

# The School Governor Initiative Impact Study **2021**

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September, 2021

# 01 Introduction

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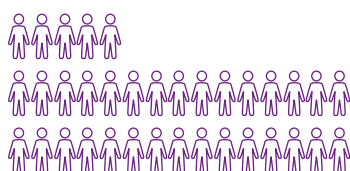
## 2021 marks ten years of The University of Manchester' School Governor Initiative.

In that time, more than 350 staff and 1,000 (UoM) alumni from The University of Manchester have become school governors in a range of educational settings from nursery/primary through to Sixth Forms and special schools.

A significant mobilisation of staff and alumni has taken place over the past decade and this report demonstrates The University of Manchester's impact on reducing governor vacancies in state schools nationally. By using the data and statistical evidence acquired

during this study, we want to help drive the continued recruitment of school governors up and down the country from within the higher education (HE) sector.

By encouraging this sector to embrace the passion, skills and knowledge of HE staff and former students, universities can collectively work towards closing the gap in governor and skills shortages and bring much needed support and challenge to the leadership of schools, particularly those in disadvantaged areas.

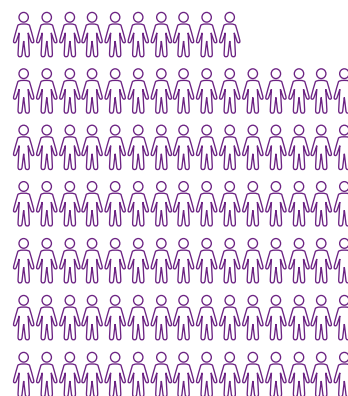


**350** staff governors

have been placed in schools since 2011

**1,350+**  
governors

placed into state schools and colleges



**1,000+** alumni

have been placed in schools since 2014

Our report shows that the HE sector has the potential to create more than 2,200 governors each year, significantly reducing governor vacancies nationally.

## 02 Overview

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**As of July 2021, there are more than 4,300 governor vacancies registered with **Governors for Schools** and many more with **Inspiring Governance** and local authorities.**

Governor vacancies are not concentrated equally across the country either, Appendix 4 highlights just a small section of current vacancies advertised with Governors

for Schools in local authorities starting with the letter B.

The demand for governors is extremely high and The University of Manchester has worked hard over the last ten years to make inroads in filling these vacancies, not only in Manchester but in neighbouring areas in our city region and across the country.

This report will look at the impact of our initiative across the following areas:

- growth of school governors;
- locality of placed governors;
- skills and professional background of governors;
- impact on diversity;
- additional impact on schools.

## 03 How the School Governor Initiative works

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**The University of Manchester was the first university to partner with **Governors for Schools** and together we have placed 165 staff and 544 alumni into schools.**

In addition, many staff and alumni have also become co-opted governors through Inspiring Governance or parent and local authority governors in their own communities through their own networks. The University of Manchester has supported all staff in their volunteering roles through its School Governor

Network and provided opportunities for professional development and training through a range of interventions.

In 2014 we introduced the initiative to our alumni community as an opportunity to engage in a different way by asking them to donate their time rather than money. Having alumni volunteer around the country also meant we could target geographical areas of governor shortages.

More than 50% of Governors for Schools vacancies could be filled by universities alone each year.

## 04 Evaluating Manchester's impact

**To establish the impact of the School Governor Initiative, we have drawn on internal data, data provided by Governors for Schools and insights from surveys and interviews with governors.**

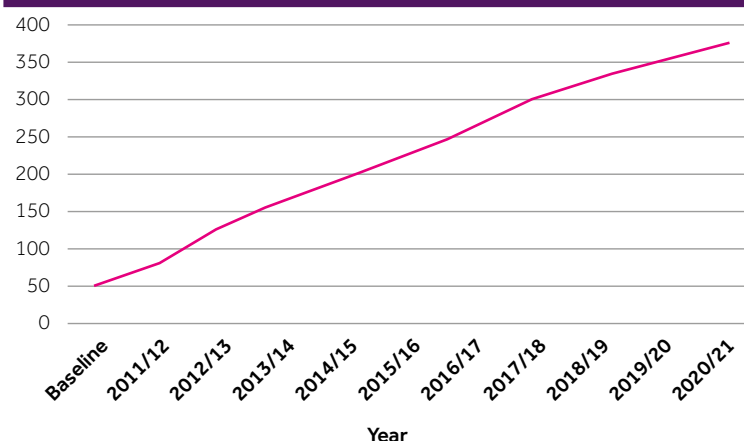
This report examines not only the number of vacancies we have filled but where we have filled them and the skills staff and alumni have brought to the governing boards.

### Growth of governors

From a baseline of 52 staff in 2011, we have seen a steady rise in governors over the past ten years. While we inevitably lose governors from our network as people leave the University or step down from governing, the supply of new governors holds strong. This steady rise means that schools in Manchester and neighbouring towns of Greater Manchester continue to benefit from University staff. It is also encouraging to know that 58% of staff governors have been a governor for more than four years, meaning that the majority of staff are in their second or third term as a school governor. In addition, 77% of staff and 83% of alumni have taken on additional responsibilities on the board and just under half are now in the role of Chair or Vice Chair.

