

NGA Skills audit

For maintained school and federation governors

Effective governance requires a board with a range of knowledge and skills. No individual will have all the necessary skills and competences. The audit also offers boards an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of their governance.

For those serving on academy committees (local government)

Refer to the scheme of delegation for your trust. This document provides guidance on how to complete the audit.

How to complete this audit

1. Enter your scores (1 to 4) or comments (where prompted). Refer to the guidance provided to complete the audit.
2. Reflect on your responses: can you identify any areas for improvement? Your chair and governance professional (clerk to the board) should discuss your responses with you.
3. The board's scores should then be collated and evaluated by the chair and governance professional.

Section 1a. Strategic leadership

These statements relate to the core function of boards to set vision and strategic direction.

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Section 1b. Accountability These are the competencies that the board needs in order to hold executive leaders to account for the educational and financial performance of the organisation.	6
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1c. People People that govern need to form positive working relationships with their colleagues to function well as part of a team.	11
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1d. Structures Understanding governance structures is vital to avoid unclear and overlapping responsibilities that can lead to dysfunctional or ineffective governance arrangements.	13
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1e. Compliance All those involved in governance need to understand the legal frameworks and context in which the organisation operates, and all of the requirements with which it must comply.	16
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2. Equality, diversity and inclusion This section is about the board's role in encouraging diversity and ensuring equality: in determining ethos and culture; when recruiting executive and senior leaders; as employers of all staff; and in evaluating the impact of decisions on pupils and other stakeholders.	20

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3. Self-evaluation Reflect on your contribution to your governance role and identify further development opportunities.	27
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Are you an NGA member?

NGA members have instant access to the Knowledge Centre, the area of our website that contains a wealth of guidance and practical resources to support effective governance. Annual NGA membership starts at just £99 per governing board.

[Find out more about NGA membership](#)

s, trustees of single academy trusts and academy committees

nowledge, skills, perspectives and backgrounds. This enables governors and trustees to ask the right que
tencies; the board is a team and this audit is a way of assessing the overall breadth and depth of the bo
their experience and understanding of the community they serve and their capacity to lead an inclusive

ing boards):

document explains your responsibilities and will help you to identify those statements in the skills audit w

ted) into the highlighted boxes below.

[A printable PDF version of the guidance can be downloaded here.](#)

where you need to prioritise further development? The guidance provided includes links to helpful resc
rd) will also be able to help you access training and development.

ted using the NGA skills dashboard - we recommend that this is carried out by your governance profes

Statement	Enter a score (1 to 4) below 1 = strong disagreement 4 = strong agreement
I have governing experience in a school or in a different sector	
I am/have been chair of a board or committee	

I have experience and expertise in developing a strategy	
I know what the school's strategic priorities are	
I can identify key risks and evaluate their potential impact	
I am aware of how the school is funded and what the funding is spent on	
I can interpret budget monitoring reports and ask relevant questions	
I understand how the school's curriculum meets the needs of all pupils	

I understand how my governing board engages with stakeholders – pupils, parents, staff and the wider community – and how this informs decisions	
I feel confident being part of the panel that conducts headteacher appraisal	
I know how to build the knowledge I need to be effective in my governance role	
I can build positive, collaborative relationships with members of my board	
I understand the strategic nature of the board's role and what governing boards and school leaders should expect from each other.	
I know what the governing board's core functions are	

I understand how the board delegates its work	
I feel confident being part of a panel to make decisions (such as on pupil exclusions or complaints)	
I know how the board meets its legal and compliance responsibilities	
I feel able to speak up if I am concerned about non-compliance and unethical behaviour	
I can identify when independent, expert advice may be required	
I know and empathise with the community served by the school	

I understand the legal responsibilities of governing boards in relation to equalities.	
I have influenced an organisation's culture of equality and diversity (through communication, appropriate challenge, awareness raising or developing policies and practices).	
I have knowledge, experience or training that will help me to promote diversity and inclusion.	
I can recognise and challenge behaviour, attitudes, policy and practice which go against the inclusive culture we want for our school.	
I understand how to use relevant data and insight to identify and resolve issues relating to inequality.	

