Department for Education

School and Trust Governance Investigative Report

Report

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Definitions and terminology used in this report

Trust: An academy trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee. It is an independent legal entity with whom the Secretary of State has decided to enter into a funding agreement on the basis of agreeing their articles of association with the Department for Education. Academy trusts have Members and trustees, whose roles are defined below. Catholic and Church of England academy trusts are referred to as Academy Companies. In church schools the terms "trust" is reserved for the separate trust that owns the land.

Multi-academy trust (MAT): this is a trust in which the board is accountable for a number of academies (see definition of trust board below).

Single-academy trust (SAT): this is a trust which is set up to have responsibility for one academy.

Maintained school: receive funding through their local authority (LA). There are four different types of maintained school: community schools, voluntary controlled (VC) schools, voluntary aided (VA) schools and foundation schools.

Structures of governance

The governing body: a collective term for the accountable body for a school or trust.

Maintained school governing body: This is the accountable body for a local authority maintained school.

Trust board: this is the accountable body for academy trusts.

MAT local governing bodies (LGBs): in this report LGBs has been used to refer to all bodies or councils that sit under a trust board in a MAT. These may include LGBs, cluster bodies or academy councils. They are a formal part of the governance structure of a MAT as determined in the trusts' articles of association. Trustees decide which, if any, governance functions are delegated to the LGBs. Therefore, LGBs can be wholly advisory or have differing levels of delegated responsibility, depending on the scheme of delegation set out by the trust.

Roles within school and trust governance

Trustees: those who sit on the board of an academy trust. They are both charity trustees and company directors of the academy trust. In Catholic and Church of England Academy Companies trustees are referred to as Directors, the term 'trustees' is reserved for those on the board of the separate trust that owns the land. Trustees collectively undertake the three core functions of governance: ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and

strategic direction of the school, holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils and the effective and efficient performance management of the staff, and overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent.

Governors: those who sit on a maintained school governing body. Governors collectively undertake the three core functions of governance: ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction of the school, holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils and the effective and efficient performance management of the staff, and overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent.

Members of the Local Governing Body: those who sit on a Trust's LGB(s) may be referred to as 'local governors'. The Trust board will decide what, if any, governance functions they will delegate to LGBs. They may set up LGBs as wholly advisory bodies. LGBs of academies with a religious designation must uphold the designated religious character of their academy.

Executive Leaders: those being held to account by the governing body for the performance of the school or trust. This would include CEOs, executive headteachers, headteachers, executive principals and principals. This might also include other senior employees of the school or trust.

Clerks: the governing body's clerk or 'governance professional' who enables the board to understand its role, functions and legal duties through providing a range of professional support, advice and expertise to the board. This definition also includes governance professionals, heads of governance and company secretaries who undertake a clerking role.

Link Governors/Trustees: those members of the governing board who have been given specific oversight of a particular area to deepen the board's knowledge of a particular area specifically where the board has specific legal duties, within the school or trust. However, accountability remains at board level.

Members: Every trust has Members who play a limited but crucial role in safeguarding trust governance. While they must ensure they do not stray into undertaking the academy trustees' role, they have powers to step in when governance is failing.

Types of governors/trustees

Foundation Governors/Trustees: In Foundation Schools these are individuals whose appointment to the governing board is approved by the foundation (such as the Diocese which is responsible for the school). In Catholic academy companies Foundation

Directors are appointed directly by the Bishop and similarly in Catholic voluntary aided schools the Bishop will appoint all Foundation Governors.

Partnership Governors: these are appointed by the board. Foundation and foundation special schools without a foundation must have at least two Partnership Governors but no more than a quarter of the total membership of the board. Not all schools/trusts will have this type of governor.

Co-opted governor/trustees: These may be appointed by the board. These can sometimes be known as Community Governors, but they are not necessarily members of the local community and can be parents or members of staff.

Local Authority (LA) Governor: On a maintained school governing body there should be one LA governor. A LA governor is nominated by their LA to the governing body, but it is for the governing body to agree whether to appoint the LA governor.

Staff Governor: Either a teaching or support member of staff paid to work at the school. Staff Governors are usually elected by the staff to ensure that staff views are represented on the board.

Parent Governor/Trustee: A parent, which includes a person with parental responsibility, or carer, of a registered pupil at the school or trust at the time of election who is elected by the school's parent body to serve as a governor/trustee.

Chair of Trust board/ Chair of Governors: An individual elected by the board to lead the board. Within this report, and when talking about roles within governance, chairs have been treated as a separate group to all other governors/trustees, as it may be the case that chairs have a different perspective to those governors/trustees who are not chairs.

Executive summary

Introduction

The effective governance of schools and trusts is essential for the provision of a high-quality education for young people throughout England. Volunteers fulfilling the role of governor or trustee in schools and trusts make a vital contribution to the education system. Having a detailed knowledge of who governs, why and how is a critical component of policy decision-making to ensure that schools and trusts are governed effectively.

The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to carry out investigative research into school and trust governance. The purpose of the research was to provide independent evidence to inform future policy development and enable evidence-based prioritisation of resources to support school and trust governance throughout England.

The research methodology comprised three strands: a feasibility stage; a survey of schools and trusts; and follow-up telephone interviews with a sample of survey respondents. This report presents the findings from the survey and follow-up telephone interviews stage. The aims were to identify:

- governance structures and distribution of responsibility and authority between levels of trust governance

- size and characteristics of school and trust governing bodies, including demographics and skills of governors, trustees, Local Governing Body (LGB) members and clerks

- recruitment and retention of those involved in governance

- the experiences of those involved in governance

- what, if any, challenges governors, trustees, LGB members, and clerks face to be effective in their respective roles.

In order to ensure the survey represented all types of publicly-funded schools in England, a stratified sample was created which sampled schools based on a set of criteria (type of school – local authority maintained, SAT and MAT; education phase; and size of MATs). The survey was emailed to a sample of 5,363 schools and trusts. The email invitation was initially sent for the attention of the Chair of the board and the executive leader, who were asked to take part and to forward the email to others within their school or academy involved in governance. As such, multiple responses could be received from one school or trust. For those academies in the sample that were part of a MAT, the Chair of the trust board and the Chief Executive Officer of the trust were contacted separately and in

addition to the academy, to gain both an academy-level perspective and a trust-level perspective. Again, the email asked for the survey to be cascaded to those involved in governance at the trust level. There were 345 trusts who were contacted in this way.

Survey responses were received from 1,207 individual schools, academies and trusts. In total, 2,571 individuals responded to the survey. The table below summarises the responses by school type:

Table 1   Responses by school type

School type	Number of schools/trusts with at least one response	Number of individual responses
Maintained school	401	905
SATs	260	648
MAT academies	436	904
MAT Trust boards	110	294
Total	1,207	2,751

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Around one-third (35%) of survey respondents identified their main role as a governor or trustee (including academy trust LGB members), 27% were chairs of a board, 23% were executive leaders,15% were clerks, and less than 1% were Members of a trust. Most respondents (65%) indicated that they held additional roles on the governing body.

As multiple responses were encouraged from each school and trust within the sample, the data was subsequently weighted so that governing bodies with different numbers of respondents did not contribute differently towards the calculation of averages and proportions.

The achieved sample was representative of the target sample in regard to all variables considered important to the study: education phase, type of school, special educational needs and disability (SEND) status, urban/rural location, religious status, and size of trust. The majority of schools were rated by Ofsted as 'good' (72% of the overall sample) and a further 16% were rated as 'outstanding'[1].

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[1] Published Ofsted statistics report as at 31 March 2020 that 86% of all schools were rated good or outstanding at their most recent inspection. The percentage of schools judged outstanding was 19% while the percentage judged good was 67%. Please see State-funded schools inspections and outcomes as at 31 march 2020

Follow-up semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with 30 individuals as shown in the table below:

Table 2   Number of telephone interviews completed by school type and role

School type	Chair	Governor/trustee	Executive leader	Clerk
Maintained	4	3	0	3
SAT	3	3	1	3
MAT	3	2	2	3
Total	10	8	3	9

Source: NFER telephone interviews of school and trust governance, 2020

The key findings are summarised below.

Governance structure

MATs have more complex structures than maintained schools or SATs, creating layers of governance. Overall, 85% reported having committees of the trust board, and 82% reported using local governing bodies which oversee individual academies. Interestingly, 2% of those who sit on trust boards did not report having a trust board within their governance structure.

Within trusts, a high proportion of respondents held additional roles, though this varied by role type, and this has resulted in a great deal of overlap across different tiers of governance structures. For example, 57% of chairs of SAT trust boards and 51% of chairs of MAT trust boards reported that they were also a Member for the trust. Similarly, 21% of SAT trustees and 20% of MAT trustees reported they were also Members for the trust.

Respondents from all board types agreed that the board had decision-making responsibility for the strategic direction, vision, and ethos of the school or trust. Similarly, decision-making for staffing issues was primarily being retained by the full board, while decision-making responsibility for in-school staff performance, wellbeing, and workload was held by executive leaders and/or MAT LGBs. Among maintained school governing bodies and SAT boards, decision-making responsibilities for other areas, such as monitoring educational performance and school improvement, primarily lay either with the

board or was delegated to a committee. Interviewees highlighted that decisions made by committees or executive leaders were reported back to and ratified by the board to ensure that appropriate scrutiny and challenge could be applied.

Among MATs, there was a clear difference in perception between trust board and LGB respondents from the same trust as to the extent to which LGBs had received decision-making powers. In some areas of responsibility, the proportion of LGBs reporting that they held decision-making responsibility was 20-30 percentage points higher than among MAT boards.

Link governors/trustees were used extensively across all board types, with only 5% of boards reporting that they did not use them. Most boards had link governors for safeguarding (88%) and SEND (83%), whereas having a link governor/trustee for pupil behaviour was less common (30%).

