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Governors

Network

Value Education

Autumn 2021 briefing



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Foreword

Governors,

Thank you for taking the time to read this briefing from the National Education Union (NEU).

The pandemic has proved just how valuable schools are to children, young people and society.

During the last year, education staff have created innovative ways to support learning, keep students connected and nurture those who need extra care. It has reminded us how much school contributes to the lives of young people and how much rests on the professional skills of education staff, yourselves and the relationships you build with your pupils and the school community.

Moving beyond the pandemic, things need to change. That is why the NEU has launched Value Education – a drive to shape the future of education, reclaim professionalism and campaign on issues of importance for the whole profession: funding, assessment, accountability, pay and child poverty.

We are always happy to hear from governors about education, so please do not hesitate to get in touch via governors@neu.org.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Bousted and Kevin Courtney

Joint general secretaries, National Education Union

Kevin Courtney Mary W. Bousted.



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What is Value Education, Value Educators?

Throughout the pandemic teachers, leaders and support staff have been on the front line – teaching children remotely, safeguarding and caring for them. But England's education system is weakened because our teachers are leaving the profession increasingly early – one in four within two years of starting the job, nearly 40 per cent within ten. They are driven out by excessive and intensive workload, lack of professional agency and stress. To make matters worse, the Government imposed a pay rise for 2021/2022.

This will compound the damage caused by a decade of real terms pay cuts, which has contributed to recruitment and retention problems in the profession. The NEU will prioritise supporting our members in taking collective steps now, in schools or colleges, to take control of their professional lives.

To help everyone achieve change, the NEU will provide ongoing advice and guidance on issues members have identified as key: in-school accountability, workload and flexible working, for example. The first set of guidance is on how to tackle unreasonable in-school accountability measures and is out November 2021.

As well as shaping what is happening in workplaces, we will be campaigning on key areas of concern so that, together, we can change things and make them better.

Funding

The costs of Covid-19 have been borne by schools and colleges, which just haven't been given what is necessary to help children succeed.

Education funding needs to increase substantially if we want every child to fulfil their potential. But the amount pledged by Government to compensate for lost learning amounts to just £310 per pupil. Other countries are spending far more – the US is investing £1,830 per young person and it's £2,090 a head in the Netherlands. Class sizes continue to increase – secondary class sizes are at their highest since records began; primary their highest this century. As a result, teachers and support staff have a far harder job ensuring every child gets the attention they need.

The most successful nations are developing education systems that enable them to compete in a world where new technologies and industries are changing the way people work, communicate, learn and develop. The UK is being left behind in this race to economic prosperity and social inclusion.

To value education, the Government needs to increase funding and invest in recovery now.

Child poverty

Disadvantaged pupils in England are 18 months of learning behind their more affluent peers by the time they finish their GCSEs. Covid-19 has shone a harsh light on the plight of 4.3 million children living in poverty in the UK. That's 31 per cent of children, or nine in a classroom of 30. Child poverty destroys children's potential.

An estimated nine per cent of UK families do not have a laptop, tablet or desktop computer. Two million UK households don't have access to the internet. These families are not able to fully participate in modern society or the workplace, and remote learning is much more difficult without digital devices or the internet. Forty per cent of the education attainment gap is set in stone before children even start school. And 75 per cent of children growing up in poverty live in a household where at least one person is in paid work.

Through our no child left behind campaign we are calling on the government to commit to a cross-departmental, long-term child poverty reduction strategy. Find out more at nochildleftbehind.org.uk

To value education, we need to end child poverty and make sure no child is left behind

Testing

The English education system tops the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) league table for the number of tests its pupils take. Over-testing has a profoundly negative effect on pupils' attitudes to learning and the development of their skills. England now tops the international league tables for rote learning and memorisation.

Children entering education in 2021 will be young adults in 2033. Schools can prepare them for jobs that have not yet been created, for technologies that have not yet been invented, to solve problems that have not yet been anticipated. To navigate through such uncertainty, students will need to develop curiosity, imagination, resilience and self-regulation; they will need to respect and appreciate the ideas, perspectives and values of others; cope with failure and rejection, and to move forward in the face of adversity.

To achieve these goals, our curriculum and assessment system must be changed. Our children and young people need experience of making and doing as well as reading and writing. They need more teaching and less testing.