<p>Is there any support or training you would like to engage in to help you promote equality and diversity in your school?</p>	<p><i>[Insert comments here]</i></p>
<p>What are the areas you feel you need to prioritise to develop your governance knowledge and skills?</p>	<p><i>[Insert comments here]</i></p>
<p>Are there any additional areas of the board's responsibilities which you would like to contribute to in the future?</p>	<p><i>[Insert comments here]</i></p>
<p>OPTIONAL: Do you have any further comments on your development needs and or your continuing contribution to the governing board?</p>	<p><i>[Insert comments here]</i></p>

NGA consultancy is here to help

If your board has identified a number of gaps in skills or competency, NGA's team of knowledgeable and experienced governance consultants are available to provide bespoke support.

[Find out more about NGA's consultancy service](#)

estions, analyse data and have discussions which create robust accountability for school leaders.
board's skills and knowledge.
culture.

which do not apply in your context.

ources.

sional (clerk to the board), together with the chair or designated member of the board.

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Guidance

Use the guidance notes below to ensure accurate and consistent scoring

4: you have significant (more than 4 years') experience of governance within the schools sector (on a school or academy trust board).

3: you have up to 4 years' experience governing within the schools sector or more than 4 years' experience governing in a different sector (such as director of a charity or limited company).

2: you have more limited governing experience outside the school sector.

1: you have no prior governing experience.

4: you have more than 4 years' experience of chairing governing boards and or committees in schools or academy trusts.

2 or 3 (depending on the type and extent of your experience): you have some chairing experience, including being a vice-chair or acting as chair for meetings. Relevant experience also includes chairing a board or committee outside the schools sector (which has common traits such as working with executives and navigating procedures).

1: you have no chairing experience.

<p>Developing a medium to long-term strategy for any organisation requires: risk management; identification of key performance indicators and deciding how they will be monitored; and consideration of stakeholder (pupils, staff, families and the wider community) views.</p> <p>4: you have experience of strategy development in a school or academy. For example, you have led a governing board strategy development day.</p> <p>3: you have experience of strategy development at the same level outside the schools sector.</p> <p>2: your experience is less extensive.</p> <p>1: you have no experience of developing a strategy.</p>
<p>4: you know what your school's strategic priorities are, what they mean for pupils and other stakeholders, and can confidently discuss these priorities with others.</p> <p>2 or 3: (depending on the level of your understanding) you are aware of your school's strategic priorities but don't feel confident discussing them.</p> <p>1: you don't know what your strategic priorities are – perhaps because you have recently joined the board or because you haven't been involved in developing the strategy.</p>
<p>Our guidance for NGA members explains how risk evaluation and management helps ensure strategic priorities are met.</p> <p>4: you have experience of evaluating and managing risk in a school governance role. You have contributed to discussions about the school risk register, potential impact and mitigation of risks.</p> <p>2 to 3 (depending on the relevance and extent of your experience): you have some understanding of how risk management works in practice. Reading NGA risk management guidance will help you achieve a score of 2 as a minimum.</p> <p>1: you have no experience of risk evaluation and do not feel able to contribute to such a discussion.</p>
<p><i>School funding is largely based on pupil numbers and also includes grants such as the pupil premium.</i></p> <p>4: you have a good understanding of how funding is allocated under different budget headings and how spending impacts on pupil outcomes.</p> <p>2 or 3: you have some awareness of your school's funding and how this is allocated but you would not feel confident providing examples of how spending impacts on pupil outcomes.</p> <p>1: you are not aware of what the key information is.</p>
<p><i>Governing boards (finance/resources committees in particular) should receive budget monitoring reports from their headteacher and or school business professional.</i></p> <p>4: you can confidently use these reports to ask relevant questions which help provide assurance that the budget is being managed effectively. Your questions focus on any changes to planned spending and the explanations for such changes.</p> <p>2 or 3 (depending on the relevance and extent of your experience): you have evaluated financial data in a school or another organisation, and this experience informs your contribution to relevant discussions</p> <p>1: you have no experience of using financial data and so do not feel able to contribute to relevant discussions</p>
<p><i>Influencing curriculum policy (as opposed to the way in which pupils are taught), is a fundamental part of the board's role. You can read about the content of your school's curriculum on their website.</i></p> <p>4: you have read and understood the curriculum content and feel comfortable discussing this with colleagues.</p> <p>2 to 3: you have read the curriculum content but do not yet feel confident discussing this.</p> <p>1: you are not aware of what the curriculum content is</p>

