

# Next-gen board leadership framework

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# Starting with the 'why'

## Reminding ourselves why we have boards

In law, boards exist to provide the authority, accountability and oversight required in incorporated companies. But boards also exist because complex organisations need more than a single mind to govern well. The stakes are too high and the systems too intricate for the executive to hold all the insight, judgement, and foresight required. Boards ensure that stakeholder perspectives are actively integrated into decision making and they keep the organisation anchored to its core purpose, maintaining a clear line of sight between strategic choices and the trust's mission, vision, and values.

Boards harness collective intelligence by bringing together diverse expertise, perspectives, experiences, and disciplines, so that decisions are tested from multiple angles before they shape strategy, allocate resources, or set risk appetite. Collective intelligence allows groups to see patterns, disagree productively, challenge assumptions, and generate options that no individual could produce alone.

This is not just a structural convenience. It reflects something fundamental about how humans think. While history often celebrates the lone genius, most real progress has come from people thinking together. Boards are a formal expression of that principle: they create a disciplined space for shared sense-making and collective intelligence, so that organisations can act with greater clarity in conditions of uncertainty.

## Why 'next-gen' board leadership?

Trust governance in England is good. Since the inception of trusts, governance has rightly been focused on compliance to ensure highly effective management of public money and avoidance of failures. The DfE's assurance work confirms that compliance failures are rare<sup>1</sup>.

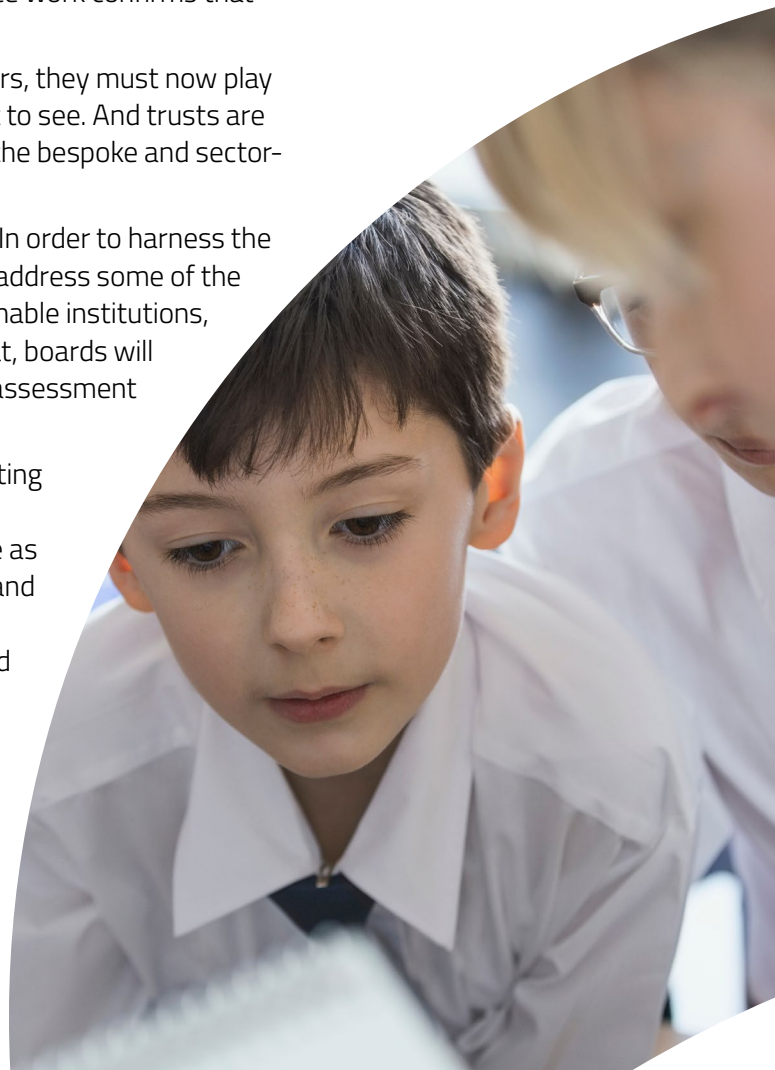
Trusts are now the majority of the sector. As system leaders, they must now play a role in designing the type of education system they want to see. And trusts are holding themselves to a higher standard, as evidenced by the bespoke and sector-created [Academy Trust Governance Code](#) (ATGC).