The vast majority of clerks from trusts were employed by the academy or trust (85% for MAT trust boards, 83% for MAT LGBs and 82% for SATs). Just over half (54%) of clerks from maintained schools were employed by their school.

Almost all clerks agreed that taking minutes (96%), circulating papers (95%), providing administrative support (93%), and providing procedural advice (89%) were part of their role. It is worth noting that a quarter of clerks did not perceive providing or signposting legal advice before, during, and after meetings as part of their role.

Clerks from SATs and maintained schools were more likely to be supporting a single board (70% for SATs and 52% for maintained schools) compared to those in MATs (34% for MAT LGBs and 19% for MAT trust boards). Instead, 38% of clerks from MAT LGBs supported between 2 and 5 boards, with 19% supporting 6 to 10 boards. Similarly, 27% of clerks from MAT trust boards supported 2 to 5 boards and 31% supported between 6 and 10 boards.

Among clerks who received an annual salary, the mean salary was £9,197.90 and with a median of £3,635. Among those who were paid an hourly rate, the mean rate was £29.33 per hour, with a median rate of £11 per hour. Finally, those who received a fixed amount per meeting were paid a mean amount of £188.44, with a median value of £181.

Who is involved and their characteristics

The typical governor/trustee was female, over 40 and currently employed. The survey found that:

- Over three-quarters (82%) of clerks were female whereas just over half (53%) of governors/trustees were female. Chair roles comprised equal proportions (49%) of females and males.

- The majority of respondents (over 80%) in governance roles in all school types were aged 40 or older with 32% of governors/trustees and 46% of chairs being aged 60 years or older.

- The majority (88%) of respondents identified as White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British. A minority (3.5%) of respondents identified as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME).

- The majority of chairs (59%), governors/trustees (68%) and Members (72%) were in some form of employment. A higher proportion of chairs were retired (37%) compared to governors/trustees (28%) and Members (21%). Most clerks (96%) were employed and 4% were self-employed. A further 4% reported being retired.

- Most governors/trustees (80%) had been on governing bodies for fewer than 10 years. Over half (57%) of clerks had serviced governing bodies for fewer than 10 years.

The size of SAT trust boards and maintained schools' governing bodies were, on average, the largest at 13.6 and 13.3 trustees/governors respectively. MAT trust boards were generally smaller with 9.6 trustees on average and 10.3 members of an LGB, on average.

Recruitment and retention

The majority of boards had vacancies and the average number of vacancies per board was higher for maintained schools and SATs than for MATs. Over three-quarters of respondents from MATs reported one or more vacancy on their trust board (77%). This fell to 73% for maintained schools, 67% for SATs and 62% for MAT LGBs. Most of the vacancies were for 'other' governors or trustees, such as co-opted or foundation and these were also perceived as the hardest posts to fill. Despite not many vacancies being for chairs, this role was also perceived to be difficult to fill across all board types. Interviews revealed that often succession planning was not in place, and governors or trustees were being asked to take the role of chair rather than proactively volunteering to do so. In terms of skills and knowledge gaps, financial management and education policy understanding were seen as the hardest areas to fill on boards overall. MAT trust boards found it most difficult to recruit people with an understanding of parental and community engagement, which was not identified as a particular challenge for other types of board.

MATs experienced different challenges in recruitment depending on the number of schools within their MAT. 'Lack of interest' and 'candidates not having the appropriate skills' were seen to be more of a challenge for system leader trust boards and LGBs compared to smaller-sized MATs. However, 'competition from other schools' was less often reported as a reason by system leader trust boards and LGBs compared with smaller MATs.

Challenges to recruitment included the perceived workload/lack of time to carry out governance roles. Interviewees explained that it was difficult to recruit people in full-time employment as they felt unable to commit the necessary time to the role.

Most governors or trustees planned to stay in their role for the next year. Of those who were leaving, chairs most often reported this was due to workload, while governors and trustees said it was due to changes in their circumstances.

Experiences of governance

Respondents, regardless of role, reported that they were confident about their ability to undertake their governance roles. On average, respondents estimated that they spent 17 hours per term preparing for meetings, 16 hours attending meetings, and 23 hours undertaking all other activities related to their governance role. This varied considerably by role and board type, with chairs of MAT trust boards spending considerably more than other types of chairs and governors/trustees.

Governors/trustees and chairs typically found training, support, and guidance useful where they had received it. They were less likely to have received some types of support, for example, from a National Leader of Governance (NLG) and/or opportunities to observe other boards. Most interviewees were aware of DfE support and guidance documents and half found the documents to be useful, particularly for outlining roles and responsibilities to new governors/trustees. Other sources of support and guidance accessed by interviewees include the National Governance Association (NGA), their Local Authority (LA), their trust, and The Key[2]. When asked what areas of support and training respondents wanted to receive, the most commonly cited areas were financial management and planning, data analysis and interpretation, statutory policy areas, and staff management.

Some clerk interviewees expressed frustrations with fulfilling the clerking role, saying that there was sometimes a lack of understanding of what clerking involved and how significant a role it was.

Perceived effectiveness of governance

The majority of survey respondents believed their boards had the range of skills, knowledge and/or experience necessary to be effective, although it should be noted that this was a self-assessment of effectiveness. Boards reported particular confidence areas such as safeguarding, financial management, risk management and strategic planning. Interestingly, there was some disjoint in the extent to which respondents believed their

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[2] The Key is an information service for school leaders available online

board collectively had financial skills, and how confident respondents felt with their own skills in this area. Respondents reported less confidence that their board had skills, knowledge, and/or experience in local, regional, and national policy priorities, managing wellbeing and workloads, and human resources. The extent to which respondents reported confidence about their board's skills differed by school type and role type. In particular, executive leaders were less positive about skills of the board, especially with regards to educational expertise and specialist knowledge.

Most respondents perceived their governing body to be effective (overall, and in relation to undertaking the three core functions of governance). MAT trust board respondents were particularly positive in this area. However, respondents identified ways in which their governing body's effectiveness could be improved such as ensuring the right people with appropriate skills and commitment were involved in governance, and the provision of more training and support. Reflecting this, the most common barriers to effectiveness reported by interviewees included individuals on their boards not challenging executive leaders enough, being operational rather than strategic, and poor chairing.

A notable minority of respondents (13%) said their boards were not undertaking any evaluation or monitoring activities. Of those who were, examples of the types of activities included self-evaluation, skills audits and annual away days.

Conclusions

Highlighted below are the main conclusions drawn from this research.

Despite the majority of boards having vacancies and struggling to recruit governors and trustees unrelated to the school, most governing bodies were relying on word-of-mouth recruitment from their local and personal networks. Schools and trusts could make greater use of connection services that connect schools/trusts with applicants interested in becoming governors or trustees. Furthermore, although good succession planning is essential to ensure changes in leadership do not impede the governing body's effectiveness, it was clear that this was not commonly happening.

Training and support were well received and greatly valued by governors/trustees. However, time and cost were considerable barriers. Guidance documents were perceived as helpful, but they need to be readily digestible and accessible.

There was a mismatch between the skills the governors/trustees felt their governing body had and those which the executive leaders felt they had, particularly in relation to knowledge and understanding of the education sector. There was also a mismatch in the (lack of) confidence individuals had in their own finance skills and their confidence in their boards' skills in this area. It may be the case that the focus of future training for

volunteers could include how to apply skillsets to the education context, and basic financial training on how to understand and interpret financial data.

Clerks, when utilised properly, are key to the effective running of governing bodies, but not all bodies are making the most of the resource clerks can offer. They can provide a breadth of knowledge and understanding, provide advice and research, and help to reduce workload and repetition for governors/trustees. Importantly, the support of an effective professional clerk was seen to help with the retention of governors/trustees.

Specific considerations for different types of governing bodies

Governance in trusts

- There is a lack of separation between the different levels of governance in trusts, due to individuals taking on multiple roles across different levels. Effective monitoring and evaluation of the trust board, with the input from independent external sources, may help to ensure boards do not become too insular and are independently challenged.

Governance in MATs

- The complexity of MAT governance presents a unique challenge in ensuring clarity in the roles and responsibilities of the different tiers of governance particularly where trust boards are delegating powers to enable schools to have some autonomy.

- Members and clerks of LGBs feel much less confident in their abilities and that of their LGB than their counterparts at trust level. This suggests more needs to be done to ensure that support and training is provided at every level of governance.

Governance in SATs

- Clerks in SATs appear to be underutilised. They were also less likely to feel that they had the support and training to undertake their roles. Why this is the case needs further investigation, as does the training options available to clerks in SATs.

Governance in maintained schools

- Maintained school governing bodies appear to feel less confident in their strategic oversight role than trust boards and were also less likely to have received most forms of training, support and guidance compared to trustees. Taken together, this suggests that more training would be beneficial to governors particularly relating to the strategic nature of the role.

- Maintained school governing bodies were less likely to be monitoring or evaluating their effectiveness compared to trust boards. More needs to be done to understand why this is not happening and what can be done to support governing bodies to evaluate their effectiveness.

Overall, this investigative research project builds a detailed picture of school and trust governance in England which augments existing knowledge and understanding of this critically important role in education.

1   Introduction

The effective governance of schools and trusts is essential for the provision of a high-quality education for young people throughout England. Volunteers fulfilling the role of governor or trustee in schools and trusts make a vital contribution to the education system. Having a detailed knowledge of who governs, why and how is a critical component of policy decision-making for Government to ensure that schools and trusts are governed successfully.

