

Model chair role description

For chairs of governing boards of schools and academy trusts

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National Governance Association

The National Governance Association (NGA) is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and clerks of state schools in England.

We are an independent, not-for-profit charity that aims to improve the educational standards and wellbeing of young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. We are expert leaders in school and trust governance, providing information, advice and guidance, professional development and e-learning.

We represent the views of governors, trustees and clerks at a national level and work closely with, and lobby, UK government and educational bodies.

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The chair of the governing board is a leadership role that provides clear direction to the governing board who work as a team to challenge, support and contribute to the strategic leadership of the school.

Governing boards in all types of schools should focus on their core functions:

1. ensuring there is clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
2. holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils and the performance management of staff
3. overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent
4. ensuring the voices of stakeholders are heard

Strategic and leadership responsibilities

The chair provides strategic leadership that allows governors/trustees to fulfil their functions by:

- ensuring that there are transparent and effective processes for recruiting and inducting a new headteacher/chief executive
- ensuring appropriate governor/trustee involvement in the recruitment of senior leaders
- ensuring the board has good knowledge of the school(s) and has mechanisms in place to obtain and listen to the views of parents, pupils and staff
- ensuring that the governing board sets a clear vision and strategy for the school(s)
- ensuring that the governing board and headteacher have a shared vision and sense of purpose
- leading the board in monitoring the headteacher/chief executive's implementation of the strategy
- setting the culture of the governing board, balancing and valuing both the support and challenge responsibilities
- ensuring the board acts as a team
- ensuring that there is a succession plan for the chair, vice chair and any committee chairs

Wider leadership responsibilities

The chair has wider leadership responsibilities associated with the role and status of lead governor/trustee on the board, such as:

- being a first point of contact and playing a leading role in employment matters as required by the adopted procedures of the school/trust e.g. grievance, disciplinary, capability
- where required, acting as a first point of contact and respondent in matters raised with the school or trust by external bodies e.g. LA, DfE, ESFA
- where required, representing the governing board in its dealings with external partners and be an advocate for the school/trust
- attend school events as appropriate and encourage other governors to do so

Developing the team

Governing boards need a range of skills and knowledge to carry out their functions effectively. It is the responsibility of the board's chair to:

- ensure the board has the required skills and commitment to govern well, and that appointments made fill any identified skills gaps and ensure a diverse team
- ensure all members of the board have a thorough understanding of their role and receive appropriate induction and ongoing development as required
- ensure that board members are involved, feel valued and encourage their development
- ensure members of the board act reasonably and in line with the board's agreed code of conduct
- develop a good working relationship with the vice chair, keeping them fully informed and delegating tasks as appropriate



Working with school leaders

Chairs and school leaders (headteachers in schools and the chief executive of a trust) must develop effective working practices which are mutually supportive. It is the responsibility of chair to:

- ensure that the governing board fulfils its duty of care to the headteacher/chief executive, including ensuring a safe and secure working environment, a reasonable work-life balance, and support for their wellbeing
- ensure all board members concentrate on their strategic role and hold the headteacher/chief executive to account
- build and encourage a professional relationship with the headteacher/chief executive which allows for honest conversations, acting as a sounding board and ensuring there are no surprises at meetings
- meet regularly (normally monthly) with the headteacher/chief executive
- oversee and participate in the headteacher/chief executive's performance review, ensuring that appropriate continuing professional development (CPD) is provided
- ensure that the headteacher/chief executive provides staff with an understanding of the role of the governing board and acts as link between the two

Influencing improvement and achieving outcomes

The board's activities should be focused on school / trust improvement and achieving the best outcomes for pupils. The chair of the board is expected to:

- ensure the board is involved at a strategic level in the school's self-evaluation process and that this feeds into its key priorities
- ensure the board's business is focused on the strategic priorities
- collaborate with school leaders to ensure the board has the information it needs to monitor the implementation of policies; pupil attainment and progress and the financial health and sustainability of the school or trust
- evaluate and question information in order to identify appropriate actions, modelling this approach for other board members
- take the lead in representing the governing board at relevant external meetings with agencies such as Ofsted, the DfE and the local authority

Leading governing board business

Chairs are responsible for the smooth and effective running of board meetings and so are required to:

- ensure that the governing board appoints a professional clerk capable of advising the board on its functions and relevant procedure
- ensure that a development and appraisal process is in place for the clerk that includes a conversation about the pay and remuneration they receive
- work with the clerk and the headteacher/chief executive to plan for board meetings, ensuring that agendas focus on the board's key responsibilities and strategic priorities and reduce unnecessary paperwork
- chair meetings effectively and promote an open culture on the governing board that allows ideas and discussion to thrive while ensuring clear decisions are reached as quickly as possible
- collaborate with the clerk to establish effective working procedures and sound committee structures
- ensure that decisions taken at the meetings of the governing board are implemented
- ensure that complaints made to the governing board are dealt with in a timely and effective manner through the adopted complaints procedure



Expenses

Governors and trustees should receive out of pocket expenses incurred as a result of fulfilling their role and NGA recommends that boards have such an expenses policy. Payments can cover incidental expenses, such as travel and dependency care, but not loss of earnings.