

# Next-gen governance

Stewardship for sustainable success

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**The voice of school trusts**



Written by Samira Sadeghi and Dawn Carman-Jones

With contributions from Dr Lizzie Oliver at Trust Governance Professionals

Samira Sadeghi is CST's Director of Trust Governance. She has been involved in school governance for over a decade, including as Head of Governance and Company Secretary at Academies Enterprise Trust (now Lift Schools) and at Ark Schools as a regional governance officer. Before she moved to the UK, Samira was a criminal defence attorney in California representing men on death row on their habeas corpus petitions for almost 12 years.

Dawn Carman-Jones has wide-ranging experience as a non-executive in the education sector, as founding chair of trustees for a 14-school primary and specialist trust, and nationally, as an independent consultant. In 2000, following a senior leadership role in further education and prior to her work in governance, Dawn established a marketing consultancy, focused on strategic business development, research, and evaluation.



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## Why do we need 'next-gen governance'?

Trusts unlock the power of schools working together. When people unite toward a shared goal, their work must be coordinated to ensure efficiency, accountability and success. Governance is akin to a magnet passed over iron filings. Without it, people can point in different directions, efforts become fragmented, workloads increase, and the common purpose is lost. A clear vision and shared values keep everyone aligned, transcending individuals and creating a legacy that outlives any one person's involvement.

Our work with trusts, through daily contact with our members and structured support through external governance reviews, vision setting, and reviews of governance structures and schemes of delegations reveal that trusts overall are strong on regulatory compliance, but less confident when it comes to strategy and leadership.

This is in part a reaction to our environments. The sector was born out of innovation and then grew rapidly, at times without a clear roadmap. Government responded with rules and regulation, targets and benchmarks. It is right that there are checks to ensure public funds are protected, but these should be the baseline and not the goal. As a maturing sector, we need a shift in attitudes that takes us forward.

We need governance that evolves and is thoughtfully designed for the 'now', with cultures that are resilient and sustainable. We can no longer simply rely on the ways of the past: governance vacancies are at an all-time high and 40% of CEOs we surveyed identified succession planning as a governance priority. Only 35% are aged under 50, and more likely to have direct recent experience of the education system.<sup>1</sup> Why is this? Is it a question of capacity? Is it the expectations and workload? Or is it the way we carry out governance?

Discovering next-gen governance is about examining our current practice and, where necessary, evolving it. It is a nuanced, modern approach to governance that is more about people than compliance. Our boards and local governance rely on volunteers; while motivated by duty, we still owe it to them to make it rewarding, even enjoyable. This new form of governance can help with retention and attract the next generations into governance. Together, this will ensure we do not miss out on the diversity of perspectives crucial to the future success of trusts.<sup>2</sup>

*"We need leaders who exist in the pace, information and context of today and are willing to envisage tomorrow. Leaders who see their organisation as a living organism rather than a machine. Who avoid bureaucracy and top-down control. Who are willing to show vulnerability and weakness. Who create higher levels of trust, self-determination, and compassion, and promote a sense of belonging." – Luke Sparkes, Dixons Academies Trust<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Data from GovernorHub's 2024 survey of 22,000 governance volunteers, a follow up to their 2022 [The Missing Pool of Talent](#) report (2022); [National School Trust Report](#); CST and Ecurio (2024).

<sup>2</sup> For a fascinating look at the power of intergenerational working, visit the [Generations Working Together site](#), containing examples of generations working collaboratively to tackle specific issues in Scotland.

<sup>3</sup> Sparkes, L (2024), ['Why we got rid of executive job titles – and why you should, too'](#), TES.



## Our theory of change – what is ‘next-gen governance’?

It starts with a shift in mindset towards stewardship. With this refocused mindset, everything changes.

Planning becomes longer term, with clear milestones mapping out the path.

Reporting is solutions-focused and based on trust and assurance not reassurance, and decision-making improves through diversity, openness, transparency, and psychological safety. Trusts take a relational approach to their stakeholders, using communication and storytelling to share their vision, mission and strategy and pre-empting friction points that can lead to resource-intensive crises. Less friction then allows freedom to sustain attention on the long-term strategic priorities.

It is all enabled by a skilled and knowledgeable governance professional who can support the board to meet these new higher standards of governance.