**Graph 1 shows the rise in the number of staff volunteering as governors since the start of the initiative in 2011/12.**

### Cumulative growth of staff governors



Our current network of governors comprises 218 University staff. This number impacts on more than 98,000 learners by contributing 18,300 volunteering hours and providing a financial equivalent of extra support to schools worth £340,000.

### Volunteer Impact Data

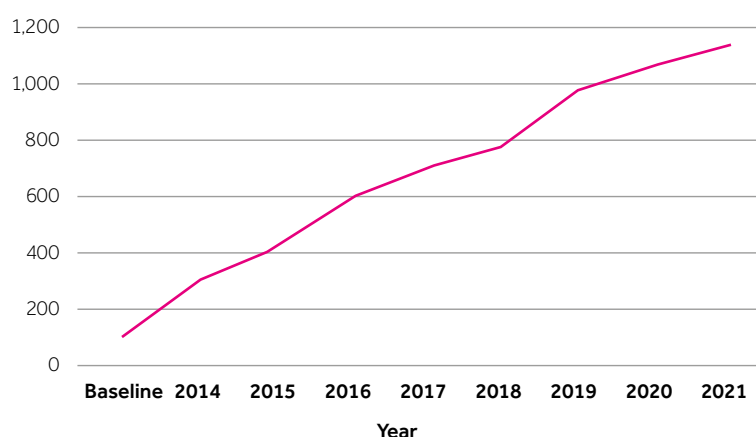
Staff governors	218
Financial support to schools*	£340,000
Economic value of volunteer time	18,300
Children impacted (p/a)	98,000

\* (Governors for Schools formula)

## 04 Evaluating Manchester's impact (continued)

Graph 2 shows the growth in alumni taking up school governor positions.

Growth in alumni governors



According to Governors for Schools recruitment data, The University of Manchester has been the number one recruiter of school governors nationally since 2014. We have seen rapid increases in the number of alumni volunteers which has been consistent over time and links closely to the targeted campaigns we have run with this cohort.

In 2020, 85 alumni were placed in schools, impacting 29,750 children, contributing 7,140 hours of support to schools with an equivalent financial contribution of £126,155.64.

### 2020 data

Placed governors	85
Economic value of volunteer time	£126,155.64
Hours donated	7,140
Children impacted (p/a)	29,750

(Governors for Schools formula)

Making a difference to schools is often quoted as the motivation behind applying to be a school governor. A recent survey conducted by The University of Manchester showed that 91% of alumni and 88% of staff feel they make a difference to the school.

### Locality

The vast majority of staff (94%) and the greatest proportion of alumni governors (38%) are in the north-west of England. Greater London and the south-east have 12% and 15% respectively of the alumni school governors. The region most covered by UoM governors (staff and alumni) is the north-west

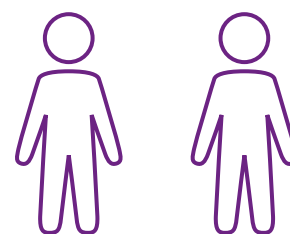
We have examined which postcode areas we govern in to see our impact on areas of disadvantage as it tends to be these areas which struggle the most to recruit school governors.

Appendix 1a shows the national distribution of UoM staff governors.

Appendix 1b shows the national picture of alumni coverage.

Appendix 1c shows the distribution of staff governors in the north-west and highlights areas of highest disadvantage.

Appendix 1d shows the distribution of alumni governors in the north-west and highlights areas of highest disadvantage.



**91%**  
alumni

**88%**  
staff

feel they make a difference to the school.

**Skills and professional background**

“Schools need governing boards that have a balance and diversity of knowledge, skills and experience to enable it to be effective. Ofsted has repeatedly noted that the most effective schools demonstrate effective leadership and management – which includes the governing board.”

NGA website

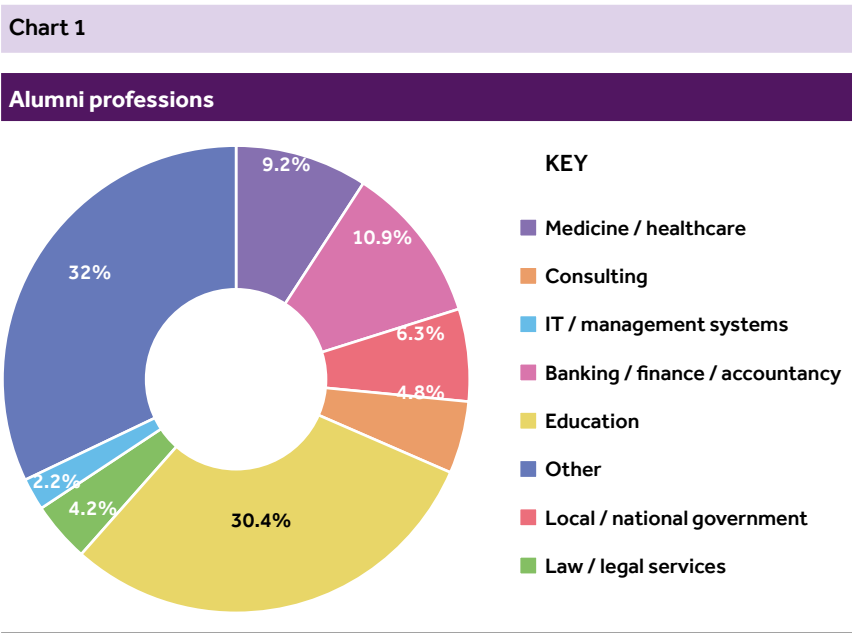
We have used governor application and vacancy data held by The University of Manchester and Governors for Schools to ascertain what skills and professional expertise our staff and alumni can contribute to governing boards and which skills are requested by governing boards when advertising vacancies.