So while compliance is necessary, it is no longer sufficient. In order to harness the positive, performance-enhancing power of governance to address some of the intractable problems we face in education and build sustainable institutions, we need to go from good to great. To go from good to great, boards will need to look beyond annual skills audits and tick-box self-assessment forms.

As we explained in [Next-gen governance](#), leaders in long-lasting institutions share certain characteristics.<sup>2</sup> They adopt a stewardship mindset that embraces their time-limited role as custodians of their organisations. They consider strategic and pro-active succession planning as a natural and necessary component of their practice. They take a more nuanced and holistic approach to their own effectiveness, going beyond

<sup>1</sup> "98% of trusts reviewed fell within the 'fully compliant', 'good' and 'satisfactory' progression towards compliance categories. This was the same as the previous year which was 98%." [Common issues identified from DfE's assurance work in 2024 to 2025](#), DfE (September 2025).

<sup>2</sup> Hill, A (2023), *Centennials: The 12 Habits of Great, Enduring Organisations*. Penguin Books



individual skillsets and considering how they behave and operate as a team.

Next-gen board leadership is a practical shift in how boards understand problems, design their own architecture, and exercise judgement in conditions of uncertainty. This paper sets out a self-assessment framework to enable that shift and embed it into board practice, recruitment, development, evaluation, succession, and re-appointment, so boards can steward long-term value with confidence.