	This	Not this
<b>Mindset</b>	Stewardship, civic-minded, outward-facing	Hierarchical, proprietary, ‘command & control’
<b>Strategic outlook</b>	Longer term vision with agile interim milestones	Short term and fixed strategies
<b>Decision-makers</b>	Diversity of thought, perspective, background	Homogeneity and group think
<b>Structures</b>	Brave, bold governance structures designed for now	Legacy models of governance
<b>Approach</b>	Compliance as a minimum	Compliance-focused
<b>Mechanics</b>	Sharp, tech-savvy, solutions-focused, risk-informed	Backward-looking, problem-focused
<b>Executive relationships</b>	Trusting in professional judgement	Seeking reassurance, overly operational
<b>Culture</b>	Ethical, psychologically safe, ‘speak up’, transparent	High-stakes accountability, need-to-know
<b>Stakeholders</b>	Relationships fostered by communication & storytelling	Minimal engagement, misunderstanding
<b>Conflict resolution</b>	Resolved informally; mediation and restorative practice	Formal, adversarial, quickly escalated
<b>Sense-making</b>	Embracing complexity and collaboration	Insular and seeking simple solutions
<b>Governance practice</b>	Led by a skilled, experienced governance professional	Led by the executive or a non-professional

# A shift in mindset

Mindsets are crucial to how we approach the complex ‘wicked’ problems we see in education.<sup>4</sup> Next-gen governance starts with a mindset shift away from hierarchical, short-term, ‘command and control’, proprietary approaches replacing them with the civic, long-term concept of ‘stewardship’. Leaders are now custodians of trusts with a rich and vibrant history and a future that will outlive those currently in post. The stewardship approach is enshrined in Principle 1 of the Academy Trust Governance Code, delivering on the trust’s charitable objects,<sup>5</sup> as well as the Framework for Ethical leadership in Education.<sup>6</sup> The difference is stark:

Stewardship	Proprietary
We / our	I / me
Greater good	Personal benefit
Supervising or managing something entrusted to you	The right or entitlement to possess something
We are custodians.	I’m in charge.
Thinking beyond the present	Thinking mainly about the present
Accountability to others first	Accountability to yourself first
Ready and prepared for someone else to take over	Inability to ‘let go’ when time is up

True stewards are humble custodians, not possessive proprietors. They balance humility with confidence, focusing on creating enduring cultures, systems, and processes that transcend any single individual and ensure long-term sustainability. Succession planning comes naturally to stewards, who embrace the joy of empowering others and passing the baton. In *Centennials*, Alex Hill cites the All Blacks, NASA, and Royal College of Art as among examples of organisations that have achieved long-term success through “overlapping stewardship”, where the current steward passes on “knowledge, expertise and team spirit on to the next contingent.”<sup>7</sup>

Stewards are inherently civic and outward-facing. CST has long championed the civic role of trusts, advocating for a new kind of public leadership – one that is genuinely civic-minded.<sup>8</sup> The Church of England’s Andy Wolfe eloquently describes ‘cathedral thinking,’ the self-effacement and vision required for long-term projects that benefit future generations. Their vision is that “this hope-filled future is not focused simply on short-term changes of policy or procedure, but on long-term shifts in thinking and practice.”<sup>9</sup> There seems to be broad agreement that the moment for that shift is now.

## Why now?

In 2010, there were 203 academy schools in England. Now, over half of all state-

4 Jane Loevinger described the ego as a process rather than a thing, a frame of reference that we use to construct and interpret our world – our mindset. Loevinger, J (1976), *Ego Development*, Jossey-Bass.

5 [Academy Trust Governance Code, Principle 1.](#)

6 Ethical Leadership Commission (2017) [Framework for Ethical Leadership in Education.](#)

7 Hill, A (2023), *Centennials: The 12 Habits of Great, Enduring Organisations*, Penguin Books.

8 CST (2024), [School trusts as civic institutions.](#)

9 Church of England (2023), [Our Hope for a Flourishing Schools System.](#)



funded schools are in trusts.<sup>10</sup> At this pivotal moment, trust leaders are reflecting not only on their trust's role in the community, but also on how the sector's growth and evolving standards are reshaping governance and leadership across the system.