The Department for Education (DfE) highlights the importance of governance in the Governance Handbook: 'The purpose of governance is to provide confident and strong strategic leadership which leads to robust accountability, oversight and assurance for educational and financial performance' (DfE, 2019a). The DfE sets clear expectations for those who govern through the Governance Handbook (DfE, 2019a), the Academies Financial Handbook (DfE, 2019b) and the Competency Frameworks for Governance (DfE, 2017a) and Clerking (DfE, 2017b).

The DfE commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to carry out a research project to provide independent evidence which can usefully inform future policy development and enable evidence-based prioritisation of resources to support school and trust governance throughout England. In doing this, the research augments existing research findings and information on who governs schools and trusts, and how, in a range of circumstances.

The existing research evidence reviewed draws attention to the key role of school and trust governance and identified related challenges. For example, James and others (2010) noted that 'the 300,000 or so school governors in England[3] make a significant contribution to their schools and to the education system as a whole', and acknowledged that governance is 'complicated, demanding and largely un-noticed' (p.4). The National Governance Association (NGA) (2019) reported an increasing demand for governors, estimating that 18,000 additional school governance volunteers were required. James and others (2013) highlighted the importance of governing body chairs in having the right experience and expertise to lead and motivate governors to govern effectively (p.3). Focusing on the governance of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), research by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) (2014) confirmed the importance of 'recruiting and selecting high-calibre governors who are able to adopt a strategic view of the trust as a whole, as well as the individual schools within it' (p.6). Fellows and others (2019) explained that delegation to the local level is how MAT governance differs from

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[3] The National Governance Association (2019) estimate the number of governors to be 250,000 in England in 2019.

other models, adding that 'more work is needed to make this crucial element contribute to its full potential' (p.30). In a feasibility study of defining and collecting metrics on the quality of school governance commissioned by DfE, McCrone and others (2017) identified four constructs underpinning effective governance: setting the vision for the school; governing board relationships and performance; monitoring the educational performance of the school; and financial scrutiny.

This report presents the findings from a survey and follow-up interviews undertaken by NFER between October 2019 and March 2020. The aims of the research are set out in section 1.1 below.

1.1 Aims of the research

The aims of the research specified by DfE were:

- To develop the evidence base on the characteristics of those who govern schools and trusts and their experience of being involved in governance in England
- To investigate what works well in terms of governance practice, what does not work well and the challenges faced by the governance sector.

The areas of investigation underpinning the aims focused on understanding how schools and trusts are governed, who governs them and their views on related matters including:

- governance structures, including distribution of responsibility and authority between levels of trust governance (including trust Members), and committees in maintained school governance
- size and characteristics of school and trust governing boards, including demographics and skills of governors, trustees, LGB members and clerks
- recruitment and retention of governors, trustees, LGB members, and clerks
- the experiences of governors, trustees, LGB members, and clerks and their views on DfE support (including communications, training and guidance)
- what, if any, challenges governors, trustees, LGB members, and clerks face to be effective in their respective roles
- how school and trust leaders experience governance and the differences between maintained schools' and trusts' governance
- other significant views on governance.

As presented in section 1.2 below, the research used primary data collection to gain the breadth and depth of factual information, experiences, perceptions and insights required to meet the aims of this investigative research project.

1.2 Methodology

The research methodology comprised three strands: a feasibility stage; a survey of schools and trusts; and follow-up telephone interviews with a sample of survey respondents. Details of the research methodology including the representativeness of the achieved sample of schools surveyed, the profile of the 2,751 respondents who completed the survey and information on the 30 interviewees from schools and trusts are provided in appendix 1 (page 142).

Survey of schools and trusts

Sample

The survey was sent to a stratified sample[4] of state-funded maintained schools and academies with the aim of gaining sufficient representation of each of the stratifying criteria, namely:

- education phase (primary, secondary and special schools)

- type of school (maintained, including those supported by a trust[5], or an academy in a Single Academy Trust (SAT) or MAT)

- size of trust (starter trusts with fewer than 5 academies including those that are technically MATs but only have one academy; established trusts 6-15 academies; national trusts 16-30 academies; system leader trusts 30+ academies).

The sample comprised 5,018 individual schools and academies. For those academies in larger MATs (established, national and system leaders), the trust board was contacted separately in addition to the academy, adding 345 MAT trust boards to the sample. These were located across all eight of the Regional School Commissioner (RSC) regions in England. Survey responses were received from 1,207 schools, academies and trusts, including a total of 2,751 respondents. The tables below provide details of the sample and responses:

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[4] Stratification is a method of sampling in which the population being sampled is further divided into smaller groups based on stratifying criteria which are deemed important to include in the sample (for example, type of school), to ensure the overall sample includes representation across all of the smaller groups.
[5] A trust school is a foundation school in which the school is supported by a charitable foundation known as a trust. The trust (rather than the governing body which would be the case in foundation schools) usually owns the freehold to the land the school is situated on and can appoint foundation governors to the governing body.

Table 3   Sample of schools and trusts who took part in the survey

Type of school	Primary schools contacted (N)	Primary schools with at least one response (N)	Individual responses from primary schools (N)	Secondary schools contacted (N)	Secondary schools with at least one response (N)	Individual responses from secondary schools (N)	Total responses (N)
LA maintained schools	378	96	239	379	127	292	531
LA maintained in a federation	379	77	169	40	14	26	195
LA maintained, supported by a trust	273	67	132	75	20	47	179
Single-academy trust	388	132	300	396	128	348	648
Academies in starter trusts	383	64	146	380	86	213	359
Academies in established trusts	383	65	109	372	67	155	264
Academies in national trusts	387	58	113	196	26	46	159
Academies in system leader trusts	380	46	80	229	24	42	122
Schools/academies Total	2,951	605	1,288	2,067	492	1,169	2,457
MAT trust board	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	294
Total	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2,751

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Table 4   Role of respondents by type of school

School type	Chair (N)	Governor/ Trustee (N)	Executive leader (N)	Clerk (N)	Member (N)	Total (N)
Maintained school	228	345	208	122	2[6]	905
SAT	129	245	140	108	26	648
MAT academy	246	313	207	111	27	904
MAT trust	62	71	70	75	16	294

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

When looking at responses by the different characteristics, it can be seen that roles were generally evenly distributed across the different school types and phase of education, suggesting that when looking at all responses by school type or phase of education, the role of the individual responding would not be influencing the findings.

A higher proportion of the maintained schools were primary schools (60%) than was seen for both MATs and SATs (45% each). It therefore may be the case that some proportion of the differences seen by type of school could reflect a phase difference. Where this is likely to be the case this has been highlighted in the report.

Schools of religious character showed similar distribution across the different types of schools to those without religious character. Therefore, any differences in this group cannot be explained by type of school. However, schools of religious character were more likely to be primary schools than schools without religious character. Care therefore must be taken when interpreting the findings for this group as some differences may be the result of a phase difference. Where this is likely to be the case it has been highlighted in the report. This same pattern was also found for the urban/rural classification. Again, where phase is likely to be accounting for some of the differences between rural and urban schools, it has been noted in the report.

Further details on the characteristics of the sample can be found in appendix 1.

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[6] Ninety five respondents identified their school or trust type as different to that which is held on the DfE's Get Information About Schools database. Routing in the survey was done on the basis of self-reported school type and role type. In this case, 2 respondents from a maintained school identified their school as a trust, and subsequently identified themselves as Members. Due to such small numbers, this will not impact on interpretation of findings.

The online survey covered the areas of investigation itemised in section 1.1 above. The survey questionnaire included a set of core questions for all respondents to answer and routed respondents to specific questions linked to their governance function. The questionnaire took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

The online survey was emailed to the office of each school or trust in the survey sample marking it for the attention of the chair, executive leader/headteacher and clerk of the board inviting them to complete it and forward the survey to colleagues involved in governance in their school or academy. The survey included questions on governance structures, roles and responsibilities; governor/trustee recruitment and retention; the effectiveness of the board; the skills and experience of the board; the experience of governance; and the demographics of respondents.

Multiple responses were encouraged from each school and trust within the sample, and of the 1,097 schools and academies who responded, 623 provided multiple responses. In order to control for multiple responses from schools and trusts, the data was subsequently weighted so that schools, academies and trusts with different numbers of respondents did not contribute differently towards the calculation of averages and proportions. This was achieved by multiplying the equal proportion weight by the inverse of the actual proportion and then multiplying each individual response by this weight[7].

Within this report weighted data has been used in the majority of cases, and particularly when comparing by school characteristics. However, it has not been used when looking at individual characteristics (the role of the individual) as this weighting would not be appropriate in this context, given that certain roles by definition allow for multiple responses per school or trust (member, governor and trustee) while others normally only allow for one response (clerk, chair and executive leader).

Follow-up telephone interviews with survey respondents

The purpose of the follow-up interviews was to explore in more detail models of governance; recruitment and retention of governors and trustees in schools or trusts; experiences of governing, including training and development; and challenges encountered.

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[7] For example, if there are 100 total responses coming from a total of 20 bodies, each body would ideally be providing five responses if all were equal. However, if one body provided 30 responses instead of five, that body's weight will be 0.17 ((5/100) * (1/(30/100)) = 0.17) so that 30 x 0.17 = 5 (approximate). In that way, each response coming from that body will be multiplied by a weight equalling 0.17. If a body provides only one response, its weight will be 5 so that 1 x 5 = 5. Moreover, if a body provides five responses, its weight will be 1. In that way, each time an aggregated statistic like a percentage or an average is calculated, bodies contribute the same amount of information irrespective of the number of respondents representing each of them.

The sample selection criteria were: respondents who had indicated at the end of the survey their willingness to participate in a 30-minute telephone interview; school type (school or trust); education phase; and geographic region.