<p>4: you have been involved in your board's stakeholder engagement activity, which may include: evaluating parent survey responses, attending parent and pupil forums, or meeting with staff and outside organisations (such as the local authority).</p> <p>3: you have experience of stakeholder engagement on another governing board.</p> <p>2: means you have experience of stakeholder engagement outside of the schools sector.</p> <p>1: means you have no experience of stakeholder engagement.</p>
<p>4: you have been a member of the panel that conducts the headteacher's annual appraisal in a school.</p> <p>2 or 3 (depending on your level of experience): you have conducted an appraisal in an organisation outside the schools sector.</p> <p>1: you have not been part of an appraisal process.</p>
<p>4: you are proactive in ensuring that your development needs are met through courses, e-learning, reading resources or networking. Your induction should provide an essential starting point.</p> <p>2 to 3: you have identified knowledge or skills gaps but have not yet engaged in or planned relevant development activity.</p> <p>1: you have not yet identified knowledge or skills gaps and have not engaged in development activity.</p>
<p>A score of 4 means that you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are willing to share the workload • welcome a range of experiences and perspectives • feel comfortable offering up constructive challenge • can reach a reasonable consensus • seek to resolve issues that may lead to conflict <p>2 to 3: you have identified areas you would like to work on.</p> <p>1: you have not yet built collaborative relationships and do not feel confident in how to achieve this.</p>
<p>NGA guidance on what governing boards and school leaders should expect from each other should be understood and applied to your own context.</p> <p>4: you have read and understood the guidance.</p> <p>2 or 3: you have read the guidance but require further clarity.</p> <p>1: you have not read or understood the guidance.</p>
<p>The core functions are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction; • Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the effective and efficient performance management of staff; and • Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent <p>NGA recognises the following as the fourth core function of governance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring the voices of school stakeholders are heard <p>Chapter one of the Governance Handbook explains the core functions and describes the features of effective governance. If you have read and understood this chapter, provide a score of 4 for this</p>

Governing boards often delegate their work to committees, working groups, individuals (link governors/trustees), and panels (such as for headteacher appraisal).

4: you have good awareness and knowledge of how the governing board delegates its work, for example, the specific responsibilities of any committees and their terms of reference.

2 or 3: you have some understanding - for example, you know what committees the board has appointed but not what each one is responsible for.

1: you are unaware of how your board delegates its work

4: you have been a member of a panel where you applied relevant policy and procedure and worked with colleagues to reach a decision.

2 or 3 (depending on your level of confidence): you understand how and why panels are formed and, with some support, you would feel confident being part of a panel.

1: you do not feel confident being part of a panel.

Your induction to the board (including any induction training course you attend) should provide a broad understanding of the board's legal and compliance responsibilities, such as its safeguarding duties.

4: means you have gained a detailed understanding of your board's legal and compliance responsibilities from experience of governing, attending meetings, carrying out the business of the board and undertaking further training and development activity.

2 or 3: you have a lower level of knowledge and understanding.

1: you have yet to gain a broad level of understanding.

4: based on your experience of governance, you are able to recognise something that is not – or does not appear to be – right and raise it as an issue in an appropriate way, however challenging it may be.