For pioneering leaders who established and led the first trusts, effecting transformational change at pace often manifested in a top-down, hierarchical leadership style focused on shorter-term outcomes and narrow in outlook. Strong individual leaders can be powerful agents for change, but they also risk creating significant dependency on one person. Organisations risk becoming unmoored and losing direction during leadership transitions, with those remaining without the authority, confidence, or capacity to lead effectively.

The launch of the Academy Trust Governance Code in 2023 marked a key moment in the sector's maturity, when we purposefully chose to hold ourselves to a higher set of governance standards. A year on, CST has analysed a year's worth of our external governance reviews (ERGs) to gain insights into what current trends in trust governance can tell us about the next phase of development. Twenty elements were coded as strengths or areas of development within each of four domains contained in CST's guidance *Governing a school trust* – board leadership, structures, accountability, and compliance and care.<sup>11</sup>

We found that most trusts were fulfilling the elements within the latter two domains. Particular strengths were around fiduciary duty and financial governance, external accountability, internal and external audits and, gratifyingly, robust scrutiny of educational outcomes and safeguarding. This comports with the Code's fundamental principle which contains the assumption that a trust is compliant. After all, trusts operate in one of the most highly regulated sectors. And the overwhelming majority of trusts are now compliant with key requirements in large part due to the increasing skill of trust governance professionals who support and advise boards.<sup>12</sup>

Where we found areas for development, they were concentrated within the two domains of board leadership and structures. For next-gen governance, a solitary focus on the basics – accountability, compliance and avoiding failures – is not sufficient. The path forward demands a more nuanced board leadership style that is comfortable with complexity, agile and evolving governance structures and mechanics, and a shift towards relational approaches that build longer-term resilience. Trust boards themselves must lead the way in envisioning next-gen governance, viewing compliance as the starting point, not the finish line.



<sup>10</sup> Department for Education (2024), [Open academies, free schools, studio schools and UTCs](#).

<sup>11</sup> CST (2024), [Governing a School Trust](#).

<sup>12</sup> Education and Skills Funding Agency (2024) [Common themes arising from ESFA's assurance work in 2023 to 2024](#).

# Next-gen governance in practice

## Planning for the longer term

Lasting, sustainable change in the education sector can take a decade, yet our ERGs and the sector survey both confirm that few trust strategies reach that far. Principle 1 of the Code asks boards to consider the financial viability and operational sustainability of their trusts in the short, medium, and long term. But there is a vital distinction between a 10-year vision, a three to five year strategy, and an operational roadmap for implementation.

Many boards lack clarity on the milestones needed to achieve longer-term goals. Education is a complex, ever-changing endeavour, so where interim milestones do exist, they must be agile and responsive to the 'now', rather than set in stone. This is not about being weak or 'letting off' leaders who under-perform, but rather acknowledging that we are subject to external factors and that a well-crafted plan allows for that. While CST has called on the government for a more stable

funding system that will allow for longer-term planning in the education sector,<sup>13</sup> the reality is that governments change. Pandemics and conflicts well outside of our control can change our destinies. Being ready to reflect that and, where appropriate, change course is a strength, not a weakness.

Boards should continuously ask themselves Lencioni's six critical questions: Why do we exist? How do we behave? What do we do? How will we succeed? What is most important, right now? Who must do what?<sup>14</sup> Boards and their executive team should also be constantly reassessing their biggest challenges and priorities and amending their plans and milestones as needed.

Long-term success also requires proactive planning for key inflection points, such as growth. Succession planning necessitates open, honest and brave discussions about the lifespan of every executive and governance leader in the trust. Depending on their view of the trust's strength and stability, boards will want to decide whether to prioritise continuity over a 'fresh set of eyes' in their next leaders. To ensure changes are managed without significant disruption (Principle 5 of the ATGC), trusts should consider 'overlapping stewardship', pre-emptively preparing the next set of leaders to seamlessly take over.



### Some questions for boards

- Does your long-term strategic planning extend beyond the working lifespan of your senior leaders and trustees?
- How does your succession plan dovetail with your strategic plan?
- Is it fully embedded in your professional development and people strategy as well as your financial horizon planning?

<sup>13</sup> CST (2024), [Funding Futures: Protecting foundations](#).

<sup>14</sup> Lencioni, P (2012), *The Advantage: Why organizational health trumps everything else in business*, Jossey-Bass.