Follow-up semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with 30 individuals, as shown in the table below:

Table 5   Number of telephone interviews completed by school type and role

School type	Chair (N)	Governor/trustee (N)	Executive leader (N)	Clerk (N)
Maintained school	4	3	0	3
SAT	3	3	1	3
MAT	3	2	2	3
Total	10	8	3	9

Source: NFER telephone interviews of school and trust governance, 2020

1.3 Report structure

Chapter 2 examines:

- different governance structures

- the size of bodies in schools and trusts, and how this changes depending on the characteristics of the school and type of body

- where responsibility for decisions is held in the different types of governance structures

- the roles and responsibilities of those involved in governance and how these vary by body and school type.

Chapter 3 explores:

- who is involved in governance and why, including survey participants' demographics and differences by role and type of school or body

- the reasons respondents became governors and trustees and why clerks took up their governance role.

Chapter 4 explores:

- recruitment approaches, vacancies and hard-to-fill roles and skill types

- governors' reasons for deciding to leave their role.

Chapter 5 examines:

- experiences of governance including participants' views of their confidence and skills to fulfil their role

- time spent on governance activities

- the training and support accessed by governors/trustees and their views on how useful it is.

Chapter 6 explores:

- whether boards consider they have the right skills to fulfil their functions

- their perceptions of their effectiveness, exploring any differences between bodies rating their own effectiveness and executive leaders' ratings of body effectiveness

- perceived barriers to effectiveness and how effectiveness can be improved

- how bodies evaluate their effectiveness and any differences in the ways this is carried out.

Chapter 7 concludes the report by summarising the evidence from this research for DfE to consider when making decisions about the prioritisation of resources to support school and trust governance throughout England.

2.   Governance structures in schools and trusts

This chapter covers the roles and responsibilities of those in governance, along with the governance structures utilised by governing bodies. It also covers the schemes of delegation and how decision-making responsibility is distributed across governance structures.

Key Findings

- Most MAT trust boards reported that their governance structures included a trust board (98%), committees of the trust board (85%) and local governing bodies (82%) which oversee individual academies. Just under a fifth of MAT trust boards (18%) had a different governance model utilising cluster bodies or academy councils. The result of this is that MATs typically have complex governance structures with multiple layers of governance.

- SAT trust boards and maintained school (MS) governing bodies were, on average, the largest at 13.6 and 13.3 trustees/governors respectively. Within maintained schools, those in a federation were on average larger with 13.9 governors than other types of maintained school (13 governors). On average, MAT trust boards were smaller with 9.6 trustees compared to 10.3 members on MAT LGBs.

- The majority of respondents from trust boards held multiple governance roles, though this varied by role type, and as such there was a high degree of overlap between the different tiers and governance structures. For example, 57% of chairs of SAT boards and 51% of chairs of MAT boards reported that they were also a Member for the trust. Similarly, 21% of SAT trustees and 20% of MAT trustees reported they were also Members for the trust.

- There was consensus across all types of schools and trusts that the full governing body had decision-making responsibility for the strategic direction, vision and ethos of the school or trust in their scheme of delegation. Decision-making about staffing issues was reported as primarily being retained by the full governing body, while decision-making responsibility for in-school staff performance, wellbeing, and workload was held by executive leaders and/or MAT LGBs.

- In most policy areas, including monitoring educational performance and school improvement, the majority of maintained schools' governing bodies and SAT trust boards reported that decision-making powers lay with the full governing body or one of its committees, rather than with individuals (such as the executive leader). Interviews revealed that where decision-making responsibility was held by individuals, these decisions were reported back to and ratified by the full governing body to ensure appropriate scrutiny and challenge can be applied.

- Among MATs, there was a clear difference in perception between trust board and LGB respondents from the same trust as to the extent to which LGBs had received decision-making powers. In some areas of responsibility, the proportion of LGBs reporting that they held decision-making powers for an area was 20-30 percentage points higher than among trust boards.

- The majority of clerks in trusts were employed directly by their academy or trust (82% of clerks in SATs, 83% in MAT LGBs and 85% in MAT trust boards). In maintained schools, just over half of clerks (54%) were employed by their school while around a third (31%) were employed by the local authority. The remaining employers of clerks are outlined in the main body of this section.

- Almost all clerks agreed that taking minutes (96%), circulating papers (95%), providing administrative support (93%), and providing procedural advice (89%) were part of their role. However, a quarter of clerks did not perceive providing or signposting legal advice before, during, and after meetings as part of their role.

- There was variation in the number of boards clerks were supporting by board type. Seventy per cent of clerks from SAT trust boards and 52% of clerks from maintained schools' governing bodies supported a single board. In comparison, just 34% of clerks from MAT LGBs and 19% of clerks from MAT trust boards said they supported a single board/body. Instead, 38% of clerks from MAT LGBs supported between 2 and 5 boards, with 19% supporting 6 to 10 boards. Similarly, 27% of clerks from MAT trust boards supported 2 to 5 boards and 31% supported between 6 and 10 boards.

- Among clerks who received an annual salary, the mean salary was £9,197.90 and with a median of £3,635. Among those who were paid an hourly rate, the mean rate was £29.33 per hour, with a median rate of £11 per hour. Finally, those who received a fixed amount per meeting were paid a mean amount of £188.44, with a median value of £181.

2.1 Roles and responsibilities of those involved in governance

The survey asked respondents to identify their main governance role. Overall, 35% were governors/trustees (including members of MAT LGBs), 27% were chairs of a board/body, 23% were executive leaders (including headteachers, executive headteachers, and CEOs), 15% were clerks, and less than 1% were Members of a trust.

In addition to this, the survey then asked respondents whether they had any additional governance roles[8], of which 65% did have additional roles.

Maintained schools

Among respondents from maintained schools' governing bodies the most common additional roles for chairs and governors was being a link governor (43%), followed by being a committee chair (30%). A minority of chairs (18%) and governors (19%) reported that they had no additional roles. Nearly all (94%) of clerks did not have additional governance roles. However, the additional roles held by this small minority of clerks included being a link governor, a vice/deputy chair of the governing body, a committee chair or an 'other' unspecified role. In total, 90% of executive leaders did not have additional roles. Among the small minority of executive leaders with additional governance roles, these include being a link governor, a committee chair, a vice/deputy chair of the governing body, a clerk or an 'other' unspecified role.

SATs

The majority of SAT trust board respondents did report having an additional role. Among chairs, the most common additional roles were being a Member and a link trustee. Only 13% of chairs did not have an additional role. For trustees (other than chairs), these additional roles tended to include being a link trustee, the vice/deputy chair of the board, or a Member. Overall, 29% of SAT trustees did not have an additional role. While 47% of executive leaders in SATs did not have an additional role, the majority of those who did were acting as a trustee. The majority (88%) of clerks from SAT trust boards did not have an additional governance role. Of the 12% who did have an additional role, the majority described this as 'other'.

MATs

When respondents from MAT trust boards and MAT LGBs were compared, there was a distinct difference in the proportion reporting that they held an additional responsibility, as shown in Table 6.

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[8] Ninety five respondents identified their school or trust type as different to that which is held on the DfE's Get Information About Schools database. For example, a respondent from a SAT may have ticked the option that their school was a maintained school in the survey. Overall, 50 respondents from MATs, 34 from SATs and 11 from maintained schools identified as the wrong school type. Most (43) of the 50 MAT respondents identified themselves as SATs, while most (27) of the 34 SAT respondents identified themselves as being in a MAT. Seven of the 11 maintained school respondents reported being a SAT. Routing in the survey was done on the basis of self-reported school type and this therefore meant that for a small number of questions where this routing operated, these respondents did not see the question or saw the wrong version of the question. Therefore, these cases are not included in the analysis.

Table 6   Proportion of respondents from MATs with no additional role

Main Role	Proportion on MAT trust board who do NOT have an additional role (%)	Proportion on a MAT LGB who do NOT have an additional role (%)
Chair	11	53
Trustee	23	N/A
LGB member	N/A	56
Clerk	57	86
Executive Leaders	30	83
N	437	724

N = 1,161 respondents

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

MAT trust board respondents were much more likely than LGB respondents to report having an additional role, particularly among executive leaders and chairs. This may be because some trust boards are formed by selecting key individuals from academies and LGBs within the MAT such as chairs and executive leaders. Among those LGB respondents who reported having an additional role, chairs and members of the LGB tended to be link governors. Chairs of one LGB were also commonly members on another LGB while members of the LGB were commonly also vice/deputy chairs of LGBs. Those executive leaders with an additional role tended to report that they were members of an LGB, while clerks tended to report that their additional role was 'other'.

Among MAT trust boards, there was more variety. Just over half (51%) of chairs of trust boards who had an additional role, reported also being Members of the trust. Among trustees, the two most common additional roles were that of a link trustee (29%) and being a chair of a LGB within the trust (27%). A notable group of trustees also reported that they were the vice/deputy chair of the trust board (20%). For the executive leaders on the MAT trust board, the most common additional role was to be a trustee (29%), followed by being a Member of the trust (14%) or member of a LGB (14%). Among the clerks, the vast majority with an additional role reported that they had an additional clerking role within the trust.

The degree of overlap across different tiers of governance structures in trusts

As noted above, responses to the survey from trusts (including SATs) identified a notable degree of overlap across different tiers of governance due to the high proportions of respondents with multiple governance roles, as shown in the table below.

Table 7   Proportion of respondents who held an additional role of Member

Main Role	Percentage identified being a Member as an additional governance role
Chair of SAT trust board	57
Chair of MAT trust board	51
Chair of MAT local body	3
SAT trustee	21
MAT trustee	20
MAT LGB member	5
Executive Leader on SAT trust board	12
Executive Leader on MAT trust board	14
Executive Leader on MAT LGB	3

N = 1,413 respondents

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Interestingly, the proportion of chairs and trustees/LGB members who identified being a Member of their trust as an additional governance role was highest among SATs. The exception to this was among executive leaders, where MAT executive leaders on the trust board more frequently identified as Members of the trust than those from SATs or MAT LGBs. In addition, although the proportions of members of LGBs who reported being Members of their trust was comparatively small, the fact that there was some respondents with both these roles highlights that overlap between different tiers of trust governance extends beyond trust board level.