From the Governors for Schools data on skills, we can see that the largest skills areas offered by both staff and alumni and highlighted in red in Appendix 2 were in education, finance and technical/systems/ICT. The figures highlighted in green show the skills most requested by governing boards in their vacancy listings. These include finance, education and HR as the most in-demand skills. Chart 3 in Appendix 3 also demonstrates this.

Our University staff have the right skills set for 10 out of 15 skill requests. Our alumni have the right skills set for 11 of the 15

skills requests. The areas where we appear to match less well is in data analysis, safeguarding and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND). However, the responses given in a recent survey by alumni and staff clearly indicate that one of the skills most commonly used on a governing board by both was the ability to question and analyse. It may be that volunteers don't recognise their own analytical skills at the point of application until they have the opportunity to use them. The safeguarding and SEND skills may have scored low because people view these areas as very specialised and not something akin to many people's professional roles unless already working with children in an educational or healthcare setting.

From our alumni database we can see that the largest proportion of governors have come from the education sector and the second largest sectors were medicine/healthcare and banking/finance/accountancy. See Chart 1 (left).



## 04 Evaluating Manchester's impact (continued)

### Impact on the diversity of governors

The diversity of governance is an important issue and has been investigated by both the National Governors Association (NGA) and by The Key.<sup>1</sup> "Adding new governors/trustees to the governing board who are reflective of (but not representatives of) the community the school serves can help it make better decisions in the interest of all pupils". (NGA, 2020)

The University's School Governor Initiative is also making an important contribution to the diversity of school governors. Nationally, the ethnic diversity of school governors is low, with only 6 % being from a non-white background according to the NGA survey in 2020 and in the north-west only 3% are from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background (BAME) whereas our staff data shows that 12.5% of staff governors are

non-white, twice that of the national figure and three times that of the north-west figure as highlighted in Appendix 5.

Similarly, where nationally only 11% of governors are under 40 and only 2% of these are under 30, 31% of our alumni governors are under 40 and 7% of these are under 30. Attracting alumni through the University's initiative has led to a more diverse group of governors than the national average.

The age range of our staff is more in line with the NGA national data but we do have more staff under 40 and almost twice the number in the 40-49 category. See Table 1 below.

### Other impact on schools

Through the School Governor Initiative there has been a great deal of new engagement with local schools and governors have been able to make a difference to their

schools by providing a link to the University. The link to opportunities and the engagement for schools often comes from contact with the University via the governor network and is communicated directly to senior leaders within the school. For schools, particularly in more deprived areas, a governor can present a wealth of information, opportunities and resources they otherwise wouldn't have the means to tap into. One local headteacher, Alice Littlehailes, described the additional benefit of her governor as "access to people who help our children be aspirational". Through her governors, Alice's pupils have visited the University to meet scientists and been able to experience the world of higher education which would have been an alien concept to many of them without that trip. To read the full case study go to [link](#).

Table 1

Age range	NGA data	UoM staff data	Alumni data
20-29	2%	4%	7%
30-39	9%	13%	24%
40-49	24%	42%	19%
50-59	24%	26.5%	17%
60-69	26%	12%	18%
70-79	14%	2%	11%
80+	unknown	0.5%	4%

<sup>1</sup> More information about the importance of diversity on governing boards can be found in The Key Report 2018 <https://thekeysupport.com/insights/2018/11/08/gov-stories-encouraging-diversity-on-school-governing-boards>  
<https://www.nga.org.uk/News/Campaigns/Everyone-on-Board-increasing-diversity-in-school-g.aspx>



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The links that develop with the University because of the representation particularly from staff on the board are both varied and beneficial. Examples of where the governor has been able to provide additional support to the schools include:

- knowledge about and access to University events
- knowledge about and access to outreach opportunities
- knowledge about and access to student volunteers to support the school
- knowledge about and access to schemes such as furniture reuse and PC donations
- governors using own knowledge, background, skills for purposes other than the board to enhance the schools performance eg. reading with children, art classes, local history projects etc.
- to read about how one of our staff governors working in HR has impacted a school in Bolton, follow the link to the case study. **Case study on Martin Banks**

