



NGA Skills audit guidance

For multi academy trust trustees

This guidance is provided to support accurate and consistent scoring of skills audit statements.

[Visit the NGA website](#) to find further guidance and instruction on how to complete the skills audit and collate results.

Section 1a. Strategic leadership

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

Statement 1

I have governing experience in a school/academy trust or in a different sector

- A score of 4 means you have significant (more than 4 years') experience of governance within the schools sector (on a school or academy trust board).
- 3 means 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 means you have more limited governing experience outside the school sector.
- Provide a score of 1 if you have no prior governing experience.

Statement 2

I am/have been chair of a board or committee

- A score of 4 means 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) means 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).
- Provide a score of 1 if you have no chairing experience.

Statement 3

I have experience and expertise in developing a strategy

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.

- A score of 4 means you have experience of strategy development in a school or academy. For example, you have led a trust board strategy development day.
- 3 means you have experience of strategy development at the same level outside the schools sector.
- 2 means your experience is less extensive.
- 1 means you have no experience of developing a strategy.

Statement 4

I know what the trust's strategic priorities are

- A score of 4 means you know what your trust's strategic priorities are, what they mean for pupils and other stakeholders, and can confidently discuss these priorities with others.
- 2 or 3 (depending on the level of your understanding) means you are aware of your trust's strategic priorities but don't feel confident discussing them.
- 1 means 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.

Statement 5

I can identify key risks and evaluate their potential impact

Risk evaluation and management help ensure strategic priorities are met. Our [risk management guidance for NGA members](#) explains how these principles are applied in an academy trust.

- A score of 4 for means that you have experience of evaluating and managing risk in a governance role. In particular, you have contributed to discussions about the trust's risk register, potential impact and mitigation of risks.
- 2 or 3 (depending on the relevance and extent of your experience) means that 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.
- 1 means you have no experience of risk evaluation and management and do not feel able to contribute to such a discussion.

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.

Statement 6

I am aware of how the trust is funded and what the funding is spent on

Academy funding is largely based on pupil numbers and also includes grants such as the pupil premium.

- A score of 4 means you have a good understanding of how funding is allocated under different budget headings and how spending impacts on pupil outcomes.
- 2 or 3 means you have some awareness of your trust's funding and how this is allocated but you would not feel confident providing examples of how spending impacts on pupil outcomes.
- 1 means you are not aware of what the key information is.

Statement 7

I can interpret budget monitoring reports and ask relevant questions

Trust boards (finance/resources committees in particular) should receive budget monitoring reports (management accounts) from their chief finance officer.

- A score of 4 means 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.
- 2 or 3 (depending on the relevance and extent of your experience) means you have evaluated financial data in an academy trust or another organisation, and this experience informs your contribution to finance and budget discussions in meetings.
- 1 means that you have no experience of using financial data and so do not yet feel able to contribute to relevant discussions.

Statement 8

I understand how the trust's curriculum meets the needs of all pupils

Influencing curriculum policy (as opposed to the way in which pupils are taught), is a fundamental part of the trust board's role. You can find out more about your curriculum content on your trust's website or on each academy's website.

- A score of 4 means you have read and understood the curriculum content and feel confident discussing this with colleagues.
- 2 or 3 means you have read the curriculum content but do not yet feel confident discussing this with others.
- 1 means you are not aware of what the curriculum content is.

Statement 9

I understand how my board engages with stakeholders – pupils, parents, staff and the wider community – and how this informs decisions

- A score of 4 means 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).
- 3 means you have experience of stakeholder engagement on another governing board.
- 2 means you have experience of stakeholder engagement outside of the schools sector.
- 1 means you have no experience of stakeholder engagement.

Statement 10

I feel confident being part of the panel that conducts the chief executive’s appraisal

- A score of 4 for means you have been a member of the panel that conducts the annual appraisal for the chief executive of an academy trust.
- 2 or 3 (depending on your level of experience) means you have conducted an appraisal in an organisation outside the schools sector.
- 1 means that you have not been part of an appraisal process.

Section 1c. People

People that govern need to form positive working relationships with their colleagues to function well as part of a team.

Statement 11

I know how to build the knowledge I need to be effective in my governance role

- A score of 4 means you are proactive in ensuring that your development needs are met through courses, e-learning, reading resources and networking. Your induction should provide an essential starting point.
- 2 or 3 means you have identified knowledge or skills gaps but have not yet engaged in or planned relevant development activity.
- 1 means you have not yet identified or engaged in relevant development activity.

Statement 12

I can build positive, collaborative relationships with members of my board

Personal attributes that individuals bring to the board are as important as their skills and knowledge.

A score of 4 means that you:

- 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
- A score of 2 or 3 means you have identified areas you would like to work on.
- 1 means that you have not yet built collaborative relationships and do not feel confident in how to achieve this.

Section 1d. Structures

Understanding governance structures is vital to avoid unclear and overlapping responsibilities that can lead to dysfunctional or ineffective governance arrangements.

Statement 13

I understand the strategic nature of the board's role and what trust boards and leaders should expect from each other.

[NGA guidance](#) on what governing boards and school leaders should expect from each other should be understood and applied to your own context.

- A score of 4 means you have read and understood the guidance.
- 2 or 3 means that you have read the guidance but require further clarity.
- A score of 1 indicates that you have not read or understood the guidance.