To value education, high-stakes testing should be scrapped and replaced with a 21st century assessment and qualifications system fit for our children and young adults.

Working together we can put the voice of our profession at the centre of shaping the education system, in the best interests of our pupils and the communities we serve.

Ending unnecessary workload

What is the NEU saying about workload?

A 2018 international survey by the OECD on teaching and learning in schools found:

- In England, 38 per cent of teachers experience stress a lot of the time (more than double the OECD average).
- Teachers work more unpaid overtime than any other profession in England, with working weeks approaching 50 hours.
- Teachers in England are excessively watched and only those in one other country, Singapore, are more observed and monitored.
- Teachers in England are less likely than their OECD counterparts to be asked their views on professional issues which are central to their working lives – including the curriculum and the school's disciplinary policies.

Coming out of the global pandemic we must value educators and a key part of that is using the precious resource of time of education staff.

What are we encouraging our members, workplace representatives and local officers to do about workload?

We know that NEU union groups negotiate with leadership teams to reduce excessive elements of accountability that drive up workload.

We want educators to be empowered to steer curriculum and pedagogy. We want to ensure staff are valued and that they receive the best pay, conditions and pensions. We are building a movement for change – at workplace, district and national levels.

We are asking members, workplace reps and local officers of the NEU to:

- collectively discuss professional issues together
- raise ideas, recommendations and concerns in negotiations with their leadership team- this will include governors
- make use of NEU resources available here: neu.org.uk/valueeducators
- elect an NEU rep or reps in their workplace
- share best practice.

What actions can you take as a governor to support ending unnecessary workload?

1. Visit our hub of resources on workload available here:
neu.org.uk/valueeducators
2. Encourage your leadership teams to speak with union reps to discuss workload.
3. Jointly meet with union reps and leadership team for discussion on workload.
4. Elect a governor with specific responsibility for looking at workload in your school and have workload as a standing agenda item at your governing board meetings.

Educators deserve a pay rise

What is the NEU saying about pay?

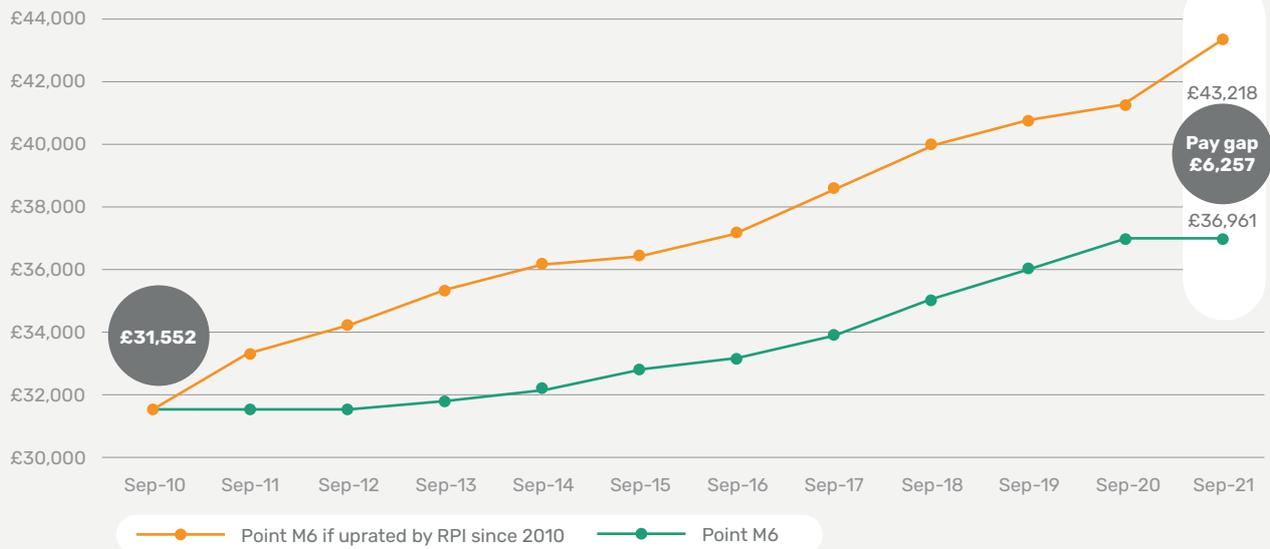
The 2021/2022 freeze for teachers is unfair. Despite educators' contribution to the pandemic response, pay has been frozen at a time when inflation is rising. This latest pay freeze follows earlier freezes and below-inflation increases over the past ten years, resulting in unprecedented real-terms pay cuts. A pay rise for teachers is necessary as well. Teacher pay needs to be comparable with the pay of other graduate professions, so it is misleading to compare it with average pay for all workers. Teaching's position in the graduate labour market has fallen significantly, as the School Teachers' Review Body has recognised. Teacher supply suffers when prospective and serving teachers see better rewards offered elsewhere. Those earlier freezes harmed recruitment and retention and caused huge damage to education.