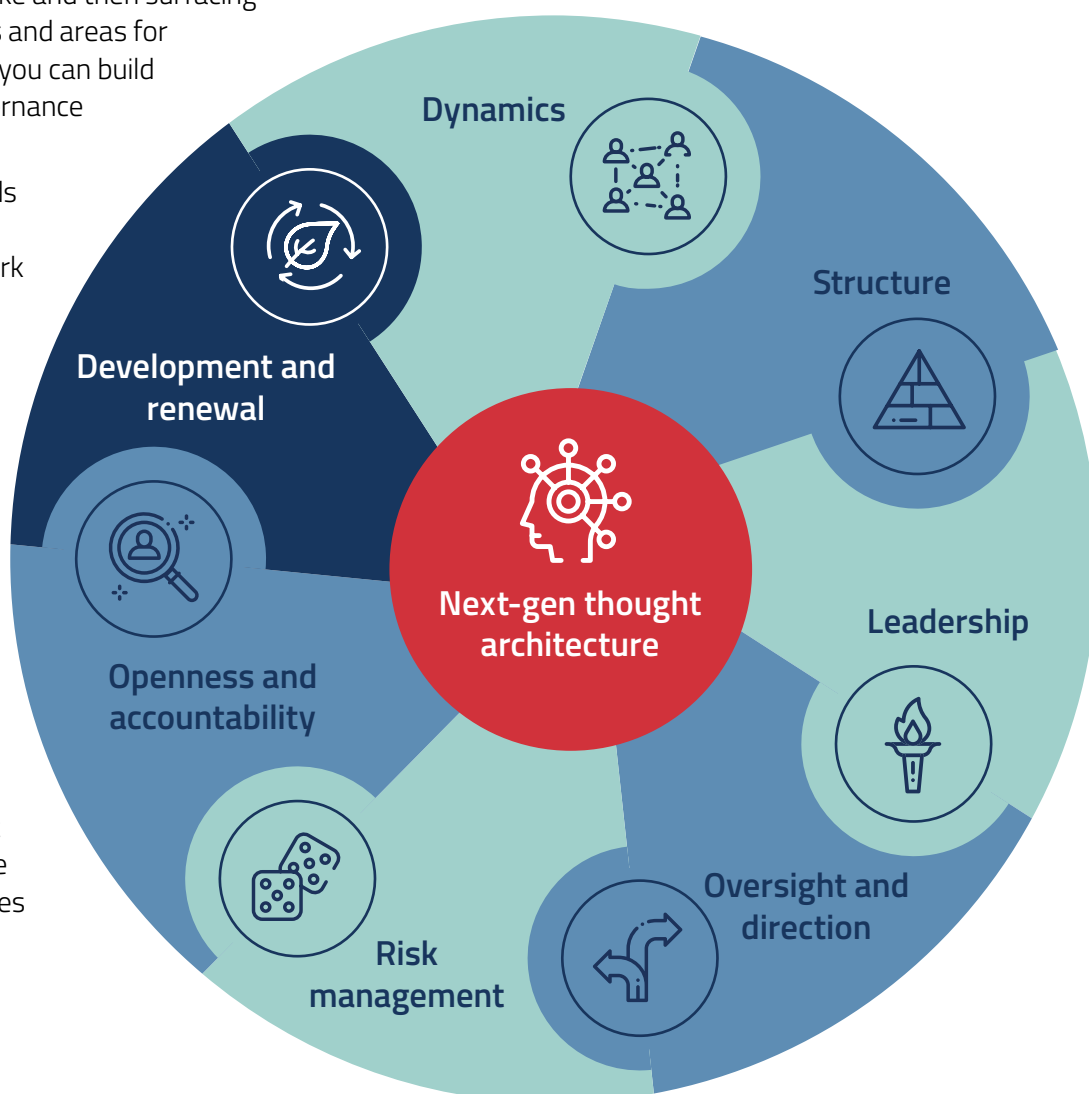
## A self-assessment framework

Principle 5 of the ATGC reminds us that “The Board’s culture, behaviours and processes help it to be effective.” This framework sets out an underpinning thought architecture, and seven domains and descriptions of practice covering:

- Dynamics
- Structure
- Leadership
- Oversight and direction
- Risk management
- Openness and accountability
- Development and renewal

No board is perfect and few, if any, boards will manage to meet all the ‘pro-active’ criteria in the framework below. However, the first step towards improving a board’s effectiveness is having a shared language and concept of what ‘great’ looks like and then surfacing and naming strengths and areas for development, so that you can build your capacity for governance improvement.

We recommend boards engage with this self-assessment framework in two stages: individually and then as a group. Honest and forthright group discussion around each domain serves two functions: first, to identify areas of strength and areas for development and second, to build and deepen relationships, rapport and trust that will ultimately improve how the board operates as a team.



# Board thought architecture



‘Thought architecture’ is a metaphor for the structure of thought that shapes and provides a framework for how we understand our environment and, ultimately, make decisions.<sup>3</sup>

The fundamental principle of the Academy Trust Governance Code assumes boards will have a shared understanding of organisational purpose and the trust’s mission, vision and values, as well as their own roles and legal responsibilities.

To fulfil their roles, boards need the right mix of knowledge, skills and experience to hold executive leaders to account. But this alone is not sufficient. Schools and trusts operate in a complex system characterised by interconnectedness, non-linearity, and emergent properties. The ‘wicked’ problems in education (that is, those without a single obvious solution, connected to other problems and subject to many interpretations) require boards and executive teams to become comfortable with ambiguity and equipped to lead through complexity.

Complex problems trigger a process of comprehending a situation and deciding how to act that is called ‘sensemaking’. Sensemaking has long been considered a

key leadership capability.<sup>4</sup> It in turn is impacted by stages of adult ego development, marked by an increased ability to:

- grasp the complex nature of problems
- broaden the scope of factors and variables under consideration
- recognise the wider historical context of issues
- distinguish between process and outcome
- tolerate ambiguity and lack of predictability
- understand interdependence and interconnectedness
- appreciate and respect individuality and alternative points of view
- recognise and plan for the emergence of new factors

A nuanced board assessment will therefore provide a shared language to describe the board’s thought architecture and the impact this has on reaching the best possible decisions. Once the board’s thought architecture is surfaced, scaffolds and supports can be put in place to encourage complexity thinking. See the *Post self-assessment* section later on.

Sensemaking	Linear or reductionist thinking	Advanced complexity thinking	Assessment and notes
Complexity	Minimising the complexity of issues; treating problems as straightforward or isolated.	Recognising and embracing complexity, acknowledging ambiguity, interdependence, and the unique nature of each situation.	
Timeframe	Focusing narrowly on immediate or recent aspects of the issue.	Considering the historical context and longer timeframes; using past patterns and developments to inform present understanding and decision-making.	

