

Introduction

I think it's safe to say that during my first year of chairing the RGA, there was no shortage of enthusiasm and good ideas about improving our offer to you, but ongoing uncertainty regarding meeting under the risk of pandemic conditions, and the limited time capacity of the board to do everything we wished to, meant that sometimes we didn't manage to achieve everything seamlessly.

Feedback from members regarding if they preferred remote or in-person sessions was very mixed, and although we attempted blended events, it's clear that we haven't yet got the technology or the skills to accomplish this effectively! We have however, emerged from last year with energy undimmed, and a better appreciation of where we feel the Association should sit in the support and training of local governance. More about this later.

Key Activities from 2021-22

Conduit to Local Authority

Collaboration and Representation. Having provided governor representation on the recruitment panel for our new Director of Education, Brian Grady, we were one of the first organisations to secure him for a 'meet and greet'. He joined us for a fascinating and entertaining discussion on the value of governors' work at our CVCC network meeting in May. We have meetings set with him during this new academic year, during which we will be raising strategic issues about governance and how we can work together with BFC to improve the impact of our role.

We still work closely with Sarah Shortt at Governor Services to plan complementary events which dovetail in with those that Governor Services provide. Last year, Sarah's capacity to offer training and networking for clerks was reduced, and so we stepped in with the offer of a Clerks' Forum. Similarly we helped to fill the absence of Advisory Governor sessions with the introduction of a New Governors' Forum.

Communication

Website. We have continued to develop the content on our website (www.therga.org.uk). The site is a useful, 'go to' resource for governors providing, amongst other things:

- A summary of the latest news as it applies to Reading
- Notification of events
- The ability to book places on events in a simple and user friendly way
- Access to presentations from previous events
- Links to useful resources
- The ability to ask a question
- Access to advice or help

Expertise

Over the past year, RGA board members have assisted school boards in a number of ways to improve governance. This activity has included sitting on panels, researching and modelling best practice in all aspects of governance, and sharing combined governor experiences to support colleagues with similar challenges.

The RGA can put governing boards in touch with experienced governors if you need help, or if you can offer it. This is an area we would like to develop further so please do share your successes with us for the benefit of everyone.

Training & Events

During this tricky year we continued to deliver the Chairs, Finance, Safeguarding and Inclusion networks, also adding the Clerks' and New Governors' forums. In retrospect, it was an ambitious programme, especially as we were emerging from pandemic working conditions at the same time. With hundreds of members, it was difficult to predict how the reintroduction of in-person meetings would go, and initial attendance at these in comparison to online events was low, although the feedback from the sessions was incredibly positive.

We have slimmed down the number of events for 2022-23, and have taken the decision to return to our core remit of providing networking opportunities which enhance, but not replace or duplicate other training. To provide a complement to the BFfC offer, which is all online, we are making all* of our events in person next year, to accommodate the possibility of meeting new colleagues, finding mentors/buddies, as well as using the time more efficiently. To aid the informal setting, we are now holding our events in The Café at The Wren School, where food and drink will be on hand at every meeting to tempt you along.

[* this is our intention for clerks too, but due to you meeting during the school day, it is a lot harder to find a suitable location. We will hold the first meeting on teams and as long as clerks actually would prefer to meet in person, we hope to find a physical location for the Spring and Summer events.]

Administration

Membership Administration. Membership currently extends to 46 schools (43 state and 3 independent). 20 Reading state schools are not members, but of these 17 are in academy trusts which in some instances don't even have local governing boards now. So membership remains at a healthy and increasing level, although the trend of multi-academy trusts opting out of collaborating with the larger Reading schools community is of concern. We will continue to approach these trusts, and local independent schools, as our aim is ultimately to support all Reading children in ensuring strong governance.

Contact Management. Our contact database holds details of governors, chairs, clerks and SBMs. We only use this database for administration and to notify you of news and events. We do NOT share your data with any other parties. At the start of the new academic year we will be contacting your schools to check these details are up to date. If you are asked, please do give permission to let the school confirm your details with us. When your governors or clerks change, please let us know as that saves time and ensures only those who wish to be kept informed will receive communications from the RGA.

Officers' meetings. The RGA board has continued to meet online every few weeks to discuss priorities, develop our offering and, of course, to plan all the events.

We are always looking for new governors to help out, so please contact admin@therga.org.uk if you are interested in becoming a board member.

Key Priorities for 2022-23

Over the next year our key priorities will be to:

- Seek to work more closely with the Local Authority at a strategic level, to achieve the common goal of every school in Reading being Good or better.
Return the focus of our governor networks to the 3 core functions of governance, and deliver our events in a more informal way which enables members to access those topics which are a priority for their school and role i.e. group work sessions.

- Partner with iGovs to support new chairs/governors with personal mentors.
- Reintroduce meaningful conference events, such as a landscape conference looking at the strategic view of school governance in Reading.
- Work with governor recruitment organisations such as the NGA, to encourage greater interest and uptake from those considering a future in governance, showcasing Reading schools as a first choice.
- Increase the number of board members

We hope you have valued your membership of the Association this year, and are enthusiastic to renew your membership next year. We are looking forward to hearing what you think about the proposed new approach for 2022-23 and getting to see old and new members very soon.

Julia Cottee
Chair