Statement 14

I know what the trust board's core functions are

The core functions are:

- 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

NGA recognises the following as the fourth core function of governance:

- Ensuring the voices of school stakeholders are heard.

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 statement.

Statement 15

I understand how the board delegates its work

Trust boards delegate their work to committees, academy committees (local governing boards), working groups, individuals (link trustees), and panels.

- A score of 4 means you have good awareness and knowledge of how the trust board delegates its work, for example, the specific responsibilities of any committees and their terms of reference.
- 2 or 3 means you have some understanding. For example, you know what committees the board has appointed but not what each one is responsible for.
- 1 means you are unaware of how your board delegates its work.

Statement 16

I understand the role and powers of the trust's members

Members hold the trust board to account for the effective governance of the trust but have a minimal role in the actual running of the trust.

- Provide a score of 4 if you understand the distinct role of members as guardians of the governance of the trust. If you have read and understood NGA's [guidance on the role of members](#), you can confidently give a score of 4 for this statement.
- 2 or 3 means that you have some understanding of the role of members but would not yet feel confident discussing the contribution that members make to academy trust governance.
- 1 means that you do not understand the role and remit of academy trust members.

The role of members is set out within part 1 of the [Academy Trust Handbook](#).

Statement 17

I understand the distinct responsibilities of my trust's academy committees (local governing boards)

Trust boards should carefully develop the role of academy committees, ensuring that they add value to the checks and balances of trust governance.

- Provide a score of 4 if you can confidently explain the role of your trust's academy committees as set out in your trust's [scheme of delegation](#) (SoD).
- 2 or 3 means you have read the SoD but need further clarity.
- 1 means that you have not read the SoD and so do not understand the role of academy committees in your trust.

NGA members may wish to [consult our guidance](#) to learn more.

Section 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.

Statement 18

I feel confident being part of a panel to make decisions (such as for grievances)

- A score of 4 means 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) means you understand how and why panels are formed and with some support, you would feel confident being part of a panel.
- 1 means you do not feel confident being part of a panel.

Statement 19

I know how the board meets its legal and compliance responsibilities

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 [safeguarding duties](#).

- A score of 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 means you have a lower level of knowledge and understanding.
- 1 means you have yet to gain a broad level of understanding.

Statement 20

I feel able to speak up if I am concerned about non-compliance and unethical behaviour

- A score of 4 means that, 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 means you do not feel confident in recognising and or challenging appropriately.
- 1 means you would like more support or guidance in this area.

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

Statement 21

I can identify when independent, expert advice may be required

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 means you feel confident identifying when expert advice is necessary.
- 2 or 3 means you have a lower level of confidence.
- 1 means you are unable to recognise situations where expert advice is necessary.

Section 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.

Statement 22

I know, and empathise with, the communities served by the trust

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

- A score of 4 means you have knowledge and understanding of the communities served by the trust – their 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 means that your experience and understanding could be extended.
- 1 means you have not yet built a broad knowledge and understanding of the communities served by the trust.

Statement 23

I understand the legal responsibilities of trust boards in relation to equalities

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

- A score of 4 means you have read and understood Department for Education [guidance on The Equality Act](#) (and or NGA [Equality and diversity guidance](#)).
- 2 or 3 means you have some understanding of the responsibilities that trusts have under The Act but require further clarity.
- 1 means you have not yet built an understanding of The Act as it applies to academy trusts.

Statement 24

I have influenced an organisation's culture of equality and diversity (through communication, appropriate challenge, awareness raising or developing policies and practices)

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

- A score of 4 means you have tangibly influenced an organisation's (not necessarily within a school or trust) 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 means you have not tangibly influenced an organisation's culture but recognise the ways in which this is achieved.
- 1 means you have yet to build an understanding of how organisations develop and maintain a culture of equality and diversity.

Statement 25

I have knowledge, experience or training that will help me to promote diversity and inclusion

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

- A score of 4 means 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 means you have some knowledge or experience in this area but do not yet feel able to contribute to discussions or suggest appropriate actions.
- 1 means you have not engaged in relevant development activity and do not feel able to contribute to discussions.

Statement 26

I can recognise and challenge behaviour, attitudes, policy and practice which go against the inclusive culture we want for our trust

- A score of 4 means 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 means you have a lower level of confidence.
- 1 means you would benefit from development, support or guidance in this area.

Statement 27

I understand how to use relevant data and insight to identify and resolve issues relating to inequality

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.

- A score of 4 means you have used data or insight to identify issues of inequality and affect positive change.
- 2 or 3 means you have limited or indirect experience of using data or insight for this purpose but are aware of its importance.
- 1 means you have not yet built an understanding of how and why data can be used to identify, promote and resolve issues of inequality.

Statement 28

Is there any support or training you would like to engage in to help you promote equality and diversity in your trust?

Reflect on the scores you have provided for statements 22 to 27. 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)

Section 3. Self-evaluation

Reflect on your contribution to your governance role and identify further development opportunities.

Statement 29

What are the areas you feel you need to prioritise to develop your governance knowledge and skills?

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.

Statement 30

Are there any additional areas of the board's responsibilities which you would like to contribute to in the future?

- 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 trustee role)?

Statement 31 (optional)

Do you have any further comments on your development needs and or your continuing contribution to the trust board?

Thank you for reading this guidance. If you have any feedback you'd like to share, please email kcfeedback@nga.org.uk.

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