Only a small number of Members responded to the survey[9]. However, the majority of those Members who responded and identified being a Member as their main governance role reported that they also sat on the trust board as a trustee, with some even operating as the chair or vice chair of the trust board. A number of them also acted in the capacity of a link governor/trustee. Only a small minority attended trust board meetings as observers. Further evidence of overlap between tiers of governance with MATs is shown in the tables below:

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[9] As outlined in section 1.2, 71 respondents who identified themselves as Members completed the survey

Table 8   Proportion of respondents from MAT LGBs with an additional role on the trust board

Main Role	Proportion who hold an additional role on the trust board (%)
Chair of LGB	16
LGB member	3
Executive leaders	1

N = 375 respondents

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Table 9   Proportion of respondents from MAT trust boards with an additional role on a LGB

Main Role	Proportion who hold an additional role on a LGB in the MAT (%)
Chair of trust board	29
Trustee	41
Executive leaders	18

N = 332 respondents

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

The tables above show that it was more common for respondents with a main role on the trust board to hold an additional role on a LGB than vice versa. For chairs of the trust board, this was primarily to fulfil the role of chair of a LGB or as a member of a LGB. For trustees, the majority who held an additional role on a LGB were also chairs of a LGB, and executive leaders at trust board with an additional role mostly identified this as being a member of a LGB. Among those chairs of a LGB who identified an additional role on the trust board, this was primarily as a trustee. The very small number of members and executive leaders at LGB level with additional roles on the trust board were doing so as trustees and vice/deputy chairs of the trust board.

Overall, this analysis highlights that there is a notable amount of overlap between different tiers of trust governance, with individuals frequently holding multiple roles across the trust. It also highlights typically that where respondents held multiple roles across the trust, they saw their role on the trust board as their main governance role.

Governor/trustee type

The survey asked chairs, governors and trustees what type of governor/trustee they were appointed or elected as. Overall, 42% of governors/trustees and chairs were appointed as community/co-opted governor/trustees, with an additional 20% appointed as foundation/partnership governor/trustees and 18% as parent governors/trustees. There was a great deal of variation by role type, as shown in the table below.

Table 10   The types of governor/trustees

What type of governor or trustee you have been appointed or elected as?	Governor/trustee (%)	Chair (%)	Overall (%)
Staff	9	1	5
Parent	23	11	18
Local Authority/Nominated	7	9	8
Community/Co-opted	41	44	42
Foundation/Partnership	16	26	20
Other	6	13	9
I don't know	2	0	1
N	974	665	1639

N = 1,639 respondents. Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not sum to 100%.

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

While over 40% of both chairs and other governors/trustees respondents were appointed or elected as Community/Co-opted governors/trustees, which is consistent with the overall mean, the proportion of other types varied by role. Among chairs, 26% were originally appointed or elected as Foundation/Partnership governors/trustees when they joined the governing body compared to 16% of all other governors/trustees. Conversely, 23% of governors/trustees were appointed or elected as Parent governors/trustees, compared to 11% of chairs.

As shown in Table 11, there was also a difference in the types of governors/trustees (including chairs) appointed to the governing bodies of schools of religious character and those without.

Table 11   Type of Governor/trustee by school's religious character status

What type of governor or trustee have you been appointed or elected as?	Schools with a religious character (%)	Schools with no religious character (%)
Staff	5	6
Parent	15	21
Local Authority/Nominated	8	9
Community/Co-opted	19	52
Foundation/Partnership	49	8
Other	4	7
I don't know	1	1
N	402	955

N = 1,357 respondents. Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not sum to 100%.

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Most notably, 49% of governors/trustees (including chairs) at schools of religious character were Foundation/Partnership governors/trustees, followed by 19% as Community/Co-opted and 15% as Parent governors/trustees. In schools without religious character, only 8% were Foundation/Partnership governors/trustees while 52% were Community/Co-opted and 21% were Parent governors/trustees. These differences cannot be explained by phase of education as the differences between primary and secondary schools were not so large. For example, while primary schools had a slightly higher proportion of Foundation/Partnership governors/trustees (26% compared to 16% in secondary schools), and secondary schools had a slightly higher proportion of Community/Co-opted governors/trustees (47% compared to 39% in primary schools), these differences were much smaller than was seen for schools with and without religious character.

There was also some notable variation between governors/trustees (including chairs) on different bodies. 28% of MAT trustees were appointed or elected as 'other' types of trustee, compared to 2% of maintained school governors, 6% of trustees in SATs, and 11% of members of LGBs. Governors on maintained schools' governing bodies, on the other hand, were more commonly appointed or elected as LA nominated governors (15%), compared to 4% of SAT trustees, 3% of LGBs member and 3% of MAT trustees.

There was some variation within different school types. For example, larger trusts tended to have fewer Community/Co-opted governors/trustees than smaller trusts. Similarly,

among maintained schools, federations tend to have more LA nominated governors than other governing bodies.

Other notable differences include 52% of governors/trustees at special schools being Community/Co-opted compared to 41% elsewhere.

2.2   Governance structures in schools and trusts

The survey asked respondents from MAT trust boards what governance structures were in place across their trust. Table 12 shows the frequency with which trusts reported having these structures in place.

Table 12   The extent to which MATs utilise different governance structures

Which of the following governance structures are in place within your MAT?	Frequency (%)
Trust board	98[10]
Committee of the trust board	85
Local governing bodies or equivalent (overseeing one academy)	82
Cluster bodies or equivalent (overseeing a group of academies, with delegated responsibilities)	11
Academy councils (with no delegated responsibilities)	7
Other	4

N =357[11]

Source: NFER survey of governance 2019/2020

The survey findings presented in the table indicate that 85% reported having committees of the trust board, and 82% reported using local governing bodies which oversee individual academies. Just under a fifth of MAT trust boards (18%) had a different governance model utilising cluster bodies or academy councils instead of, or alongside, having local governing bodies or equivalent. National and system leader trusts[12] were

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[10] While only 98% of respondents reported that their MAT trust structure included a trust board, only respondents who had previously indicated they were on a MAT trust board were able to answer this question.

[11] The reported N is based on data that has been weighted in order that multiple responses per school or trust do not contribute more information than schools for which there was only one response.

[12] MATs are allocated a size category based on the number of academies within the trust as follows: starter trusts have 1-5 academies, established trusts have 6-15 academies, national trusts have 16-30 academies and system leader trusts have more than 30 academies.

more likely than smaller trusts to have academy councils with no delegated responsibilities in place.

Size of the governing body

The survey also asked chairs and clerks how many governors/trustees were intended to be on their governing body overall. SAT trust boards and maintained schools' governing bodies were, on average, the largest at 13.6 and 13.3 trustees/governors respectively. Within the maintained sector, where schools are part of a federation, the federated governing body was on average larger with 13.9 governors than other types of maintained school (13 governors). MAT trust boards were generally smaller with 9.6 trustees on average and 10.3 members on average on MAT LGBs.

Among trusts there was no relationship between the size of the trust and the intended numbers of trustees on the board. For example, while system leader trusts (the largest category of trust) had the largest number at 10.5 trustees on average, national trusts (the second largest category) reported the smallest board size on average (9.3 trustees). The size of the trust board did not appear to be related to the number of LGBs the trust had. There was very little variation in the size of LGBs by trust size.

Among trust boards (both SATs and MATs), those overseeing secondary academies were on average larger, at 13.7, than those overseeing primary schools, at 11.4 trustees. Similarly, among maintained schools' governing bodies and MAT LGBs, secondary schools/academies had on average 13.2 governors/LGB members compared to 12.1 governors/LGB members for primary schools.

Trusts overseeing schools with a religious character were slightly larger at 14.4 trustees, compared to 13.3 among schools with no religious character. Among maintained schools governing bodies and MAT LGBs, there was no difference between schools with a religious character and those without in the intended size of the governing body (12.6 governors). This is a different pattern than was seen by phase of education, with primary school boards (which account for the majority of schools with religious character) being smaller than secondary schools boards, suggesting this difference is related to the schools religious character, rather than phase of education.

Governing bodies of special schools had, on average, 14 trustees in trusts (SAT and MAT trust boards combined) and 13.7 governors/LGB members in maintained governing bodies and MAT LGBs combined.

The size of boards at rural and urban schools were very similar for all types of board (Maintained, SAT, MAT and MAT LGBs).

The data gathered from telephone interviews with 30 survey respondents supported the findings from the survey with regards to the widespread use of committees and LGBs or

equivalent under the trust board in MATs. The interviews also highlighted that the use of committees was common among the governing bodies of maintained schools and trust boards of SATs.

Changes to the structure of governance

The telephone interviews revealed a difference to governance structure over time related to the type of school. The majority of interviewees[13] from maintained schools (who ranged from being on their board for between 5 and 19 years) and SATs (who ranged from being on their board for between 5 and 9 years) reported that the structure of the governing body had not changed in their time on the board. Where there had been a change in governance among these governing bodies, this was typically to merge governing bodies into a single body following schools becoming federated or to remove or replace committees.

The removal of committees was typically reported as a result of low governor/trustee numbers, limited time and availability to governors/trustees, and/or the committee being perceived as redundant due to a shift in the scheme of delegation across the governance structure. There was one example of a governing body specifically deciding to change its approach to governance in order to ensure the governors/trustees had greater involvement in decision-making. The board had elected to move from 1 to 2 full governing board meetings per term and removed all committees except the finance committee. An interviewee observed that this *'means that everyone has a greater involvement and sees the whole picture rather than just their section'*.