## 05 Conclusion

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School governors are in continual need across the country and there is considerable demand for skilled, professional people from a range of backgrounds. There isn't a one size fits all or one school governor type, governing boards need a diverse range of people and skills who will both challenge and support the school. This report has shown that while finance is a skill high in demand, many other skills are needed and what really matters in most cases is having the school and the child at the heart of any decision making. Ten years of partnership with Governors for Schools has made a significant inroad to filling vacancies in the Greater Manchester and bordering areas of our region and our alumni have done a sterling job in reaching out to schools in London and in the many communities in

their locality. While there is still a long way to go to close governor recruitment gaps, we have been able to make a very positive impact in Greater Manchester, Cheshire and Derbyshire and today there are far fewer vacancies in the city regions of Manchester and London compared to the start of our initiative. Governors for Schools reports that in Manchester and London there are more volunteers registered with them than vacancies, the reverse of the situation that existed back in 2011.

However, we endeavour to keep recruiting and campaigning to ensure that interest and uptake remains high.

All UK universities have a great opportunity to make a difference in this area of social responsibility

and community engagement. Our analysis of staff and alumni skills has shown that as a HE population, we have the skills that fit the board, we can match the skills requests in two thirds of the demand areas and we can make a change for good in schools in disadvantaged areas.

Our **case studies** give a wonderful insight into the great work being done already by people in our sector but we want to see HE as a whole pushing this forward. Good governance and support doesn't only benefit the school, it benefits the person doing the role through their own development and in turn that brings advantages to the employer, the community and to society as a whole.

## 06 Recommendations

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- As a sector we can collectively tackle vacancies in vast areas of England and Wales with governor shortages by creating a continuous supply from within the HE sector.
- Universities should engage both staff and alumni for maximum impact.
- The sector should try to match the skills gaps where possible to make recruitment more focussed.
- Universities are a great source of young skill and talent which could help realign the lack of governors under 40. Universities could help in making the role more attractive to the younger workforce by highlighting the professional development opportunities and linking it to performance and development reviews.
- Data analysis, finance, HR and legal skills are important for governing, but there is also an increasing need for skills in mental health and wellbeing, safeguarding, fundraising and SEND. There will be a large number of university staff and alumni who possess such skills and it is important we exploit these talents for schools.
- Universities should target specific geographical areas through their alumni. It would be possible to hold focussed events in the areas where there are governor shortages.
- Schools could make more of the HE link they have with their governors, governors have knowledge of the HE sector which can be shared more formally with staff and learners, in particular around aspirations and access to HE.
- Universities should consider the benefits of a staff governor network to support staff in their governing roles.

## 07 Forecasting model

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The University of Manchester commissioned Public First to carry out an analysis to model what the impact of our School Governor Initiative might look like if it was run across higher education institutions in England and Wales.

In this report, it was estimated that if all universities in England and Wales ran a similar governor recruitment and placement scheme to The University of Manchester's School Governors Initiative, they could produce more than 2,400 new school governors each year –

filling more than 50% of the current vacancies registered with Governors for Schools, and more than 10% of the current nationwide vacancies.

This estimate is based on the number of staff working at each institution, and the most recent seven cohorts of university students (alumni). It is possible that by mobilising their entire alumni networks, universities' potential impact is much greater – our highest estimate is that they have the potential to fill more than 8,000 school governor vacancies across

England each year. However, this figure comes with a considerable degree of caution, and the 2,400 figure remains the central estimate.

As previously outlined, governor vacancies are not concentrated equally across the country, however, universities are well placed to support governor recruitment across the country.

We know that graduates don't necessarily stay in the same area they go to university in, nor do they return home. A 2016 report by the

## 07 Forecasting model

Centre for Cities estimated that a quarter of all new graduates from UK universities worked in London six months after graduation, an area which often has a surplus rather than a shortage of volunteers for school governor roles, while estimates from the National Governance Association indicate that in the west midlands, south-west and east of England, around a third of governing boards have two or more vacancies.

However, one of the key benefits of running governor recruitment programmes in universities is their

geographic spread across the country, and their broad diversity. This means their alumni populations often include people who are from - and who stay in - the local area, as well as those who are more mobile. In particular, with the data universities have about their staff and alumni populations, they are well placed to target resources at recruiting people who currently reside in localised 'cold spot' areas. We estimate that even when excluding institutions from London, and assuming that only 40% of a non-London based institutions'

alumni are able to be contacted about the project, 1,000 governor vacancies outside the capital could be filled each year.

Furthermore, a university's staff population is likely to remain more geographically fixed to a certain area. Modelling for staff data alone shows the impact a School Governors Initiative could have over the next ten years in each UK region, excluding the additional governors created from more geographically dispersed graduates and alumni.