## Reimagining governance to eliminate duplication and ‘fluffload’

Growth in the trust sector has brought with it growing pains. Last year at CST we invited the sector to examine and reimagine governance in their trusts. We know that a “school trust is a dynamic organisation. If the trust has a group of schools, then governance is also a complex activity. The structures of governance are therefore dynamic and should change when ‘inflection points’ are reached.”<sup>15</sup>

As structures change, so should documentation. We have found that in many trusts, schemes of delegation are not as regularly reviewed and updated as they might be. CST has always been clear that the local tier of governance is essential to effective governance of a trust, providing eyes and ears on the ground in key areas like SEND and safeguarding, helping contextualise the trust’s strategy and engaging directly with stakeholders. However, our ERGs find that many of those at the local tier lack a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and that communication between the layers of governance can be often poor. This siloed working creates duplication, confusion over accountability (executive and governance) and stress-inducing ‘fluffload’, particularly for headteachers.

Next-gen governance requires reimagining and, if necessary, redesigning your governance community to ensure it is fit for purpose. It demands bold thinking about structures, clearly articulating what each tier is trying to achieve; how it is contributing to the organisation; and how it will address your priorities and challenges. It may be that current structures are working just fine, but trusts cannot be limited by what has gone before and it sometimes requires being brave (and possibly putting noses out of joint) to intentionally design a governance community that works in the ‘now’.

### Some questions for boards

- At what points in your strategic plan are there identifiable inflection points that will require potential structural change in governance structures, central functions, delegations, and accountability?
- Does everyone understand the scheme of delegation? How do you know that delegations are being fulfilled effectively?
- Do you have duplication in your scheme? Eliminate it by co-locating responsibility with expertise and then openly communicating across the layers.

## Diversity in practice

Many trust boards currently lack the required diversity to ‘exist in the pace, information and context of today’ and ‘envisage tomorrow’. Diversity data gathered by GovernorHub indicates that every group other than white, Christian, higher-educated individuals over the age of 40 are under-represented amongst governance volunteers.<sup>16</sup> In the words of Matthew Syed: “Teams that are diverse in personal experiences tend to have a richer, more nuanced understanding of their fellow human beings. They have a wider array of perspectives – fewer blind spots. They bridge between frames of reference.”<sup>17</sup>

Principle 6 of the ATGC asks boards to put in place a “clear, agreed and effective approach to advancing equality, diversity and inclusion” throughout the trust.

<sup>15</sup> CST (2024), [Governing a School Trust](#)

<sup>16</sup> GovernorHub’s survey of 22,000 governance volunteers in 2024.

<sup>17</sup> Syed, M (2019), *Rebel Ideas: The Power of Diverse Thinking*, John Murray.



Diversity of thought and perspective amongst our boards, teachers and school leaders is crucial if we want to build forward-thinking and effective organisations that equip our children to succeed in today’s increasingly culturally interconnected world. Yet our ERGs found a lack of diversity at board level and EDI strategies that were poorly embedded in many trusts.

Many trusts have EDI-related policies and statements that do not yet translate into reality. CST’s discussion paper *Building diversity into our workforce strategies* sets out actionable steps that trust can take to embed EDI effectively.<sup>18</sup>

**Some questions for boards**

- How does your trust attract candidates? Are you purposefully reaching diverse audiences? Does this include alumni, which in many trusts is a huge untapped resource?
- How independent is your governance appointment process or is recruitment ‘in my image’?
- Consider how the culture, climate and working conditions of your board (and your trust) might fail to attract (or actively drive away) more diverse staff and leaders.
- How do you ensure that diversity is embedded and not tokenistic in nature?

Sharp, tech-savvy and solutions-focused mechanics of governance

Strong governance is based on assurance not reassurance. Assurance is focused on ‘improving not proving’ and provides evidence-based confidence with an inherent trust in professional judgement. Reassurance is about ‘proving’. It focuses on comfort and aims to prevent worry. It obsesses with control and prediction. It is placatory in nature and is predicated on mistrust.

Assurance	Reassurance
‘Improving’	‘Proving’
Evidence-based confidence	Seeking comfort, reducing worry, placatory
Trusting	Predicated on mistrust
Values professional judgement	Values control and predictions

Our ERGs found the mechanics of governance – reporting, meetings, policies and other documentation – are still frequently driven by reassurance, causing many boards to lose their focus on strategic priorities. Unfocused governance drains time and energy and creates ‘fluffload’ for all involved. This type of governance also drives away all but the most time-rich governance volunteers, creating a lack of diversity of thought and perspective on boards.