2 or 3: you do not feel confident in recognising and or challenging appropriately.

1: you would like more support or guidance in this area.

You may wish to [consult The Framework for Ethical Leadership in Education](#).

Effective governing boards understand the benefit of having independent, expert advice and the risk of not having it. It is important to have regard to the advice of the board's governance professional (clerk to the board) on issues of compliance and other matters. It may also be necessary, on occasion, to seek legal, financial, or human resource advice.

4: you feel confident identifying when expert advice is necessary.

2 or 3: you have a lower level of confidence.

1: you are unable to recognise situations where expert advice is necessary.

Governing boards are accountable to the communities they serve. Developing knowledge and understanding of your community means you are better placed to understand the impact of your strategy and decisions on the community.

4: you have knowledge and understanding of the community served by the school – its characteristics, economy and cultures – which is informed by a range of experiences such as volunteering, talking to people, and or living and working in the community.

2 or 3: your experience and understanding could be extended.

1: you have not yet built a broad knowledge and understanding of the community served by the school.

Governing boards have a legal duty under The Equality Act to protect pupils and staff against discrimination, harassment and or victimisation.

4: you have read and understood Department for Education [guidance on The Equality Act](#) (and or NGA Equality and diversity guidance).

2 or 3: you have some understanding of the responsibilities that trusts have under The Act but require further clarity.

1: you have not yet built an understanding of The Act as it applies to schools.

Culture – the way things get done around here – is what makes a school or trust unique. Culture influences behaviour and practices and so is a crucial component of implementing a vision and strategy. The policies that governing boards adopt influence culture in their school.

4: you have tangibly influenced an organisation's (not necessarily within a school) culture of equality and diversity. Examples include being part of a working group for creating more flexible, family friendly working practices or helping to design a work environment that is more accessible.

2 or 3: you have not tangibly influenced an organisation's culture but recognise the ways this is achieved.

1: you have yet to build an understanding of how organisations develop and maintain a culture of equality and diversity.

An example is training on unconscious bias (beliefs and views about other people that might not be right or reasonable).

4: you can confidently contribute to discussions and actions that promote diversity and inclusion. You may have increased your knowledge and understanding through personal experience or by participating in a range of training and development (such as using books, podcasts and mentoring) to gain authentic insight.

2 or 3: you have some knowledge or experience in this area but do not yet feel able to contribute to discussions or suggest appropriate actions.

4: you are confident to engage in constructive dialogue over decisions, expectations, attitudes, assumptions or language that, whether intentional or not, could result in individuals or groups being disadvantaged or marginalised.

2 or 3: you have a lower level of confidence.

1: you would benefit from development, support or guidance in this area.

Data and insight help governing boards to explore issues, verify evidence and question any discrepancies. Examples include data on exclusions, recruitment, and career progression of different groups.

4: you have used data or insight to identify issues of inequality and affect positive change.

2 or 3: you have limited or indirect experience of using data or insight for this purpose but are aware of its importance.

1: you have not yet built an understanding of how and why data can be used to identify, promote and resolve issues of inequality.

Reflect on the scores you have provided for statements 18 to 23. What do you think will have the biggest impact on your contribution? This could include:

- Mentoring and coaching
- Specific training (such as unconscious bias training)
- Reading
- General awareness raising
- A whole board approach (such as a diversity and inclusion workshop)

Reflect on your responses to this audit as well as any previous conversations about your governance development. What do think will have the biggest impact over the next 12 months? For example:

- Completing your induction (if relevant).
- Continuing professional development in specific areas of responsibility (for example, if you have responsibility for pupil premium, this might be an area you'd like to build a greater understanding of).
- Mentoring and support from within the board.

- Do you have any specific skills or experience that you think could be utilised by the board?
- Are there specific areas or committees you would like to become more involved in?
- Would you like to take on a leadership role within the governing board (such as chairing a committee or a link governor/trustee role)?

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