



Learning for Life Trust

Role description for the Chair of the Board



The role of the chair of governors should be viewed in the same light as that of the chair of the board in any other sector. The role of the chair is demanding, complex and multi-faceted.

The chair leads the governing board ensuring it fulfils its functions well. A good chair will ensure the board's focus is on the strategic.

The culture of the board is largely determined by its chair. The chair is "first among equals" but has no defined individual power. A good chair works well with school leaders to advise and shape proposals to be discussed at the board meetings. The chair should facilitate the governing board working as a team to challenge, support and contribute to the strategic leadership of the school.

As well as leader of the board, the chair is at times a confidante, a manager, a critical friend, a cheerleader, an ambassador, an arbitrator, and possibly a mentor and coach; the balance of these roles adopted will depend on the situation at hand and in particular the experience and strengths of the Principal.

Role Purpose: Leading governance in schools

To provide leadership to the governing board and ensure that governors/trustees fulfil their functions for the proper governance of the school(s)

Leading governance in schools

- To ensure that the governing board and Principal have a shared sense of purpose.
- To ensure the governing board sets a clear vision and strategy for the school(s).
- To lead the board in monitoring the Principal's implementation of the school strategy.

Leading and developing the team

- To ensure the board has the required skills to govern well, and that appointments made fill any identified skills gaps.
- To ensure all governors/trustees receive appropriate induction, ongoing training as needed and have a thorough understanding of their role.
- To ensure members of the board act reasonably and in line with the board's agreed code of conduct.
- To develop a good working relationship with the vice chair, ensuring s/he is kept fully informed and delegating tasks as appropriate.
- To ensure that board members feel valued and encourage their development.
- To carry out a performance review of each governor/trustee.
- To ensure that there is a plan for succession for the chair, vice-chair and any committee chairs, and that by recommending limits on office, there is always a mix of new and experienced members.

The chair, the Principal and accountability

- To build a professional relationship with the Principal which allows for honest conversations, acting as a sounding board and ensuring there are no surprises at meetings.
- To meet regularly with the Principal, which in normal circumstances is likely to be monthly.
- To ensure that there are transparent and effective processes for the recruitment and induction of the Principal
- To ensure appropriate governor/trustee involvement in the recruitment of senior leaders.
- To ensure all governors concentrate on their strategic role, receive information fit for purpose and hold the Principal to account.
- To oversee and participate in the principal's performance review, ensuring that appropriate CPD (continuing professional development) is provided.
- To ensure that the Principal provides staff with an understanding of the role of the governing board and acts as link between the two.
- Where required, represent the governing board in its dealings with external partners and be an advocate for the school.
- To attend school functions (plays/sports days/prize giving) as appropriate and encourage other governors to do so.
- To ensure that complaints made to the governing board are dealt with in a timely and effective manner.

The chair will also play a lead role in any decision to suspend the Principal.

Leading school improvement

- To ensure the board is involved at a strategic level in the school's self-evaluation process and that this feeds into the key priorities.
- To ensure the board's business is focussed on the key strategic priorities.
- To take the lead in representing the governing board at relevant external meetings with agencies such as Ofsted, the Department for Education and the local authority.
- To ensure the board has mechanisms in place to obtain and listen to the views of parents, pupils and staff.
- To ensure the governing board adopts a visits protocol which is linked to monitoring key strategic priorities:
- The chair who should already have a good knowledge of the school will need to consider whether s/he needs to continue such formal monitoring visits or whether these are now best delegated to the team.

Leading governing board business

- With the clerk and the Principal, to plan for the board meetings, ensuring that agendas focus on the board's key responsibilities and strategic priorities and reducing unnecessary paperwork.
- Chair meetings effectively and promote an open culture on the governing board that allows ideas and discussion to thrive whilst ensuring clear decisions are reached as quickly as possible.
- To collaborate with the clerk to establish effective working procedures and sound committee structures.
- To ensure that decisions taken at the meetings of the governing body are implemented.

- To ensure the governing board appoint a professional clerk capable of providing advice on the board's functions and that s/he is appraised and developed.

Appointing the Chair

Electing a chair in multi-academy trusts (MATs) the chair of the Board of Directors will be appointed by the other directors. The chair of any local governing committee/board will be appointed according to the rules that the MAT board has put in place. This may affect the role of the chair as the MAT may retain some of the functions described above at Board level.

What skills/attributes should a chair have?

Candidates for chair should be able to demonstrate a good selection of the skills/attributes set out below:

- Commitment to the school
- Good understanding of the environment in which the school is operating and wider education policy
- Personal integrity
- Negotiation and diplomacy skills
- Good understanding of the legal responsibilities of the board as both individuals and a corporate entity
- Strong communication skills
- Good organisational skills
- Ability to think strategically
- Ability to prioritise
- Ability to chair meetings well
- Ability to have courageous conversations and make courageous decisions
- Ability to build and get the best out of a team
- Capacity to process information quickly and understand relevant data
- Ability to delegate

What are the extra time commitments?

The expectation for charity trustees is that the time commitment should be between 10-20 days a year, with the chair of the board being at the upper end of the time commitment. There are many similarities between chairs of governing boards and charities (indeed academies are charitable companies) so you should aim to keep your commitment at or below the 20 day limit. If you are finding your commitment is significantly more than 20 days then it may be productive to sit down and work out what you are spending your time on, whether it is strictly necessary and/or whether it can/should be delegated to someone else.