Confederation of School Trusts

CST GUIDANCE: A TOOL FOR BOARD EVALUATION

The [Competency Framework for Governance](#) (DfE 2017) sets out the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to be a governor or trustee. However, governors or trustees are more than a loose group of knowledgeable, skilled and capable people working together. They also form a corporate entity – the trust board. CST's tool for board evaluation provides a way of assessing the corporate competence of the board, rather than the individuals on it.

Introduction

Board evaluation is too often viewed as a compliance activity — a mechanical process of checking off items on a list with little real value for the board. But meaningful evaluation can be transformational.

CST has developed a board performance evaluation tool that we believe can be used to engage the board in meaningful evaluation. It is based on the Competency Framework for Governance, but simplifies the framework and makes the focus of evaluation the competence of *the board* as a corporate entity rather than the individuals on it.

The table below sets out the performance evaluation framework.

Annex A offers a card-sort exercise and prioritisation matrix that the whole board can use as an evaluation activity. The prioritisation matrix can then be used to develop a board action plan or board development plan. The advantage of this exercise is that it creates dialogue and encourages the active engagement and participation of all trustees.

CST can also offer a "survey monkey" facility for a small administrative fee. The advantage of this approach is that responses to the evaluation tool are anonymous.

The board performance evaluation framework

Competence	Domains of competence
Setting direction	The Board: • Thinks strategically • Sets direction • Plans, prioritises, monitors progress • Understands change management
Culture, values and ethos	The Board: • Determines organisational values and culture • Ensures conduct and operation of the Board and wider organisation embodies culture, values, ethos • Ensures that policy and practice align with the organisation's culture, values and ethos
Decision-making	The Board: • Identifies most likely option to achieve the organisation's goals and objectives • Puts aside vested or personal interests to make decisions that are in the best interests of all pupils/students • Acts with honesty, integrity and objectivity /takes decisions impartially
Collaborative working	The Board: • Understands views/ needs of parents • Enables productive relationships • Builds trust and shared ownership • Is credible, open and honest

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Risk management	**The Board:** • **Knows the principles and processes of risk management** • **Identifies, evaluates and monitors risk** • **Ensures risks are aligned with strategic priorities** • **Avoids conflicts of interest**
Educational improvement	The Board: • Sets clear expectations re the process of improvement and intended outcomes • Defines the range and format of information and data needed in order to hold executive leaders to account
Analysis of data	The Board: • Uses published data to understand which areas of performance need improvement • Questions leaders on whether they are collecting the right data • Challenges leaders re purposeful, efficient and valid assessment data
Financial frameworks/ accountability	The Board: • Ensures integrity of financial information received by the board • Establishes robust financial controls • Is rigorous in questioning whether enough is being done to drive efficiency and align budgets to priorities
Financial management	The Board: • Assimilates financial implications of priorities and use this to make decisions about funding • Interprets financial data and asks informed questions about income, expenditure and resource allocation and alignment with the strategic plan priorities
Staffing and performance management	The Board: • Ensures that the staffing and leadership structures are fit for purpose • Takes responsibility for pay policy • Considers implication of pay decisions in the context of the spending plan

External accountability	The Board: • Ensures systems are in place to meet the demands of scrutiny • Ensures the board is accessible and answerable to parents etc. • Uses relevant data/ information to present verbal and written responses to external scrutiny
Building an effective team	The Board: • Is honest, reflective and self-critical • Demonstrates professional ethics, values and sound judgement • Recognises the importance of the clerk/governance professional company secretary's role in advising the board
Structures of governance	The Board: • Understands roles and responsibilities • Is able to contribute to the design of governance and committee structures that are fit for purpose and appropriate to the scale and complexity of the organisation
Statutory/ contractual requirements	The Board: • Knows the board's legal responsibilities and accountabilities • Identifies when specialist advice may be required • Identifies non-compliance
Self-review	The Board: • Demonstrates the agreed values and culture of the organisation and what impact individual contribution is making to effective governance • Is outward facing and focused on learning from others to improve practice
Board effectiveness	The Board: • Evaluates the impact of its decisions on pupil outcomes • Utilises feedback from external scrutiny to inform decisions about its development • Undertakes self-evaluation to ensure board development

Card sort and prioritisation matrix

The shapes in Annex A can be printed and cut out as cards and then used in pairs or groups of three trustees as a card sort exercise. Trustees should pick the top six areas of competence where they believe the board is *not* performing well.

These are then sorted using the prioritisation matrix below. The prioritisation matrix is then compared across the different groups of trustees and the board arrives at an agreed view.