Interviewees from MATs tended to report some form of change to their trust's governance structure. The most common reason given for a change in governance structure was the result of the school converting from a maintained school to an academy and joining a MAT. Largely, where LGB interviewees had experienced this conversion, they felt that the structural change had not resulted in a change to the LGB or its remit. One interviewee commented *'I would say that the governors on the ground have noticed very little in terms of the delegation of their powers'* following academisation and the associated change in the governance structure. Some of these interviewees felt that a trust board, which had specific additional responsibilities, had simply been added to the existing structure.

Other reasons given by MAT interviewees for changes in governance structure are as follows.

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[13] 7 respondents representing 4 maintained schools and 8 respondents representing 4 SATs

- MATs growing in size, resulting in modifications such as the addition of trust-level committees and the creation of LGBs and/or academy councils

- LGBs within a trust being merged to oversee multiple schools.

A small minority of interviewees highlighted that the governance structure of the MAT was partly informed by the scheme of delegation that the trust board considered appropriate for their academies.

2.3 Responsibility for decision making

Decision-making responsibility for staffing

The survey asked respondents where decision-making responsibility lay for staffing issues in their school or trust. For the purposes of this research, decision-making responsibility is defined as the individual or groups who normally have responsibility for deliberating issues and recommending a course of action. In maintained schools and SATs, the majority of respondents were in agreement that decision-making responsibility for the employment and performance of the executive leader was held by the full governing body or one of its committees. This included the appointment of the executive leader, performance review, and pay review. Executive leaders were overwhelmingly perceived as having responsibility for the performance, wellbeing and workload of staff within the school.

In MATs, respondents from both trust board level and LGB level broadly agreed that the trust board or CEO/executive leader at trust level had decision-making responsibility for staffing issues relating to executive leaders across the trust. Decision-making responsibility for staffing issues within individual academies was attributed primarily to the CEO/Executive, followed by LGBs at trust level.

In order to ascertain the level of agreement within trusts analysis was run on the subset of trusts that had questionnaire responses for both the LGB and board level. This is shown in the figures below.

Figure 1   MAT trust boards' views on where decision-making responsibility about staffing issues is held within their trust
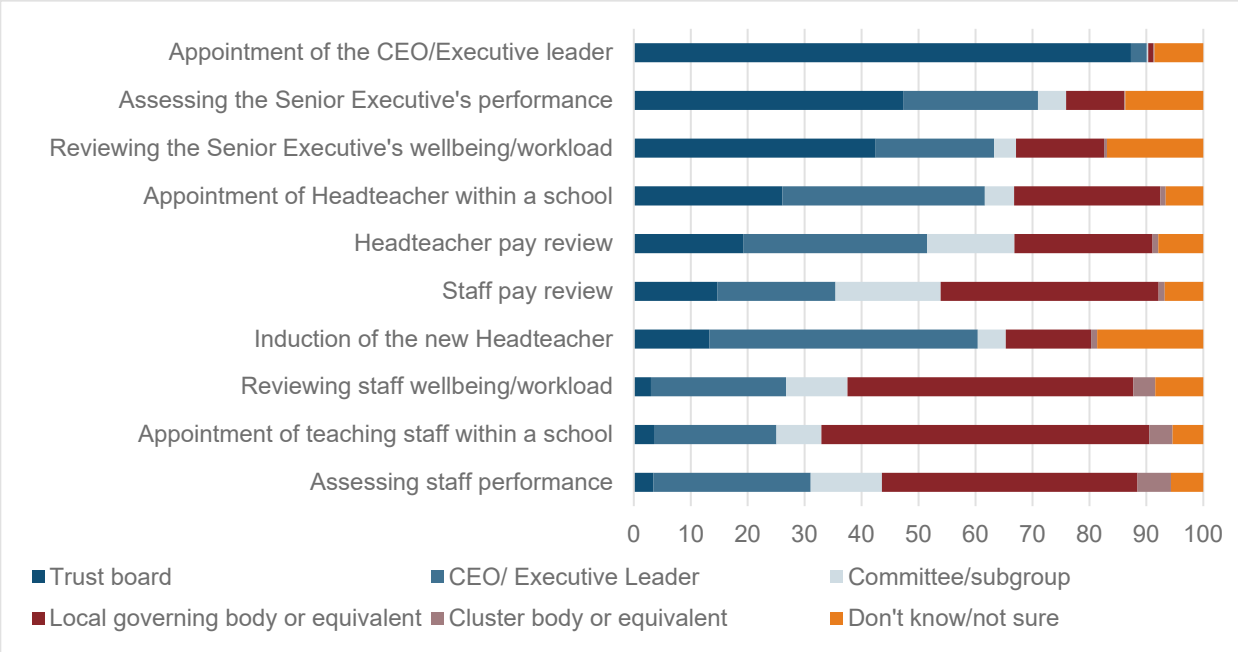
N = 410[14]

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020.

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[14] Data has been weighted so that governing bodies with different number of respondents will not contribute differently towards the calculation of averages and proportions.

Figure 2   MAT LGBs' views on where decision-making responsibility about staffing issues is held within their trust
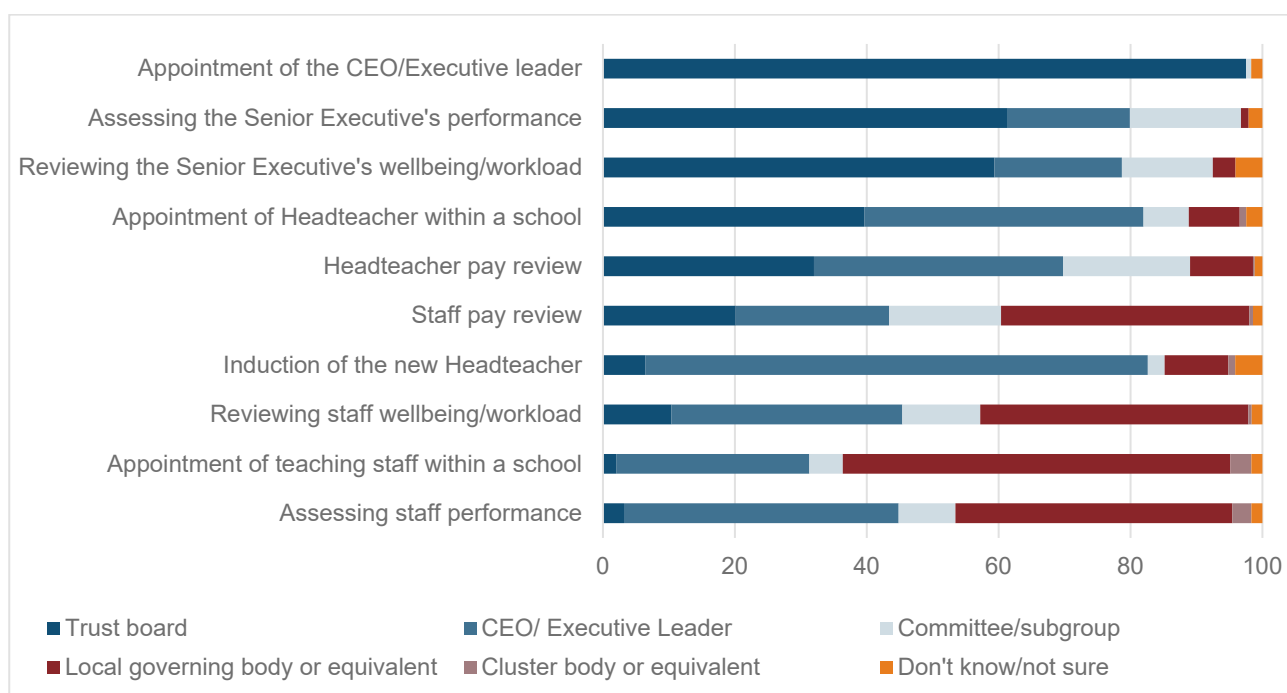
Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020.

Respondents from trust boards and LGBs in the same trust perceived the distribution of decision-making powers differently. Respondents from LGBs perceived themselves as holding decision-making powers more frequently than did respondents from trust boards. For example, on the issue of the appointment of a new headteacher, 40% of trust board respondents reported that the trust board had responsibility for this within their scheme of delegation, while 42% reported this was delegated to the CEO/Executive leader, 7% reported this was delegated to a committee[16] and 8% reported that the LGB had this delegated power. However, in response to the same question, 26% of respondents from LGBs perceived the trust board as having responsibility for this, 36% perceived the CEO/Executive leader as holding this responsibility, 5% perceived this responsibility to be with a committee and 26% reported that the LGB held this delegated power. LGBs were also much more likely to not know where the decision-making responsibility for these staffing issues lay within their trust's governance structure, particularly in relation to assessing the performance of the senior executive and reviewing their wellbeing and

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[15] Data has been weighted so that governing bodies with different number of respondents will not contribute differently towards the calculation of averages and proportions.
[16] In this question, committees may refer to both committees of the trust board and committees of the local governing body or equivalent.

workload. In each area of responsibility, the proportion of respondents from LGBs who reported they did not know was at least double that of respondents from the trust board. This suggests some confusion or lack of understanding over the scheme of delegation in trusts.[17]

Decision-making responsibility for areas relating to the functions of governance

The survey also asked respondents where decision-making responsibility lay for issues relating to the core functions[18] of governance. The findings are presented below.