<sup>3</sup> Gilbride, N (2025), The challenges of teaching complexity sciences to novice learners in public administration. *Teaching Public Administration*, Vol. 0(0) 1-14

<sup>4</sup> Ancona, D (2005), *Leadership in an Age of Uncertainty*. MIT Leadership Center

Sensemaking	Linear or reductionist thinking	Advanced complexity thinking	Assessment and notes
<b>Approach</b>	Applying linear, standard frameworks without adaptation; over-reliance on prior assumptions.	Engaging multiple valid perspectives; challenging assumptions; inviting diverse input to co-create a shared understanding of the situation.	
<b>Scope</b>	Reducing the issue to a narrow set of variables; addressing only visible symptoms.	Investigating how the issue is connected to broader organisational systems; prioritising identifying root causes and system-wide implications.	
<b>Data and information</b>	Relying predominantly on hard data and input from formal authority figures (such as the executive team).	Seeking diverse data types and perspectives (qualitative, informal, external); layering professional judgement onto data; valuing insights from multiple stakeholders across the organisation.	
<b>Emerging factors</b>	Ignoring or underestimating evolving dynamics; lacking mechanisms to revisit assumptions or decisions.	Actively monitoring for change; acknowledging uncertainty and unpredictability; building in processes to reassess and adapt as new information emerges.	
<b>Responses to issues</b>	Selecting responses that treat symptoms or short-term fixes; lacking systemic analysis.	Prioritising responses that address root causes; understanding that every response involves trade offs; accepting that responses may cease to work or cause additional problems and will need to evolve; supporting experimentation and continuous learning.	

Sensemaking	Linear or reductionist thinking	Advanced complexity thinking	Assessment and notes
<b>Response time</b>	Emphasising immediate action without reflection; equating speed with effectiveness.	Balancing timeliness with reflection; responding with urgency where needed but incorporating thoughtful analysis and strategic foresight.	

# Board dynamics

Principle 2 of the ATGC states “The Board recognises, respects and welcomes diverse, different and, at times, conflicting views as they are applied to the furtherance of the Academy Trust’s charitable Objects.” Principle 6 adds, “Advancing equality, diversity and inclusion matters helps a Board to make better decisions.”

In addition to the need for diversity of thought, background and perspective,

decades of research by Professor Anita Woolley and others has consistently found that high functioning collective intelligence emerges through the interplay of bottom-up and top-down processes.<sup>5</sup> Bottom-up processes draw on the characteristics of individual members, while top-down processes involve the structures, norms, and routines that shape group behaviour. Together, these dynamics determine how effectively a group coordinates, collaborates, and makes decisions.



Reactive practice	Pre-emptive practice	Pro-active practice	Assessment and notes
<b>Relationship with executive leaders</b>			
Board is passive; meetings are dominated by CEO/executive who presents pre-determined decisions; little or no challenge.	Board provides constructive feedback and acts as a sounding board for executive options.	Board and executive work in partnership; board contributes strategic expertise and co-develops direction with executive.	
<b>Power dynamics</b>			
Imbalance among trustees; some dominate agenda and discussions (for example, long-serving chair or trustees); others feel excluded.	All trustees are encouraged to contribute; leadership actively draws in quieter or newer members.	Inclusive dynamic where all voices are respected and valued; newer or less experienced trustees are supported to shape board direction.	
<b>Inclusion</b>			
Some trustees feel marginalised or unable to participate; ‘in group’ dynamics may exist.	Board is conscious of diversity and strives to include a range of perspectives.	Board proactively cultivates inclusion through intentional upskilling, role allocation, and pre-meeting preparation for full participation.	

<sup>5</sup> Woolley et al (2010), Evidence for a collective intelligence factor in the performance of human groups. *Science*, Vol. 330, Issue 6004; Woolley et al (2015), *Collective intelligence and group performance*. The Association for Psychological Science



Reactive practice	Pre-emptive practice	Pro-active practice	Assessment and notes
<b>Trust and respect</b>			
Trustees show lack of trust or respect toward one another; executive lacks respect for board due to perception as 'non-educationalists'.	Trustees, especially the chair, model respect and engage in constructive debate.	Strong mutual respect underpins all relationships; informal social interaction supports team cohesion and trust.	
<b>Factions</b>			
Factions or cliques exist within the board (for example, long-standing versus newer trustees); leads to dysfunction and division.	Board operates collaboratively; differences are aired and addressed respectfully.	Board culture actively prevents entrenchment; reflective practice and structured dialogue ensure unity and forward focus.	
<b>Open to dissent</b>			
Disagreement is shut down; groupthink prevails; concerns not acknowledged or acted upon.	Board maintains a 'speak up' culture; dissent is tolerated and occasionally voiced.	Dissent is welcomed and encouraged; trustees are expected to play devil's advocate to test thinking and avoid blind spots.	