The Government must ensure fair cost-of-living increases for teachers. These should not be conflated or confused with pay scale progression, for which not all teachers are eligible. Cost-of-living increases are needed as well, to protect teachers' living standards and ensure their pay remains competitive.

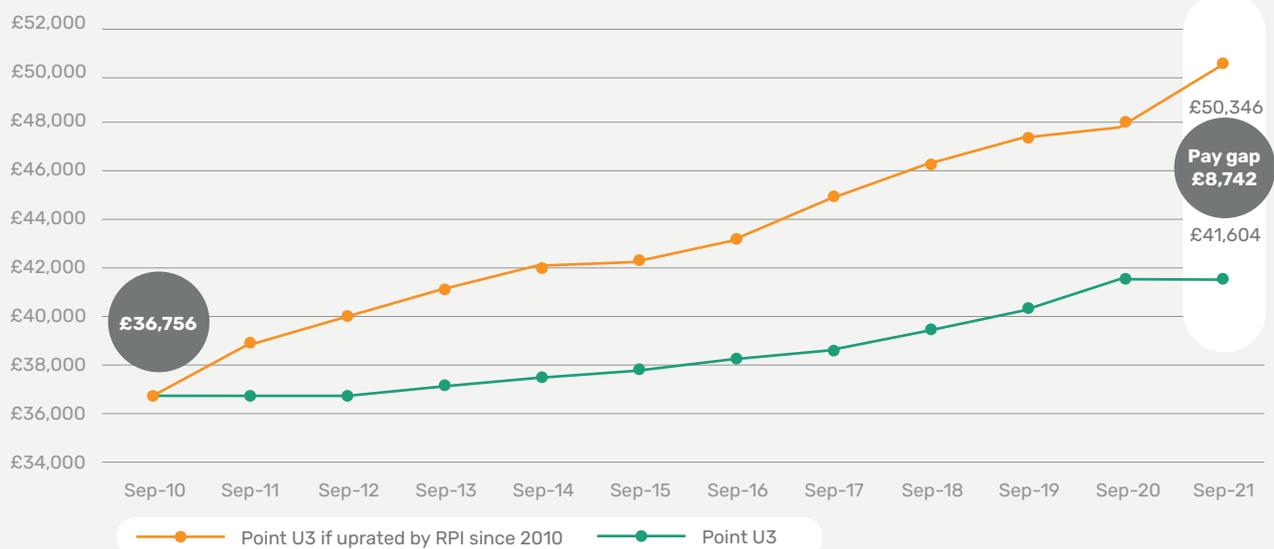
Failing to value teachers and other education staff will make the challenge of recovering from the pandemic harder. Education staff will be as important to that recovery as they have been to the pandemic response. The Government should show it values all educators by ensuring they are paid fairly.

Teachers in England have lost thousands in pay since 2010. Check the graphs below for main, upper and leadership pay ranges.