Next-gen governance in a complex, fast-paced environment requires minimalist, forward-looking and solutions-focused reporting. These shorter reports should encourage more analysis and force greater insights (the crucial ‘so what’). Laser sharp meetings must have a specific goal in mind, involve the right people, and timings must be carefully considered to accommodate diverse needs. Policies should

18 CST (2024), [Building diversity into our workforce strategies](#).

be minimised, consolidated or even eliminated when unnecessary. Technology can help here, but only if used carefully and always with data protection and human oversight in mind. Boards need to release their legacy demands for ever increasingly detailed reporting, whilst ensuring that their executive have the skills to deliver next-gen style papers.

### Some questions for boards

- Are detailed minutes required at every level of governance? Ask why. Limit to action logs where possible.
- Are you making the most of technology? With appropriate guardrails, artificial intelligence tools can now help with meeting notes and actions. Online forms can be used to create quick and agile two-way communication between the layers. AI tools even exist to scan policies across your trust for duplication and lack of compliance. But all AI tools ultimately need the human touch to ensure appropriate end results.
- Are executive reports longer than five pages? Do they still look like 'headteacher reports'? Encourage reports that are forward-looking and strategic in focus, that address risk and propose solutions rather than just explaining the problem. AI tools, with human oversight, can help streamline reports and draft executive summaries.
- Have policies mushroomed out of control? Eliminate any that are not helpful and embedded. Think about your audience. How many people will read all of a 75-page policy? Does each school need an individual policy, separately reviewed and approved? Use short-and-sharp FAQs and handbooks to communicate expectations. Reserve only the most important policies for board approval, delegating the rest.
- Are meetings longer than two hours? Shorten them. Governance is as much about what happens between meetings, so think about how to capitalise on the in-between time. Use 'consent agendas' (where routine, non-controversial items are grouped together and passed with a single motion) to manage compliance items and leave space for strategic discussions.
- Is membership of meetings optimal? Effective meetings are firmly chaired with 'generous authority' and involve eight to 12 individuals. Less than eight risks a lack diversity of perspective, especially if some people are unable to attend a meeting; more than 12 and people will struggle to participate.
- Choice of venue is a powerful lever. To keep children front of mind, meet in a classroom rather than a boardroom (this can also achieve 'displacement', breaking people out of unhelpful 'board' habits). Also consider the arrangement of the room to ensure the space is inclusive and welcoming to all.<sup>19</sup>

## Openness, transparency and psychological safety for all

In 2012, building on Professor Amy Edmondson's ground-breaking work in 1999,<sup>20</sup> Google's Project Aristotle sought to understand and replicate high performing teams by reviewing scores of academic studies and examining the behaviours of 180 teams. It overwhelmingly found that the most important feature was a strong

<sup>19</sup> See Parker, P (2018), *The Art of Gathering*, Penguin Random House.

<sup>20</sup> Edmondson, A (1999), 'Psychological safety and Learning Behaviour in Work Teams', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol 44, No 2.

sense of psychological safety that fostered an environment where members felt comfortable expressing their thoughts and ideas openly, leading to more productive discussions and innovative solutions.<sup>21</sup>

Next-gen governance must be ethical and underpinned by psychological safety. As espoused in Principle 7 of the ATGC and the Framework for Ethical Leadership in Education,<sup>22</sup> an effective long-term strategy must be rooted in openness and transparency. This is facilitated by the type of leadership set out in Principle 2: “creating the conditions in which Academy Trust staff are confident and enabled to provide the information, advice and feedback the Board requires.”

Without these conditions, we create a ‘thermocline of truth,’ where people fear speaking up and critical issues never reach decision-makers. This silence breeds crises, forcing leaders into constant firefighting, derailing the long-term vision and leaving strategy adrift. True progress requires an environment where honesty flows freely, and challenges are acknowledged and met before they become emergencies.

Next-gen governance removes high-stakes accountability within the trust. It allows for mistakes and establishes norms for how failure is handled. It facilitates speaking up, embraces constructive conflict and promotes sincere dialogue. It also celebrates successes.