**Table 2: Estimated number of school governors recruited from university staff only, by region (per year)**

Region	One year	Five years	Ten years
North East	52	259	517
North West	111	555	1,109
Yorkshire and Humber	82	412	825
East Midlands	56	282	564
West Midlands	69	345	691
East of England	77	383	766
South East	138	689	1,378
South West	82	409	818
London	221	1,106	2,213
Wales	54	272	544
<b>Total</b>	<b>942</b>	<b>4,712</b>	<b>9,425</b>

<sup>1</sup> Swiney and Williams (2016) *The Great British Brain Drain*:

<https://www.centreforcities.org/publication/great-british-brain-drain-where-graduates-move-and-why>

<sup>2</sup> <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/is-there-a-school-governor-recruitment-crisis>

## 07 Forecasting model

**Table 3: Estimated number of school governors placed each year from English and Welsh universities staff and most recent alumni cohorts (14/15-19/20)**

		Conversion rate		
Number of new governors (per year)	% alumni with active contact details held	Pessimistic	Manchester rate	Optimistic
	High (80%)	1145	2291	3436
	Medium (60%)	970	1940	2910
	Low (40%)	795	1589	2384

Table 3 shows the calculations for the number of governors who could be recruited under the different variables. The range is large – from just under 800 governors on the most pessimistic set of assumptions (where every university can only make contact with 40% of its alumni pool of the last seven years and where conversion rates are 50% lower than Manchester's) to almost 3,500 (where we assume an 80% contact rate and a conversion rate of 50% greater than Manchester's).

Our central estimate of 2,291 governors assumes a contact rate of 80% – given Manchester's estimate that they are actually in contact with far more than that, especially of more recent alumni – and a conversion rate equivalent to Manchester's. This is because despite running for ten years, the conversion rate for Manchester has been consistent throughout this period, including in early years.

There's the potential to create more than **11,000** new governors from within the HE sector within five years.

# Appendices

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## Appendix 1a

National distribution of  
UoM staff governors

[Link to interactive map](#)

### KEY

● Staff governors



# Appendices

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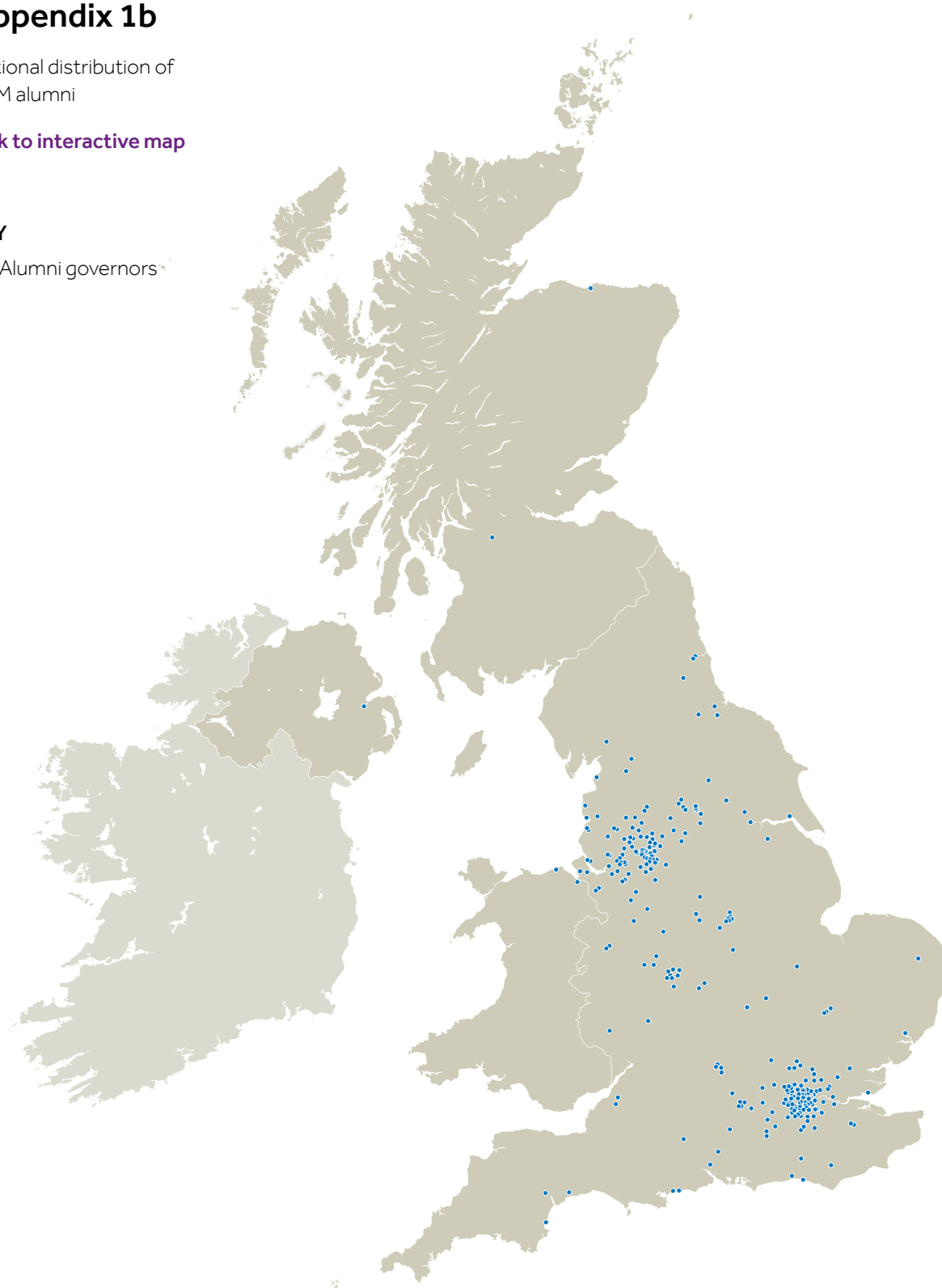
## Appendix 1b