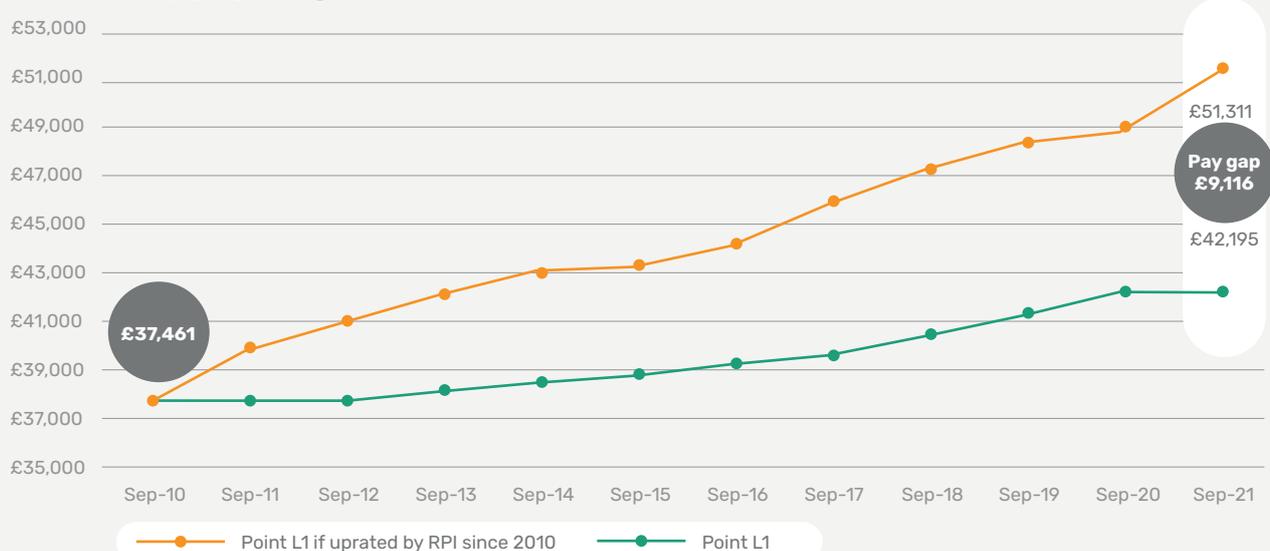
Main pay range



Upper pay range



Leadership pay range



Alongside the national pay increase, we continue to campaign for the abolition of performance-related pay, which in many multi-academy trusts (MATs) has already been removed. This system is inherently discriminatory with members reporting through our annual pay surveys that women and Black staff are less likely to progress in pay.

During the pandemic, most education establishments suspended performance-related pay due to the inability to carry out a fair appraisal process.

We believe that pay progression should be automatic and not linked to performance for all education workers, apart from those involved in a capability processes.

What are we encouraging our members, workplace representatives and local officers to do about pay?

- Members have already written to their MP to oppose the pay freeze.
- We will be surveying them about of pay in November 2021.
- Speak with members in the workplace about pay and progression, raise issues with their leadership team to ensure progression is automatic.

What actions can you take as a governor to support our campaign on pay?

1. Speak with your leadership team to ensure pay progression is automatic for staff, apart from those involved in capability processes.
2. Adopt the NEU's model pay policy for your school, available here: neu.org.uk/media/386/view
3. Look out for actions from the NEU that encourage governors to help us ensure that Government provides a pay increase that is fully funded.

Making school uniforms affordable for all families

Affordable school uniforms: how schools can help alleviate cost pressures for parents

The average cost of school uniforms runs into hundreds of pounds – money that many families on low incomes simply do not have. Branded or specialised school uniforms places unnecessary financial pressure on parents and carers to provide unaffordable clothing for their children, when similar, cheaper options can often be found in supermarkets or high street shops.

When children arrive at school without the correct uniform, they often feel isolated or stigmatised, and can even be sent home for wearing the wrong brand of clothing. Ensuring all schools cater for the needs of their local community will alleviate pressure on families and allow pupils to focus on their learning in school, rather than worry about what they are wearing.

Research by charity Parentkind found that the cost of school uniforms tops parents' concerns when it comes to the affordability of sending a child to school. Its [2019 annual parent survey](#) revealed that the cost of school uniform was higher than any other financial burden, with 46 per cent of parents nominating uniform costs as a concern, rising to 58 per cent among those with lower incomes.

A big win for families: new law and imminent guidance for schools

After years of campaigning, school uniforms is finally to be made more affordable for families under a new law passed by Parliament in April 2021. It will require schools to follow new statutory guidance on uniform costs, instructing them to keep prices down.

Expected in the autumn term of 2021, the Department for Education's (DfE's) guidance will advise schools to make sure that when they take up contracts with uniform suppliers, they are competitive and transparent in order to keep costs down. It will also include measures on encouraging second-hand uniform, schools' arrangements with suppliers, and ensuring parents have access to clear information about uniform policies.

