked those candidates standing for the first time and reminded them that there would be other elections in the future.

The Chair drew attention to the information on the agenda about Regional Director elections held in October. Susan Marsh (NW) and Lesley Stout (L) had both been re-elected, and there was a new SW Regional Director in John Pay, from Poole association. Finally, she mentioned two Directors who were standing down, Gillian Stunell and Sara Sheath, and thanked them for their contributions and commitment to NGA.

Carol Woodhouse, Honorary Treasurer of NGA, then presented the accounts up to the end of the last financial year and the Chair proposed that these be adopted. (*The accounts are posted on the website.*) After various questions, including a request that in future an update on the sixth months of operation since the end of the previous financial year should be presented, a vote was taken and the accounts were adopted. It was then proposed that Messrs Crombies should be appointed as auditors for the coming year. A vote confirmed this recommendation.

The next item of business was a proposal by the Board that changes should be made to subscriptions with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009. Terry Douris, Honorary Secretary, proposed that:

- Individual Member subscriptions should be increased to £27 per annum;
- Standard Governing Body Member subscriptions should be increased to £60 per annum;
- The cap for Association Members should be increased to £1680 per annum;

An amendment to increase the Individual Member subscription to £30 was proposed. After some debate, a vote was taken and the amendment was defeated by a substantial majority in all categories. The meeting then moved to the vote on the original proposal. This was carried by a substantial majority in all voting categories.

Before the Chair's closing remarks, the CEO, Phil Revell, drew members' attention to the fact that this was the last AGM to be presided over by the current Chair, Judith Bennett, She would be standing down at the next Board Meeting. The CEO called upon John Adams, NGA's Vice-President to say a few words. John paid tribute to the job that Judith had done as the first Chair of NGA.

Doris Neville-Davies, SE Regional Director, added that the four other Officers elected in 2006 with the Chair, Stephen Adamson, Clare Collins, Terry Douris and Carol Woodhouse, were also standing down and she thanked them for all their work as Officers of NGA.

The Chair, in a somewhat less than composed state (!), added her thanks to her fellow Officers, to Board Members, to Phil Revell, Gillian Windass, Dawn Pheasey and Anicka Bashir for all their work for NGA and for their support; and to Dawn, Carrie and Madeleine for the excellent organisation in the course of the day. She thanked the members for their support of NGA and of herself. It had been a privilege to hold the post of Chair and she was grateful to have had the opportunity afforded to her.

The meeting closed at 3.35pm.

*(The results of Officer elections will be announced in December after the Board Meeting to be held on 12<sup>th</sup> December.)*

*Judith Bennett*  
9.11.08