## Board structure

Principle 4 of the ATGC encourages boards to “establish processes by which its committees provide the relevant information to the Board that enables it to retain oversight of all aspects of the Trust’s work.”

Effective trust boards recognise that they do not operate in a vacuum and that

the design of their governance community – with appropriate delegations and information flows – deeply impacts the effectiveness of their own decision making. They ensure clarity about roles and responsibilities and effectively delegate responsibilities while retaining collective decision making and accountability.



Reactive practice	Pre-emptive practice	Pro-active practice	Assessment and notes
<b>Clarity of roles</b>			
Overlapping or unclear roles and responsibilities; committees operate in silos.	Committee roles and remits are clear and aligned with scheme of delegation.	Structure reviewed regularly for fitness-for-purpose; dynamic alignment with strategy and operational context.	
<b>Delegation and reporting</b>			
Delegation to committees is ad hoc; limited reporting lines.	Committees receive delegated responsibility with regular reporting to the board.	Strong, accountable committee system with feedback loops; trust between board and committees is high.	
<b>Local governance</b>			
Local governance is tokenistic or underutilised; those involved lack clarity on their role in the governance community; no meaningful connection to trustees and other layers of governance.	Defined role for local tiers; some input into board assurance.	Local governance provides robust insight and local accountability and contributes valued input to board assurance, particularly on the school context, stakeholder voice and local knowledge.	

Reactive practice	Pre-emptive practice	Pro-active practice	Assessment and notes
<b>Review of structure</b>			
No regular review of governance structures or schemes of delegation.	Governance structure reviewed annually with minor refinements.	Structures are adapted proactively in response to strategic shifts and sector change (for example, growth, regulation).	

## Board leadership

Principle 2 of the ATGC states “The Chair provides leadership to the Board including taking responsibility for ensuring it has agreed priorities, appropriate structures, processes and a productive culture and has Directors who are able to govern well and add value to the Academy Trust.”

The chair enables the board to work as an effective team by developing strong working relationships between board members and with the governance professional, ensuring sufficient quality discussion and encouraging constructive challenge.



Reactive practice	Pre-emptive practice	Pro-active practice	Assessment and notes
<b>Agenda setting</b>			
Chair allows executive to drive agenda setting and provides minimal input; governance professional's contribution is purely administrative.	Chair has a good relationship with the governance professional and works with them and the executive to shape agendas.	Chair actively seeks the governance professional's advice in shaping agendas, ensuring their input is respected by the executive and their expertise is embedded in the process.	
<b>Meeting facilitation</b>			
Chair dominates discussions or defers excessively to executive; lacks structure.	Chair manages time well, encourages participation, follows agenda and supports constructive challenge.	Chair nurtures team dynamics, fosters inclusive discussion, and flexes style to maximise contribution and insight.	
<b>Board engagement</b>			
Low attendance, limited participation; lack of commitment to board role.	Reasonable attendance and preparation; most trustees contribute actively.	High engagement across all trustees; preparation is thorough, with deep understanding of papers and key issues.	

Reactive practice	Pre-emptive practice	Pro-active practice	Assessment and notes
<b>Meeting dynamics</b>			
Meetings are unfocused, becoming rushed or overly lengthy, with unclear outcomes.	Meetings are adequately structured, with action points and follow-up.	Meetings are dynamic, generative, and focused on value-add strategic discussion.	
<b>Chair's development</b>			
No feedback or development opportunities for the chair.	Chair receives periodic informal feedback from trustees.	Chair seeks and welcomes 360° reviews; actively develops leadership approach through mentoring, reflection, and professional development.	

# Board oversight and direction

Principle 4 of the ATGC states “Where the Board has delegated functions, it needs to implement suitable financial and related controls, performance oversight and reporting arrangements to make sure it oversees these matters effectively.”

Effective board oversight depends on a positive, trusting relationship with the executive team, underpinned by the right balance of challenge and support.