National distribution of  
UoM alumni

[Link to interactive map](#)

### KEY

● Alumni governors



# Appendices

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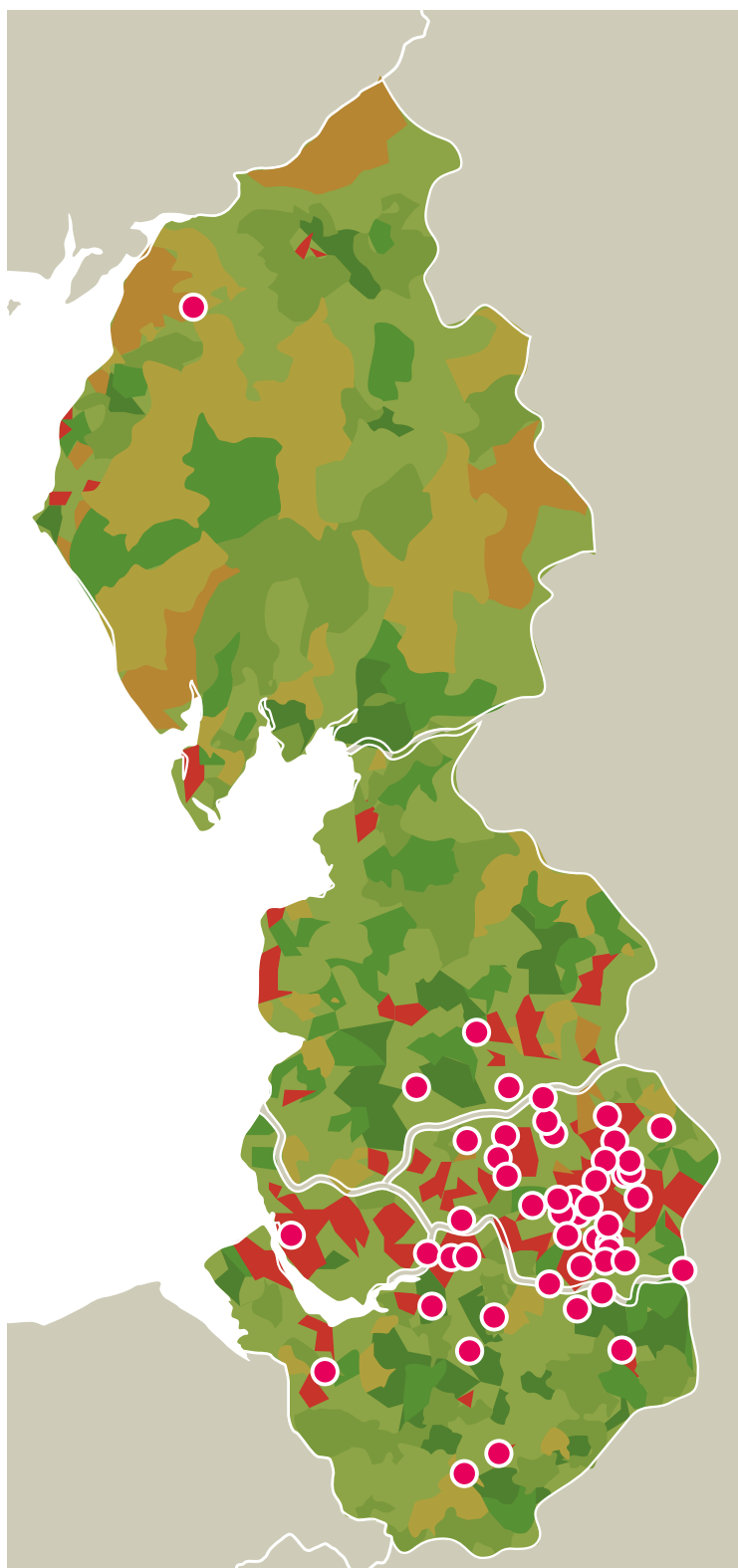
## Appendix 1c

North West distribution of UoM staff governors. The red background highlights areas of highest disadvantage

[Link to interactive map](#)