### Some questions for boards

- How do leaders model genuine vulnerability and honesty?
- Are there extreme power gradients in your trust? Next gen governance and a stewardship mindset means boards take the lead in empowering others and reducing power imbalances.
- How do you establish shared norms for acceptable and unacceptable behaviours and are the latter called out as problematic?
- How do you expect, make space for and hear all voices, valuing their contributions? How do you reward speaking up, ensuring it becomes natural and expected?
- How do you communicate with empathy – clearly, intelligently and compassionately?
- How do you approach failure, accepting human error as normal and required for learning?
- How do you track and interrogate information that might indicate concerning trends before they escalate (for example, high staff turnover or absence, both in shared services and in schools)?
- How does your trust derive learnings from any complaints and whistleblowing cases (and near misses)?

## A relational approach underpinned by communication and storytelling

Next-gen governance requires a cultural shift towards true stakeholder engagement, servant leadership, transparency and openness – all enshrined in the ATGC. Building relational trust is also a key pillar of improving the conditions for our trust and school leaders, teachers and support staff and reducing unsustainable

<sup>21</sup> Duhigg, C (2016) ‘[What Google learned from its quest to build the perfect team](#)’, *New York Times*.

<sup>22</sup> [Framework for Ethical Leadership in Education](#)

levels of stress and burnout.<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately, our research has found that communication is not a particular strength in the trust governance sector. Our ERGs revealed that there is wide variation in how well trust cultures, values, and mission are communicated or understood by stakeholders. Nor do those at the local tier understand their roles and responsibilities. Conversely, we also found that the areas of greatest impact in trust governance were those where there was clarity of communication and expectation.

Purposeful and empathetic communication and relationship building can also reduce friction points: consider the rising number of parental complaints that currently consume vast amounts of governance time and divert scarce resource. Principles 5 and 7 of the ATGC emphasise the need for the board to communicate well with *all* stakeholders and ensure communication is a two-way loop. Storytelling and over-communicating with our stakeholders can garner their trust, respect and understanding. The success of the All Blacks team is deeply rooted in their history and legacy, which is reinforced and communicated constantly and creates fierce loyalty. Embedding effective communication, mediation, and restorative justice practices in everyday practices (and policy) can reduce friction, reserving escalation for only the most severe cases.

### Some questions for boards

- Does your trust 'tell its story' to stakeholders? Do they understand all that you do for their children?
- Map the communications in your trust. Is information shared regularly, openly and widely? Is it two-way?
- Do staff have the skills to effectively communicate and are there support mechanisms in place to ensure they feel confident in tackling issues at the earliest stage?
- Have you built informal solutions such as mediation and restorative justice into your policies to avoid escalation and time-consuming panel reviews? These do not need to be formal, externally-sourced, or expensive. Training your own staff can be the key.

## Governance as a professional endeavour

The crucial role of the governance professional is cited throughout the ATGC as a pillar of effective governance. Not surprisingly, our ERGs found a direct correlation between high quality trust governance and a skilled governance professional leading the way. However, governance is often seen as an 'add on' to other responsibilities and the role has not fully garnered the respect it deserves. The governance professional is also not located appropriately within the leadership structure and important decisions are made without the benefit of their input and advice. Even more alarming, our sector survey revealed that in some trusts, the CEO leads on governance, directly in contravention of the Academy Trust Handbook.<sup>24</sup>

Next-gen governance is not possible without the consistent support of a skilled governance professional; this goes well beyond the traditional role of 'clerks'. Operating a charitable company requires trustees and executive leaders to navigate

<sup>23</sup> Cruddas, L (2024), '[The importance of culture, climate and conditions – making our schools brilliant places to work](#)', Confederation of School Trusts

<sup>24</sup> DfE (2024), [Academy Trust Handbook](#) at 1.42.

an ever-increasing number of legal, regulatory and financial requirements. It is crucial, therefore, that they are well supported in this by a professional to provide accurate and timely advice and facilitate seamless governance practice.

### Some questions for boards

- Who leads on governance in your trust? Regardless of size, if it is the CEO, this violates the Academy Trust Handbook 2024.
- Is the governance professional role prioritised, well understood and afforded the respect and status it requires to enact quality governance in your trust?
- Is the governance professional present and able to advise and influence when executive decisions are made?



