National Governance Association

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The independent organisation for school governors, trustees and clerks

A guide to the NGA model code of conduct

For all types of governing boards

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National Governance Association

The National Governance Association (NGA) is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and clerks 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 clerks at a national level and work closely with, and lobby, UK government and educational bodies.

www.nga.org.uk

Introduction

Effective boards clearly set out what they expect of members, particularly when they first join. All governing boards should adopt a code of conduct which details the behaviour and professional standards required for the board to carry out its work within the school/s and the community. This guide accompanies the NGA model code of conduct and covers:

- the principles of the NGA model code of conduct
- using a code of conduct to support effective teamwork
- tailoring the NGA model code of conduct
- adopting and reviewing a code of conduct

The principles of the NGA model code of conduct

All members agreeing to a code of conduct should do so with a good understanding of the core functions of governing boards, which are to:

- ensure there is clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
- hold executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils and the performance management of staff
- oversee the financial performance of the organisation and makes sure its money is well spent
- ensure the voices of stakeholders are heard

The NGA model code of conduct is anchored in the Seven Nolan Principles of Public Life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. The model code is also strengthened by the Framework for Ethical Leadership in Education which builds on the Nolan principles and outlines the principles which support ethical decision-making and challenge unethical behaviour in schools and trusts.

The model code recognises that effective governance is the result of strong professional relationships that are based on a mutual understanding of roles and responsibilities. NGA's model code of conduct describes appropriate relationships between individuals, the whole board and the leadership team of the school/trust.

Boards should use their code of conduct alongside individual role descriptions to ensure all members understand what is expected of them. NGA provides model role descriptions for chairs, governors, trustees and clerks.

The board's code of conduct should set high expectations for everyone involved in governance. This requires all board members to take individual responsibility for developing their knowledge and skills on an ongoing basis. NGA provides tools to help boards evaluate their collective knowledge and skills and take appropriate action.

Using a code of conduct to support effective teamwork

Effective governance requires effective teamwork: governors/trustees working collaboratively as colleagues to achieve a goal underpinned by a solid understanding and respect for each other's roles.

NGA's Creating the right dynamics guidance explores the concept of effective team dynamics and reinforces that "the most direct way for a governing board to clarify expectations of those governing is through a code of conduct." Chairs may refer to their code of conduct to support discussions such as annual governor performance reviews. In doing so, the code of conduct becomes a tool to help boards and individuals develop their governance practice.

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'Creating the right dynamics' sets out an approach to dealing with conflict or tension using a measured and conciliatory approach. When it has not been possible to deal with tension or conflict informally, and the situation has become untenable, formal action may be necessary. In such cases, the appropriate rules and procedures should be applied, whether that is to suspend or remove a governor/trustee under maintained school regulations or articles of association as appropriate. Advice should be sought from the clerk to the governing board or relevant governance professional.

Tailoring the NGA model code of conduct

The NGA model code of conduct is suitable for boards in all types of school or trust. However, the model code is designed to act as a template and should be adapted to reflect:

- your specific governing board and school structure
- your board's delegated responsibilities
- policies and procedures that your individual school or trust must follow; the code of conduct should not contradict other constitutional documents such as articles of association

Adopting and reviewing a code of conduct

The code of conduct should be discussed by the board before adoption to develop a sense of collective ownership. This collaborative approach ensures that the resulting code is a common reference point.

Boards should review and approve their code of conduct annually, ideally at the first meeting of the autumn term. When reviewing their code, the board should reflect on the events of the previous year and consider amendments to suit the needs of the board. Boards should also review their code of conduct upon any significant changes to the law or school policy. NGA recommends that boards publish their code of conduct on the school website.

When recruiting new members, boards may refer candidates to their code of conduct (and role description). This will help ensure new members have a good understanding of expectations before being appointed. New members should agree to and sign the board's code of conduct on being appointed.

Further reading

NGA has a range of guidance available at nga.org.uk that is suitable for boards adopting a code of conduct or working on improving their effectiveness. Relevant guidance includes:

- What governing boards and school leaders should expect from each other
- Skills audit and skills matrix: tools to help evaluate skills and knowledge
- Model role descriptions for chairs, governors, trustees and clerks
- Creating the right dynamics: a guide to help governing boards work effectively as a team

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