



Confederation of School Trusts

CST's approach to forming our policy

As the sector body for School Trusts, it is a point of principle that our policymaking is open and egalitarian, by which we mean it is as inclusive as possible of our broad membership. Unlike more traditional associations, we do not have a policy-making body that is directly elected. We believe in policy making that is open and agile.

We aim to use collaborative approaches in our policy making process, so that policy is informed by a broad range of input and expertise, and by our values, drawn from the [principles of public life](#), integrity, objectivity, openness and honesty.

As far as possible, we want our policy to be data-informed and evidence-based, but given the pace of policymaking, this is not always possible. So, we are committed to identifying where we can make strong claims informed by the evidence, where the claims are weaker, what are our 'best bets' and where we need further research.

We test our thinking iteratively to improve our policy making to meet the complex, changing policy environment.

Broadly, we follow the principles of [open policy making and design](#).

We are strictly apolitical. We work with the government of the day, political parties and politicians across the spectrum to advance education for public benefit. In enacting political influence we comply with our duties under [Charity Law](#):

- Our policy influence and campaigning will only be undertaken in the context of supporting the our charitable purposes.
- We will always ensure that any involvement with political parties is balanced.
- We would not usually campaign but rather seek to influence but when considering campaigning we will always weigh up the possible benefits against the costs and risks and ensure any campaign is in line with our charitable purposes.

Our principles

1. **Listening** to new ideas and engaging our members to give us new insights and help us see problems from different points of view.
2. **Understanding the needs of our members:** we believe this will help us to develop policy that works for the people it impacts.
3. **Gathering evidence, information, and a broad range of views:** we believe it is important to be humble about what we know, and what we don't (yet) know. We are not the only 'expert' and that we do not have monopoly on good ideas and policy development.

4. **Working with experts and engaging with new knowledge:** we believe experts and academics can help us to better understand a policy problem, review possible solutions and challenge assumptions.
5. **Testing as we go along:** Testing and iterating policy solutions are more likely to mean that they work for our members in the real world of schools and education.

Approaches to open policy making

There is always more to do in ensuring that our policymaking is truly open and inclusive of our broad membership. Here are some of the ways in which we currently engage in open policymaking:

- **Listening to members** through the regular open zoom members – testing thinking and policy ideas in real time. Our agile seminars are another way of sharing and/or testing specific thinking with members, and we plan to establish a small policy forum with members.
- **Rapid surveys** conducted in real time to seek members' views on specific aspects of policy, for example on public examinations in the pandemic.
- **Policy cards** are a recent addition to our open policymaking tools. We publish short, sharp 'policy cards' on very specific aspects of policy in our member briefing and invite live comment on the positions stated therein.
- **Convening smaller advisory or expert groups** to advise on specific aspects of policy, for example CST's advisory group on the SEND review which is a time-limited task and finish group advising Leora on the SEND review and Green Paper.
- **Seeking expert advice** from our platinum partners on specific aspects of policy, for example the way that we have worked with our legal partners over the pandemic period to assess the legal implications of specific policies.
- **Discussion papers** – where we are yet to be able to make strong claims, or where we want to test policy and concepts, we publish discussion papers which help us to test as we go along and iterate. An example of this is our recent discussion paper on What is a Strong Trust?
- **Working with academics**, for example our work with Nottingham University on testing our concept of 'robustness' in School Trusts, and our work on commissioning a literature review on the evidence supporting the question of what is a strong trust?
- **Theory building** – our Bridge to the Future Papers are a form of theory building. Theory-building is important because it provides a framework for analysis, facilitates the efficient development of specific fields, and is needed for the applicability to practical real-world problems in education. An example of this is our recent papers on [Knowledge Building](#), [Communities of Improvement](#) and [Professional Development in School Trusts](#).

We are always keen to hear from our members and our wider community about ideas for improving our policymaking. Please do get in touch media@cstuk.org.uk