## Conclusion

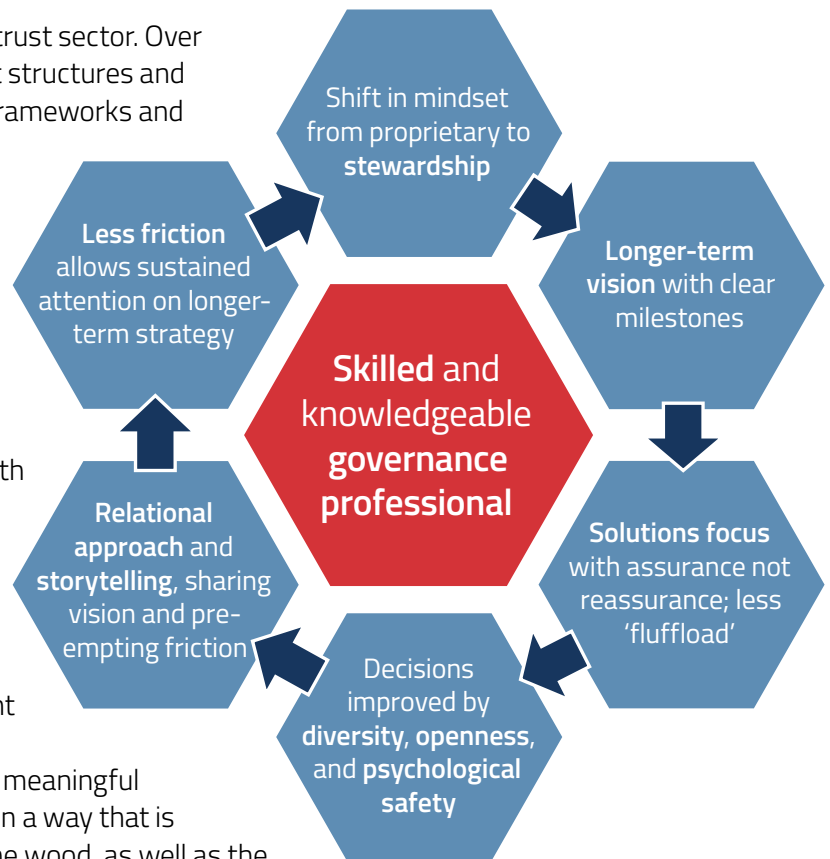
We are on the cusp of the next phase of the trust sector. Over the past 20 years we have explored different structures and approaches, building up increasingly robust frameworks and ways of working.

We now have a much more mature, if still imperfect, regulatory framework that includes considered rules and compliance checks. We also have a deepening confidence in the sector of what compliance looks and feels like, embedded in our 'business as usual' practices.

The time has come for us to build on that. With the right shift in mindset, we can create a version of trust governance that will ensure long-lasting and sustainable success in providing the best possible education for our children.

We must still ensure compliance with relevant legislation and regulation, but we do so with a trust in our colleagues and an emphasis on meaningful assurance, not narrow box ticking. We do so in a way that is intelligent, proportionate, and always sees the wood, as well as the trees.

CST and its professional community of trustees and governance professionals will endeavour to be at the vanguard of embedding the aspirational principles of the Academy Trust Governance Code and defining next-gen governance that exists in the pace, information and context of today and envisages tomorrow.



## About this report

Much of the evidence for this report is drawn from CST's experience conducting external reviews of governance across dozens of school trusts.

An external review of governance is an assessment of the governance arrangements in a trust, conducted by an independent reviewer, to provide assurance to the board on where governance is impactful and to identify areas for improvement.

CST expert consultants typically conduct a review over 10-12 weeks, including a review of core governance documents, surveys of trustees and local committee chair opinions, one-to-one interviews, and observations of board meetings.

Our reports are objective, honest and robust, and all are subject to quality assurance by an experienced trust governance expert. This allows us to both check the rigour of our findings and draw upon good practice from across the sector in our recommendations.

Visit [cstuk.org.uk](https://cstuk.org.uk) for more details of CST's full range of trust development services, including external reviews of governance, vision setting, executive performance review, and mentoring.





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Suite 1, Whiteley Mill  
39 Nottingham Road  
Stapleford  
Nottingham  
NG9 8AD

0115 9170142

[cstuk.org.uk](http://cstuk.org.uk)

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