Once guidance is published, schools will be required by law to consider it when developing uniform policies.

New NEU school uniform guidance

The [advice](#) addresses key issues for schools to consider when writing a school uniform policy. These include:

- [cost of school uniform being one of the biggest pressures for low-income families;](#)
- [issues of Black students feeling alienated by some school approaches to school uniform and a connection between inflexible policies and the racial disparity in school exclusions;](#)
- school policies still fuelling gender stereotypes; and
- [greater flexibility being needed in relation to making reasonable adjustments for SEND students.](#)

New advice on developing pre-loved uniform guidance

The Children's Society, Child Poverty Action Group and Children North East have joined forces to share some [ideas and good practice from their research with schools](#). With some adjustments to policies and practices, schools can reduce the pressure of school uniform costs.

Ahead of the DfE's new statutory guidance being published at some point this term, [The Right Blazer](#) is the first in a series of resources to help schools begin thinking about how they can help to make uniforms more affordable.

Poverty proofing the school day

[Turning the Page on Poverty](#) is a collaborative piece of work, produced by the NEU alongside the Child Poverty Action Group and Children North East. It draws on in-depth research and recent case studies and provides pragmatic guidance and effective resources for members to use both in their own practice, and on a whole school level.

Download [Turning the Page on Poverty \(neu.org.uk/turning-page\)](#) to learn more about:

- how to talk about poverty with pupils, parents and colleagues.
- taking a whole-school approach to tackling poverty and stigma.
- what schools and practitioners have learned from lockdown.
- real life testimonials from education staff.
- resources to help you address the impact of poverty on learning in your classroom.

Child Poverty Action Group and Children North East have also recently published a [Cost of the School Day calendar](#) resource for schools and school staff. The aim of the calendar is to help schools identify possible cost barriers during the academic year and think about some alternatives to make sure all children and young people can fully participate in education. Throughout the calendar are ideas and good practice examples from schools across England, Scotland and Wales which have taken part in the Cost of the School Day project.

Climate change curriculum

What is the NEU saying about climate?

Education is at the forefront of the fight for action against climate change: children are the future, and the future looks grim for people and the planet without decisive action.

In the latest draft strategy from the DfE on incorporating climate learning into the curriculum, the NEU – alongside other education unions – has identified a number of areas for concern. There are particular areas of concern for education staff.

- The addition of a climate training qualification for teachers being both optional and additional. This raises concerns about whether teachers will be adequately supported in delivering the climate curriculum, and will face an additional burden on top of an already unmanageable workload.
- The siloing of climate into discrete subjects – such as STEM, geography and citizenship – rather than weaving it into all aspects of the curriculum and recognising the crucial role arts and social science subjects have to play in addressing the climate crisis. This also further devalues arts subjects, and prohibits discussion about the way in which the Global South has been impacted by profit seeking in the Global industrial North – which might be addressed through history or social and political sciences.
- The lack of recognition of the need to address disparities in subject choices – such as gender inequality in relation to STEM subjects. Introducing green skills could be an important step in ‘levelling up’ across gender, race and class disparities in pursuing skills and subjects linked to higher-paid careers.
- The lack of mention of Ofsted – which compromises meaningful and nuanced learning in favour of reductive, quantifiable targets.
- The insistence of an ‘apolitical’ approach could inhibit open discussion around the climate crisis and who is responsible.
- There is very little mention of funding and the disparities between schools in wealthier areas and those in more deprived areas are left unaddressed – threatening the ability to make progress.

The NEU will be working with other stakeholders over the next few months in arguing for the changes we believe need to be made to this strategy to ensure that the final version supports education staff in meeting the needs of young people.

What are we encouraging our members, workplace representatives and local officers to do about climate?

- Acquaint themselves with the demands from [Teach the Future](#) and the [COP26 Coalition](#), of which the NEU is a member.
- Demand more funding, resources and support to adequately deliver the climate curriculum
- Recognise that young people, in organising and taking part in climate strikes, are showing courage and leadership in responding to this crisis. While we cannot call strikes, we encourage NEU members to show support in a range of ways which demonstrate solidarity. [School climate strike | NEU](#).
- Raise the need to address inequalities in subjects and skills at leadership level, and by supporting NEU campaigns, demand action on this.
- Raise the way in which Ofsted will take meaningful action on delivering climate education through NEU campaigns on Ofsted.