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[17] It should be noted that this analysis was done at the cohort level by comparing all trust responses to all LGB responses, rather than comparing responses within the same trust at the individual level.
[18] The 3 core functions of governance 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 (Department for Education, 2019a)

**Figure 3   Decision making within maintained school governance structures**
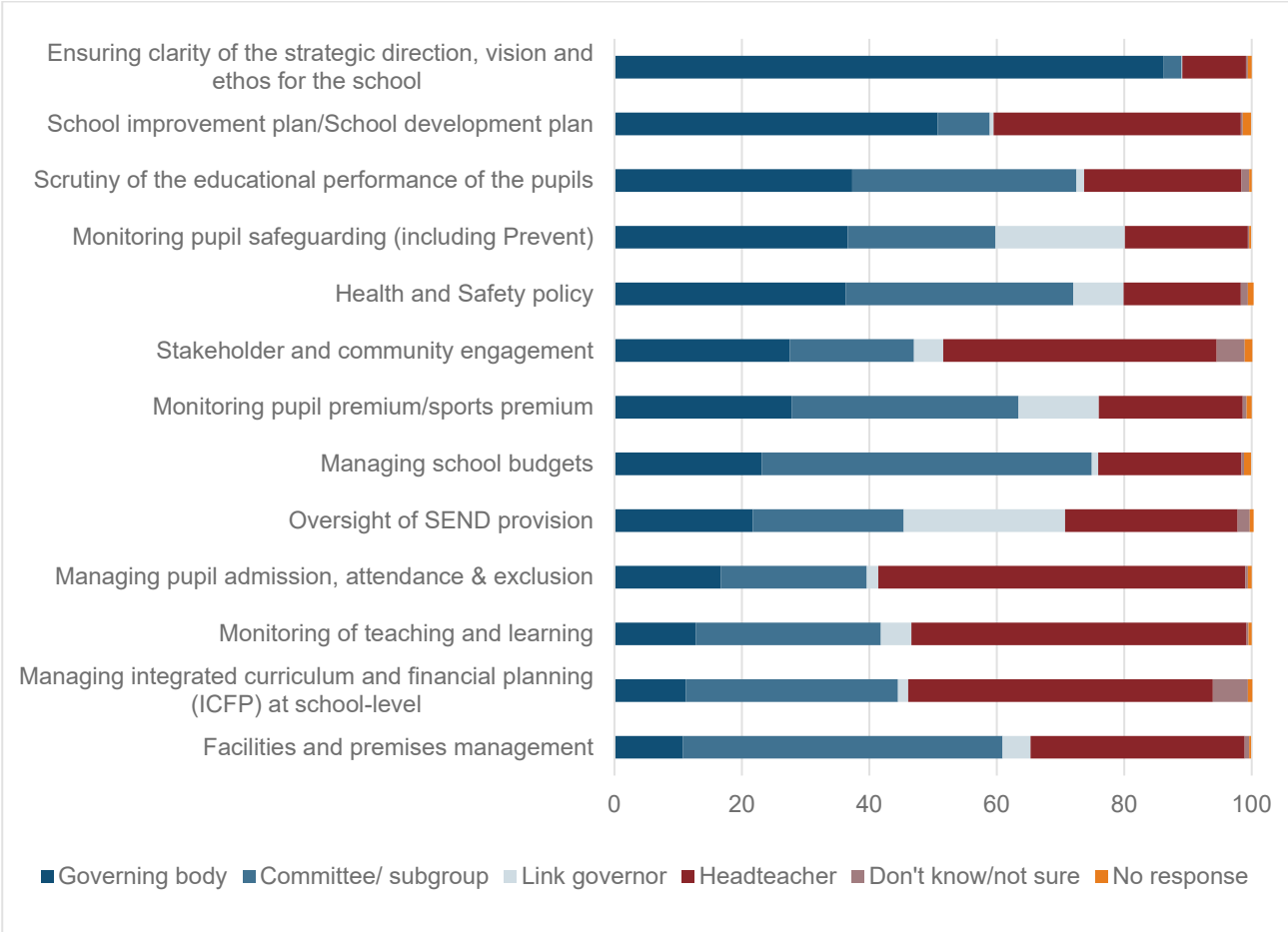
N = 888[19]

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020.

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[19] Data has been weighted so that governing bodies with different number of respondents will not contribute differently towards the calculation of averages and proportions.

Figure 4   Decision making within SAT governance structures
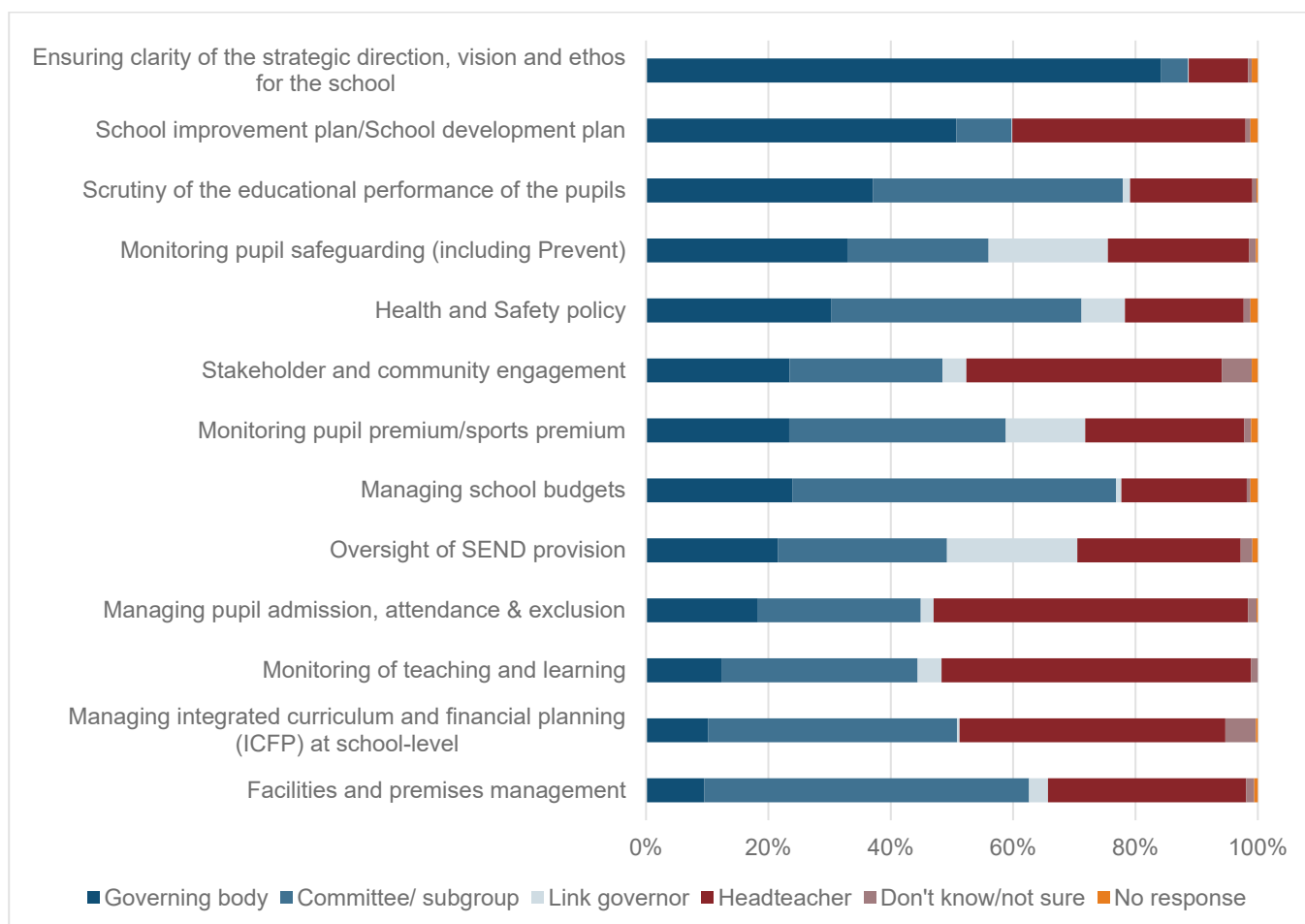
N = 582[20]

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020.

Maintained schools' governing bodies and SAT trust boards were very similar in their perceptions of where decision-making responsibility lay and in most areas the majority reported that decision-making lay with the full governing body or one of its committees. However, the pattern of responses varied depending on the function or policy area. Respondents typically reported that the full governing body had responsibility for school improvement/development plans, while committees of the governing body most frequently had responsibility for managing school budgets and facilities and premises management. Executive leaders primarily had responsibility for monitoring teaching and learning and managing pupil admission, attendance, and exclusions.

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[20] Data has been weighted so that governing bodies with different number of respondents will not contribute differently towards the calculation of averages and proportions.

Looking at the 3 core functions of governance, respondents from maintained schools and SATs were largely in agreement:

- The majority (86%) of maintained schools felt that 'ensuring clarity of strategic direction, vision and ethos of the school' lay with the governing body, while 84% of the SAT boards responded in this way.

- For both maintained schools and SAT boards, 37% of respondents felt scrutiny of educational performance lay with the governing body. There was a slightly larger difference in the use of committees in relation to this core function with 35% of maintained schools said this lay with a committee compared to 41% of SAT boards.

- Almost a quarter (23%) of maintained schools felt that managing school budgets lay with the governing body and 52% said this lay with a committee compared to 24% of SAT boards who said this was with the governing body and 53% who said this was with a committee.

Other responsibilities were reported reasonably evenly between different structures or individuals. For example, 36% of maintained schools' governing bodies indicated that the full governing body had decision-making responsibility for Health and Safety policies, while a further 36% reported that was held by a committee. There were also a few areas where the responsibility was reported reasonably evenly across governing bodies, committees, executive leaders, and in some instances a link governor/trustee such as oversight of SEND provision or monitoring pupil safeguarding (including Prevent).

Analysis comparing primary and secondary school governing bodies found that they were very similar in their perceptions of where decision-making lay, with the following exceptions.