The agreed prioritisation matrix is then used to develop a board action plan/ board development plan.
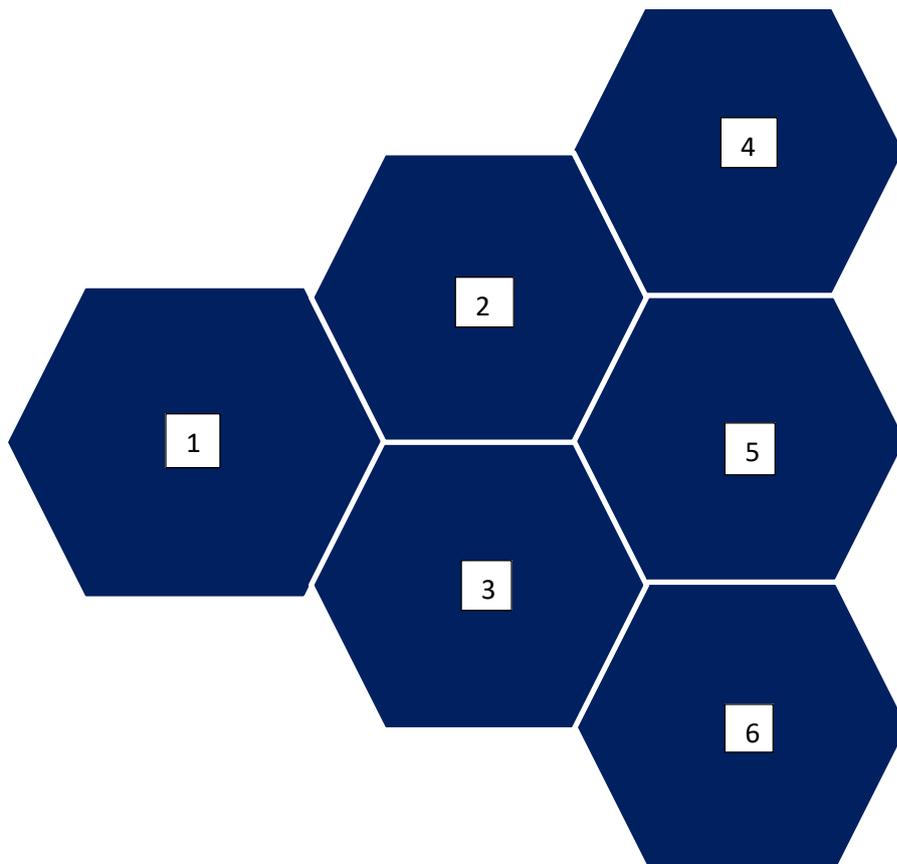
Annex A: Card Sort

Setting direction

Thinks strategically

Sets direction

Plans, prioritises, monitors progress

Understands change management

Culture, values and ethos

Determines organisational values and culture

Ensures conduct and operation of the Board embodies culture, values, ethos

Ensures that policy and practice align with the organisation's culture, values and ethos

Decision-making

Identifies most likely option to achieve the organisation's goals and objectives

Puts aside vested or personal interests to make decisions that are in the best interests of all pupils/students

Acts with honesty, integrity and objectivity /takes decisions impartially

Collaborative working

Understands views/ needs of parents

Enables productive relationships

Builds trust and shared ownership

Is credible, open and honest

Risk management

Knows principles/ processes of risk management

Identifies, evaluates and monitors risk

Ensures risks are aligned with strategic priorities

Avoids conflicts of interest

Educational improvement

Sets clear expectations re the process of improvement and intended outcomes

Defines the range and format of information and data needed in order to hold executive leaders to account

Analysis of data

Uses published data to understand which areas of performance need improvement

Questions leaders on whether they are collecting the right data

Challenges leaders re purposeful, efficient and valid assessment data

Financial frameworks/ accountability

Ensures integrity of financial information received by the board

Establishes robust financial controls

Is rigorous in questioning whether enough is being done to drive efficiency and align budgets to priorities

Financial management

Assimilates financial implications of priorities and uses this to make decisions about funding

Interprets financial data and asks informed questions about income, expenditure and resource allocation and alignment with the strategic plan priorities

Staffing and performance management

Ensures that the staffing and leadership structures are fit for purpose

Takes responsibility for pay policy

Considers implication of pay decisions in the context of the spending plan

External accountability

Ensures systems are in place to meet the demands of scrutiny

Ensures the board is accessible and answerable to parents etc.

Uses relevant data/ information to present verbal and written responses to external scrutiny

Building an effective team

Is honest, reflective and self-critical

Demonstrates professional ethics, values and sound judgement

Recognises the importance of the clerk/governance professional role in advising the board

Structures of governance

Understands roles and responsibilities

Is able to contribute to the design of governance and committee structures that are fit for purpose and appropriate to the scale and complexity of the organisation

Statutory/ contractual requirements

Knows the board's legal responsibilities and accountabilities

Identifies when specialist advice may be required

Identifies non-compliance

Self-review

Demonstrates the agreed values and culture of the organisation and what impact individual contribution is making to effective governance

Is outward facing and focused on learning from others to improve practice

Board effectiveness

Evaluates the impact of the board's decisions on pupil outcomes

Utilises feedback from external scrutiny to inform decisions about board development

Undertakes self-evaluation to ensure board development