### KEY

● Staff governors



# Appendices

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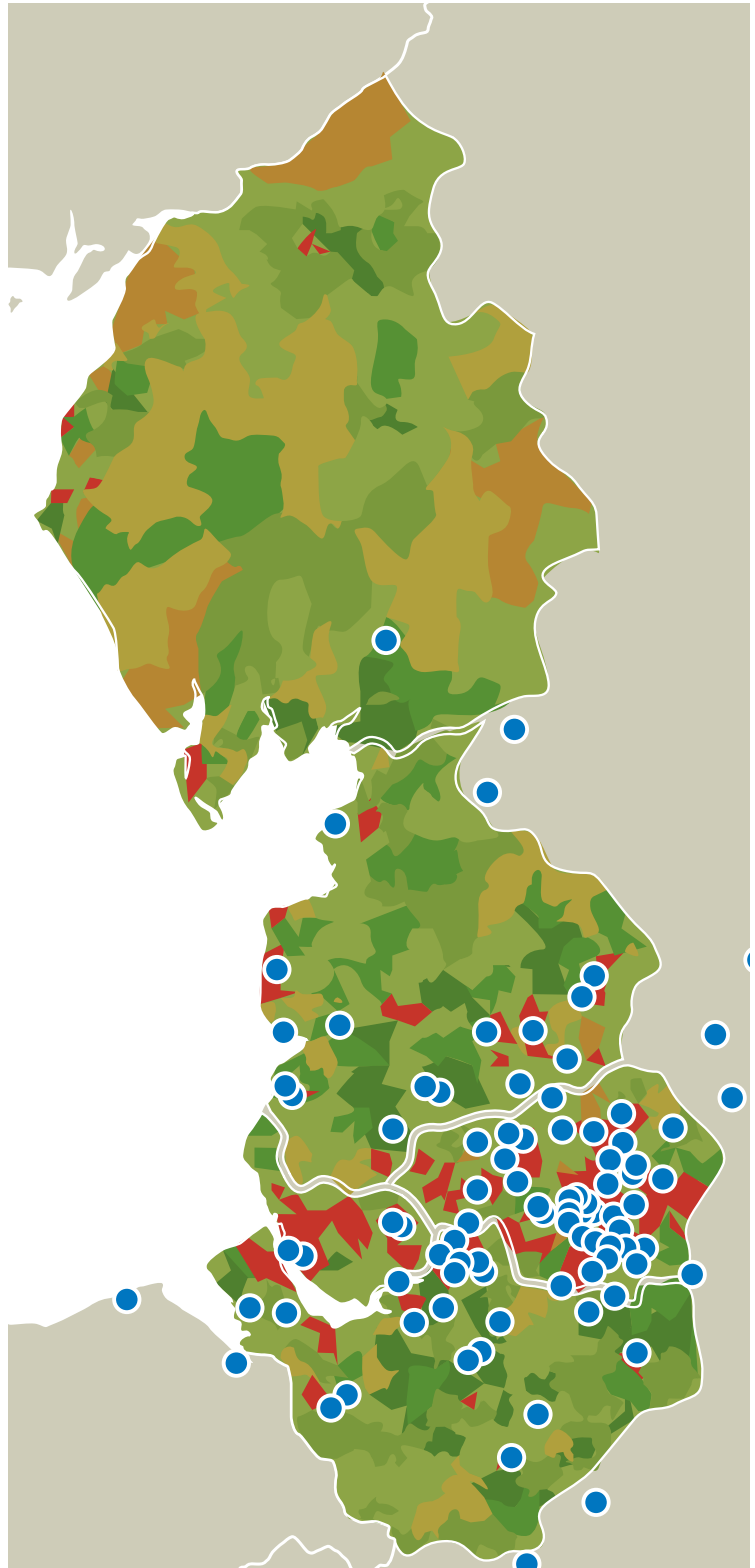
## Appendix 1d

North West distribution of UoM alumni governors. The red background highlights areas of highest disadvantage

[Link to interactive map](#)

### KEY

● Alumni governors





# Appendices

## Appendix 2

Table 4

Skill areas/performances	% vacancies (total) with skills as desirable or essential	% volunteers (alumni) with skill level as moderate or extensive	% volunteers (staff) with skill level as moderate or extensive	
Financial	36.15%	53.85%	55.56%	●
Education	26.77%	69.23%	50.00%	●
HR	28.10%	43.59%	33.33%	
Legal	19.00%	28.21%	16.67%	
Marketing/PR	17.16%	47.44%	38.89%	
Data Analysis	13.81%	12.82%	0.00%	
H&S/Premises	13.47%	6.41%	16.67%	
Premises	8.70%	17.95%	22.22%	
Tech/Systems/ICT	9.65%	69.23%	66.67%	●
Safeguarding	14.39%	7.69%	0.00%	
Fundraising	14.22%	39.74%	27.78%	
Health and Safety	9.21%	46.15%	27.78%	
Mental Health/Wellbeing	16.13%	33.33%	5.56%	
SEND	16.13%	12.82%	11.11%	
Procurement	4.64%	29.49%	27.78%	