It requires clarity about the boundary between strategic leadership and operational management, ensuring the board stays focused on direction rather than delivery. Central to this is asking for the right reporting, information, and data – enough to provide assurance and insight without straying into day-to-day control and creating ‘fluffload’ for both the board and the executive leadership.



Reactive practice	Pre-emptive practice	Pro-active practice	Assessment and notes
Relationship with governance professional			
Governance professional fulfils a purely administrative role, distributing papers and taking minutes.	Board works with the governance professional and executive to drive strategic assurance-focused reporting.	Board actively empowers the governance professional to shape governance delivery that is streamlined, strategic, insightful and holistic in outlook.	
Relationship with executive			
Executive controls flow of information; board receives curated updates.	Board requests evidence-led assurance and challenges constructively.	Open dialogue; board has confidence in asking the ‘third question’; co-constructs strategic direction.	
Information and data			
Board is overwhelmed by data or receives limited insight; focuses on inputs and compliance.	Board requests only strategic-level data with occasional deep dives.	Board is insight-led; data and narrative used to test assumptions and drive continuous improvement.	

Reactive practice	Pre-emptive practice	Pro-active practice	Assessment and notes
<b>Strategic focus</b>			
Meetings dominated by operational detail or retrospective performance.	Balanced focus between strategic planning and oversight of delivery.	Future-oriented, with board setting clear direction, and tracking impact against strategic outcomes.	
<b>Reporting: content</b>			
Long reports filled with descriptive operational detail; weak links to strategy or principal risks; little analysis.	Shorter core paper with a clear exec summary; direct line to strategic priorities and risk; detail moved to appendices.	Insight-rich, future-oriented synthesis that surfaces the 'so what', options, and implications for strategy and risk.	
<b>Reporting: ask and option</b>			
No explicit ask; papers inform rather than enable decisions; options absent or uncosted.	Clear purpose and ask; at least one option with pros, cons, and resource or risk implications.	Crisp recommendation framed against options and consequences; explicit assurance or decision sought, with success measures.	
<b>Reporting: timing and cycle</b>			
Packs issued late; ad hoc schedule; the wrong forum receives the wrong information.	Issued at least one week ahead; standard formats; mapped to the annual plan and scheme of delegation.	Reporting calendar integrated with the governance cycle so the right insight reaches the right forum at the right time; routine feedback improves paper quality.	

## Board risk management

Principle 4 of the ATGC states “The Board promotes a culture of sound management of resources whilst understanding that being over-cautious and risk averse can itself be a risk and hinder innovation and progress.”

Boards play a critical role in the approach to risk governance, taking primary responsibility for ensuring robust processes to identify, review, and manage risks.

This extends beyond compliance to fostering a culture of risk awareness across the organisation. Effective oversight also means aligning risk management and risk appetite with strategic priorities, so that risk becomes an enabler of ambition rather than a brake on progress.



Reactive practice	Pre-emptive practice	Pro-active practice	Assessment and notes
<b>Risk identification</b>			
Risk register is static, compliance-driven, or executive-owned.	Risk reviewed regularly by board; relevant and aligned to priorities.	Risk is dynamic; strategic risks anticipated and stress-tested by board with executive input.	
<b>Risk appetite</b>			
No defined risk appetite; decisions driven by fear of failure.	Some clarity on tolerance levels; risk appetite statement reviewed annually.	Risk appetite embedded in decision-making; board uses it as a strategic tool.	
<b>Culture of risk awareness</b>			
Risk seen as a ‘negative’ or purely financial.	Risk is recognised in operational and strategic domains throughout the organisation.	Board cultivates positive risk culture; embraces intelligent risk-taking for innovation and growth.	



# Board openness and accountability

Principle 7 of the ATGC states “Making accountability real, through genuine and open two-way communication that celebrates success and demonstrates willingness to learn from mistakes, helps to build trust and confidence, and earns and maintains legitimacy.”

Effective boards are highly emotionally intelligent, taking great care to nurture and

foster trusting and meaningful relationships with the executive and their stakeholders, encouraging openness and a willingness to learn from mistakes. Governance through volunteers is inherently civic in nature and effective trust boards maintain that civic outlook, looking beyond their own schools and trust and considering the health and wellbeing of the entire community in which their trust operates.