What actions can you take as a governor to support ending unnecessary workload?

- Support education staff in demanding more resource and funding to deliver climate education – including guaranteed additional training.
- Respect the movements and actions of young people in raising their legitimate concerns.
- Advocate for adequate funding and resource to decarbonise the education estate and provide sustainable free school meals.

Ethical leadership

What is ethical leadership?

At this challenging time of a pandemic, which among other things is leading to excessive staff workload, compromised staff wellbeing and the loss of teachers from the system, leaders and governors deserve support and guidance on what good leadership looks like. The seven Nolan Principles for Public Life provide a good starting point for ethical conduct by leaders: accountability, honesty, integrity, leadership, objectivity, openness, and selflessness.

To complement the seven Nolan principles, the NEU has worked with our leadership members to produce our Code of Ethical Practice in Leadership. We urge you to take or obtain a copy and as a school or college governor, to use it as your supportive friend, and being transparent. The framework illustrates the kind of behaviours expected from leaders and governors in education, even in these challenging times.

What are we encouraging our leadership members to do in relation to ethical leadership?

The union believes ethical leadership should be at the heart of everything we do. Governance and leadership in your school or college is, of course, only one element of your role. You are also a leader within the wider community as well, able to help influence the understanding, views and aspirations of that community. As an organisation committed to extending educational opportunity and promoting social justice, the NEU will work alongside you and support you in that role as well. Your first step is to look at Code of Ethical Practice in Leadership and to reflect that as a governor.

There are many challenges the education sector and the wider world face currently; the Covid-19 pandemic, climate crisis, alarming loss of teachers and educational leaders from the profession, inadequate educational funding, Ofsted - to name but a few that you will undoubtedly be dealing with as a governor. The only way we can address and resolve these issues is by taking an ethical approach. Basing governorship decisions on ethical grounds, and being transparent, will always be positively received, even when sometimes the message is not welcomed.

What can you do to support ethical leadership?

Please read our guidance on ethical leadership available here: neu.org.uk/ethical-practice-leadership and join the NEU Governors Network. Together we can make a difference, together we can succeed and improve the education and lives of future generations.

FAQs

What is a school governor?

School governors play a vital role in education, they are the overseers of a school and have an important and varied role helping the school run effectively. In state/maintained schools the governing board have three main functions:

1. Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure the money is well spent.
2. Supporting and acting as a critical friend to head teachers and leaders to enhance the educational performance of the school and its pupils and ensure that staff have access to development opportunities to enable their efficiency.
3. Planning the strategic direction of the school, ensuring the aims and objectives are set and the targets and policies for achieving those.

Who can be a school governor?

Most governing bodies consist of a wide range of people who bring a variety of skills and knowledge from their backgrounds to the role. There is no specific qualification required to be a school governor, but it is necessary to bring a broad understanding of the expectations required for the success of the school and the consequences of the decisions made. Governors will need to give particular regard to the impact new initiatives and proposals will have on staff, pupils, and parents. On average the governor term is four years with the expectations to attend meetings and gain a better understanding of how the school is meeting the strategic direction. Being a school governor is an opportunity to make a valuable contribution to a local school and community. Ultimately, there must be a dedication and a vested interest in the long-term success of pupils and the school itself.

What are your responsibilities of a school governor?

- Ensuring clear vision and strategic direction.
- Work alongside the head teacher or college principal to promote effective ways of learning and teaching, and setting the school or college's aims and policies.
- Work as a team to ensure the best decisions are made for the school and raise standards of educational achievement with a pupil-centred approach.
- Be prepared to challenge senior leadership and decisions, if required, and identify where improvements can be made.
- It is important to maintain and understand the wellbeing of staff and pupils, and identify and appreciate the different circumstances of pupils, parents/carers in relation to home environments.
- Monitor the school's budget.
- Analyse school staffing structures.
- Recruit and appoint the head teacher and senior leaders.

How can you become a school governor?

To become a school governor, you can apply directly to your local school or college or contact your local council office. Schools will likely check references and do a DBS check, and it is important to provide this to help the school make an informed decision.

 neu.org.uk/governors
 governors@neu.org.uk