Table 2: Table of alumni and staff skill set

### KEY

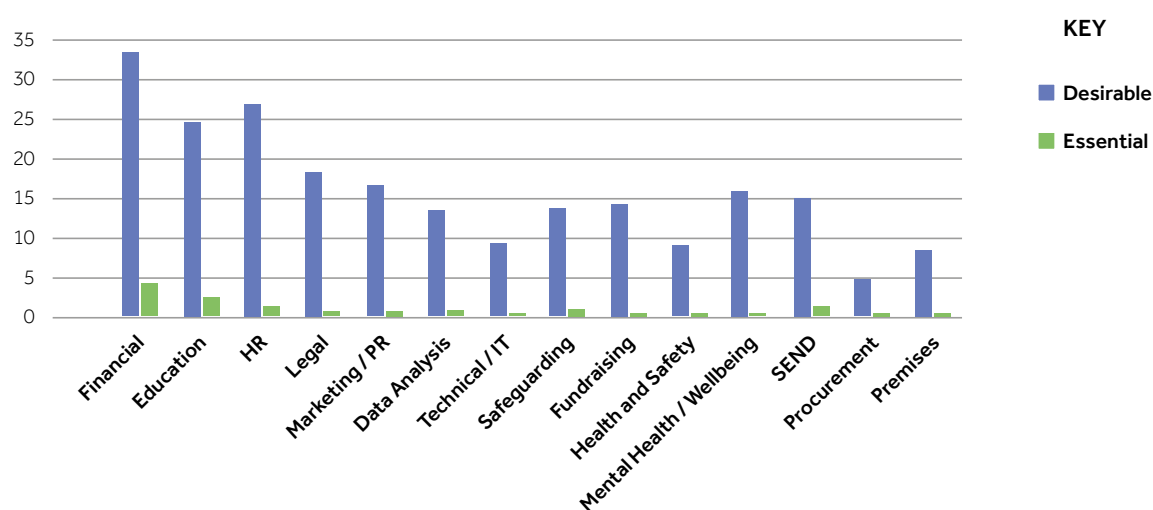
- Largest skills areas offered

# Appendices

## Appendix 3

Chart 2

Skills requests by schools (%)



## Appendix 4

Table 5: Current vacancies advertised by Governors for Schools

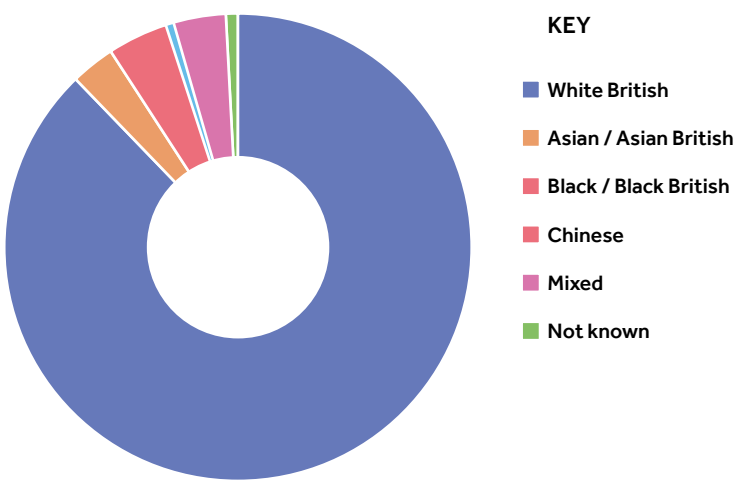
Local Authority	Number of vacancies	Local Authority	Number of vacancies
Barking and Dagenham	3	Blackpool	12
Barnet	14	Blaenau Gwent	6
Barnsley	3	Bolton	11
Bath and North-East Somerset	16	Bournemouth	22
Bedfordshire	27	Bracknell Forest	9
Bedfordshire Central	40	Bradford	35
Bexley	20	Brent	17
Birmingham	87	Brighton and Hove	110
Blackburn	8		

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# Appendix 5

Chart 3

Ethnicity of staff governors (%)



## 08 Case studies

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"Governors with a broader remit than education bring a different perspective to the board and can move schools on in a more organic way than an educationalist generally would".

**John McGeoghan,**  
University of Manchester alumnus



"I really value the commitment the University gives to developing good governors. Governing is such an important role in schools and what the University does through has a profound impact."

**Alice Littlehailes,**  
Headteacher St Luke's C of E primary school

Please visit our case studies website for more details [here](#).



"The pupils in my school face a raft of challenges to their learning and while we, the school and the governors, can't solve social problems, we can take an active role in caring about the pupils and the staff and strive for the very best outcomes."

**Professor Stephen Campbell,**  
Non-clinical Professor of Primary Care Research at the University



With a background in higher education, Martin's awareness and understanding of issues such as equality of access and teaching practices are easily relatable to a school setting.

He has been a governor at Blackrod Primary school in Greater Manchester since October 2016.

**Martin Banks,**  
HR Partner at the University

"As a school in an area with some of the highest indices of deprivation in the country, often a child's way out is through the education they receive and that is what makes the role of the school so important".

**Julie Clarke,**  
University alumna