Reactive practice	Pre-emptive practice	Pro-active practice	Assessment and notes
<b>Stakeholder engagement</b>			
Engagement is one-way, reactive, or superficial (for example, surveys with no feedback loop).	Clear mechanisms to hear from key stakeholders; feedback reviewed and acted upon.	Stakeholders co-create aspects of trust strategy; feedback actively shapes board assurance.	
<b>Transparency</b>			
Board operates in isolation; decisions not communicated or justified.	Basic communication through reports, websites, newsletters.	Transparent culture with meaningful updates and reporting; clear rationale for decisions, communicated well.	
<b>Accountability</b>			
Culture of defensiveness; limited mechanisms for raising concerns.	Whistleblowing and complaints processes in place and known; the value of psychological safety is understood.	Psychological safety is embedded; stakeholder challenge is welcomed and seen as learning opportunity.	

Reactive practice	Pre-emptive practice	Pro-active practice	Assessment and notes
<b>Civic outlook</b>			
Board focuses solely on its own schools and narrow outcomes defined by regulators.	Ad hoc external partnerships and collaborative relationships exist; workforce development considers the trust's role as an employer in the community; trust seeking to scale impact and not just through growth.	Strategic partnerships are built with external actors to address key barriers; the trust is a visible anchor institution; progress is measured against broad outcomes for all children in communities served.	

## Board development and renewal

Next-gen governance cannot happen without a skilled and knowledgeable governance professional leading the way. Together, they work with the chair and executive to put in place processes for building and supporting the board that are intimately connected to its effectiveness. The aim is for practice to evolve

from reactive and compliance-driven approaches to proactive, strategic, and future-focused recruitment and development.



Reactive practice	Pre-emptive practice	Pro-active practice	Assessment and notes
<b>Appointment</b>			
Appointments made through informal networks or agency only; no clear link to strategic need; no nominations committee.	Nominations committee oversees recruitment; mix of open and agency routes; aligned to strategic priorities.	Nominations committee recruits for future-facing needs, including behavioural competencies and adaptability; governance structure flexes with strategic evolution.	
<b>Induction, training and development</b>			
Minimal or compliance-based induction; training is ad hoc or tick-box.	Structured programme aligned to strategic needs; annual refresh; training uptake tracked.	Development focuses on culture, decision-making, and board dynamics; trustees embrace 360° developmental feedback and reflective practice.	
<b>Evaluation, composition and design</b>			
Static skills audit used to 'fill gaps' in traditional functional roles.	Annual board and individual evaluations feed into recruitment and development; skills, experience and behaviours reviewed.	Board composition is designed intentionally for strategic agility; evaluation includes interpersonal dynamics and diversity of thought, background and perspective.	

Reactive practice	Pre-emptive practice	Pro-active practice	Assessment and notes
<b>Succession planning</b>			
Reactive; vacancies filled as they arise without forward planning.	Gaps anticipated based on upcoming needs; short/medium-term succession mapped against strategy.	Proactive succession plan with three time horizons (emergency, near-term, long-term); includes leadership development and behavioural fit.	
<b>Re-appointment</b>			
Routine re-appointment unless maximum term reached; limited consideration of ongoing suitability.	Re-appointment based on contribution, required skills and alignment to trust priorities.	Re-appointments assessed against evolving structure and culture; interpersonal dynamics and trustee impact explicitly considered.	

## Post self-assessment action

### Board development plan

Having surfaced the board's practice, a board development plan can be put in place to address areas where practice can improve. Capacity will naturally limit the ability to address everything immediately, so prioritising is key and allowing an evolving plan to run from year to year will allow the board to take a longer-term view of its own progress.

For many boards, a good first developmental step will be team trust-building exercises. The time and effort spent on these exercises will pay enormous dividends.

### Scaffolds and support structures

The complex nature of trust governance demands that boards work at a very high level of performance – levels that place upward pressure on adult ego development and cognitive load. Boards composed of busy volunteers are unlikely to meet this demand without scaffolds and structured supports. These are not a 'nice to have', they are essential to the healthy functioning of a board. Much like in a classroom, the aim is to set high aspirations and put in place support structures and scaffolds to enable progress.

Time is the board's most valuable and scarce commodity. Enabling higher functioning collective intelligence begins with better time management and laser sharp agenda planning. A ruthless review of the board's annual agenda cycle is a necessary step:

- **Prioritise:** Acknowledge that boards simply cannot discuss everything in depth and prioritise those items that carry the greatest risk and/or involve complex problems that are at the forefront of the executive leaders' minds
- **Calculate:** Add up the number of hours of board time in a year (including committees) and reconfigure the meeting cycle to maximise time for deeper strategic discussions. For an example of how board meeting time has been successfully maximised, see the case study involving Castle Phoenix Trust in [Effective board reporting](#).
- **Consent agendas:** Identify every item that can be moved to a 'consent agenda' (where routine, non-controversial items are grouped together and passed with a single motion); these can be circulated outside of the main meeting cycle and consent gathered electronically or in short and sharp online meetings, ensuring a documented decision-making audit trail
- **Agenda order:** Start agendas with strategic and multifaceted issues that require deeper discussion to ensure the board is fresh and there is sufficient time to focus on what matters most, with any routine items moved to the end. Board Intelligence suggest using the 'jar of life' approach to agenda planning.

The next step is to build scaffolds and support structures into board reporting, both to assist executive leaders in drafting concise but impactful reports and to prompt the board to engage in more advanced group discussion. See the *Board oversight and direction* section for pro-active practice on reporting.



Every board report template could include the same built-in sections to facilitate rich discussion:

- **Executive summary** setting out the 'problem statement', potential responses, the specific ask of trustees (discussion, information, or decision) and strategic framing questions to direct attention and discussion, as well as a link to the relevant risk(s) on the risk register
- **'Looking back'** section providing a brief summary of previous performance, including any relevant historical context
- **'Looking forward'** section providing a brief overview of potential opportunities, as well as emerging risks or concerns; this will include any 'trade-offs' from responses and any adjustments that might need to be made
- **'Looking from above'** section taking a strategic 'helicopter' view of the problem, including a variety of stakeholder perspectives
- **'Looking out'** section addressing external factors that should be taken into consideration

Finally, meeting structures and practices should be amended to eliminate fluffload. To save time in the meeting, consider allowing trustees to pose clarification questions and receive answers in advance of the meeting on a shared governance platform.

At the meeting, 'taken as read' should be enforced and the chair should immediately guide discussion towards the strategic framing questions set out in the report. The chair should use 'generous authority', interrupting when necessary to bring discussion back on track (especially if it veers into the operational), eliminating time wasted on 'agreeing', and drawing out more reticent trustee voices. The chair could also use a set list of prompts to use at various points in the discussion, including:

- What haven't we asked?
- Have we looked at this from all angles and considered multiple perspectives (especially those of stakeholders at the 'coal face')?
- What assumptions and beliefs underpin the conclusions we have made?
- How can we test these assumptions?
- Where have we unknowingly 'filled the gaps'?
- Where might small changes have big effects?
- Are there patterns emerging and what are they?
- What interdependencies might affect this decision?
- What unintended consequences should we anticipate from our responses?
- What are the implications for our trust strategy?

These are just some examples of scaffolds and support structures that boards could use to good effect. To discover more shared practice from your colleagues, make sure to join CST's [Governance and trustee professional community](#).

## Further resources and support from CST

CST offers a wide range of support for trusts, including [online guidance documents](#), [training courses](#), [conferences](#), and [bespoke consultancy](#), including advising on strategy and processes around board effectiveness.

All of our services are backed by CST's experience as the national sector body and member organisation for school trusts, and a recognised thought leader regularly called on by government, policy makers, and trust leaders.

They have all been specifically tailored from the ground-up for academy trusts.

Support of particular relevance to board effectiveness include:

- [External reviews of governance](#): For an in-depth independent assessment of your trust's governance arrangements.
- [Chair mentoring](#): CST's mentoring services give trust chairs personalised strategic support from system-leading experts.
- [Strategy development](#): To facilitate your vision and strategy development.
- [Governance structures](#): This very focused review is helpful when trusts need an independent assessment of their board structure and the interaction between the layers of governance in a trust.
- [Executive performance review](#): To support you in the development and delivery of your trust's process, drawing upon our deep understanding of the executive role, as defined in our sector-leading guidance on the Core responsibilities of a school trust CEO.
- [Governance training](#): We offer training for members, trustees, and board chairs, and local committees, to help ensure governance excellence.





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