- **Monitoring of teaching and learning** – in primary schools, 56% of respondents reported that the executive leader had responsibility compared to 46% of secondary school respondents. Instead, among secondary school governing bodies, a higher proportion of committees held this decision-making responsibility (35% compared to 26%).

- **Managing pupil admission, attendance and exclusion** – in secondary schools, 29% of governing bodies give decision-making responsibility to committees compared to 21% among primary schools.

Note that this analysis is descriptive and so has not controlled for different school types (e.g. maintained and SATs) included in this comparison.

The qualitative interview data supports the findings from the survey, but interviewees frequently highlighted that where decision-making was conducted by a committee or the executive leader this was always reported to and ratified by the full governing body to

ensure the appropriate scrutiny and challenge could be applied. However, one interviewee highlighted the potential for duplication in this approach, reporting that *'even if* [the governing body] *do decide that committees will make that decision, they discuss it all again at the full governing body'.* This demonstrates the potential scope for inefficiency of the governing body if the scheme of delegation or instrument of government and decision-making process is not clear. Survey data on decision-making within MAT governance structures are presented below.

**Figure 5   MAT trust board's view of decision making at different levels**
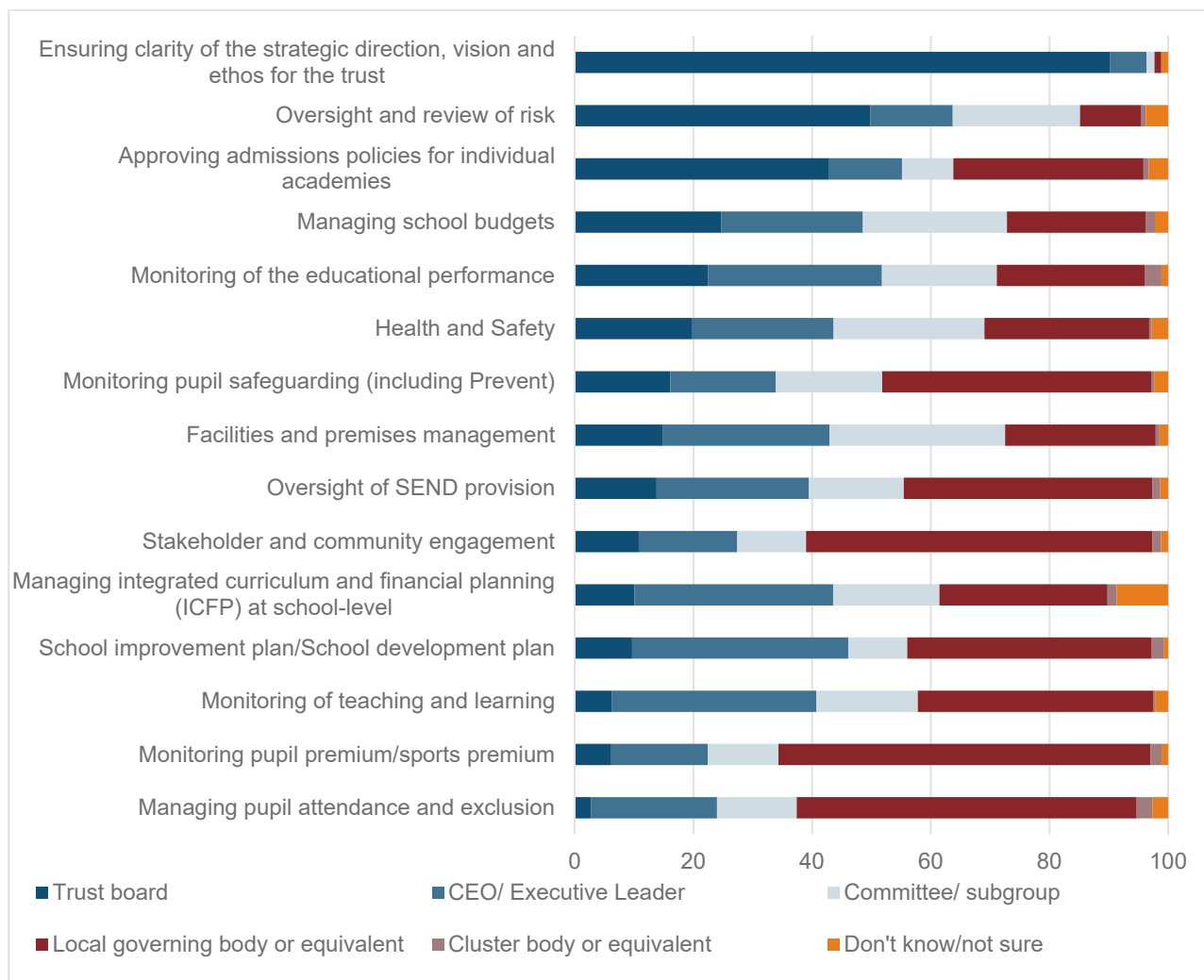
N = 410[21]

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020.

[21] Data has been weighted so that governing bodies with different number of respondents will not contribute differently towards the calculation of averages and proportions.

Figure 6   MAT LGB's view of decision making at different levels within the trust
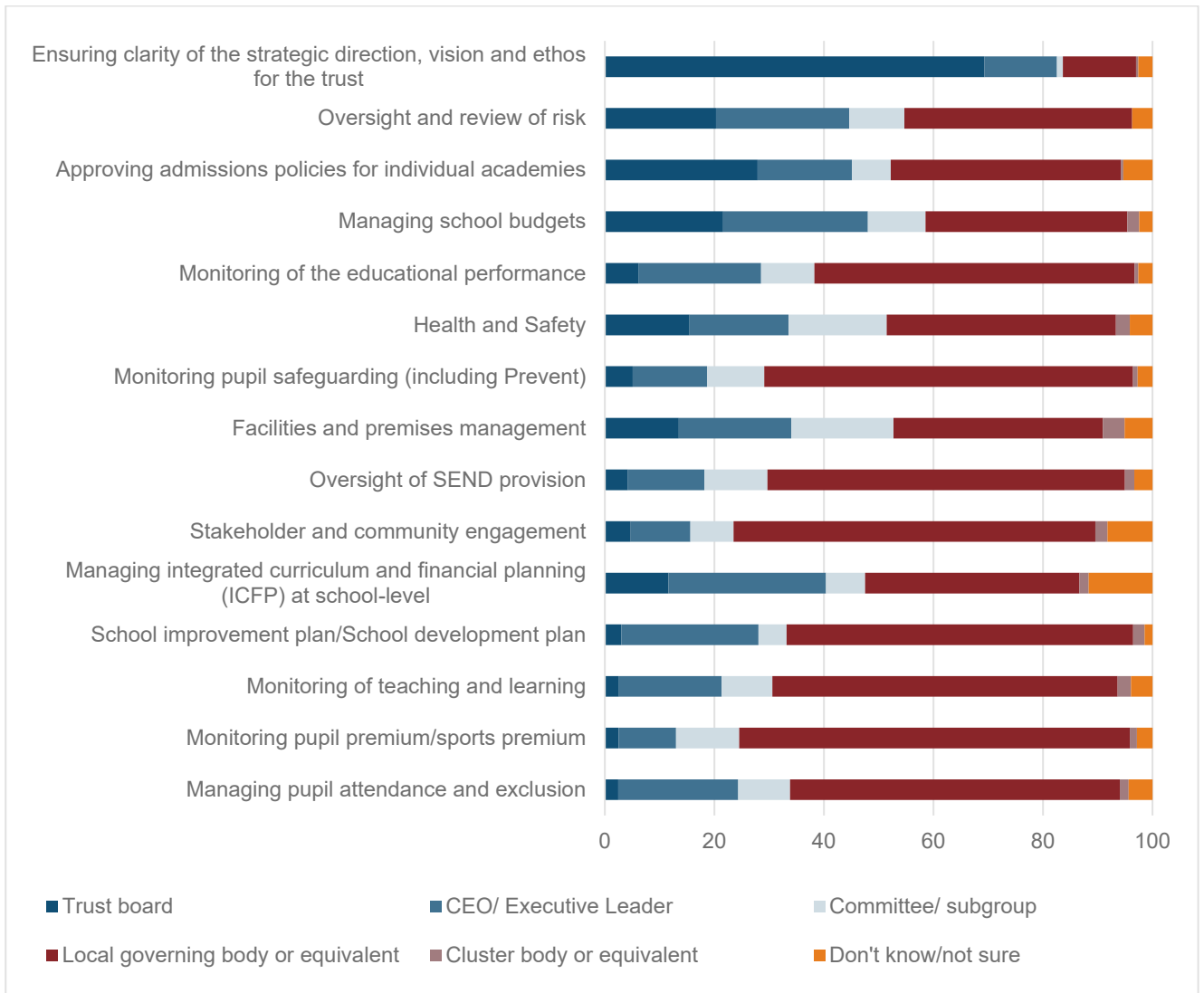
N = 626[22]

Looking at those MATs with responses from both LGB and board level only, it appears there are some discrepancies about where responsibility lies for the 3 core functions of governance, as noted below:

- Over two-thirds (69%) of LGBs felt that ensuring clarity of the strategic direction lay with the trust board, while 90% of the board respondents responded in this

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[22] Data has been weighted so that governing bodies with different number of respondents will not contribute differently towards the calculation of averages and proportions.

way. One per cent of trust boards felt that this lay with the LGB compared to 13% of LGBs.

- Around a fifth (22%) of trust boards felt that monitoring of educational performance lay with the trust board compared to 6% of LGBs. Furthermore, while 58% of LGBs said this lay with the LGB compared to 25% of trust boards.

- There was slightly less disagreement with regards to managing school budgets. A quarter (25%) of trust boards felt that this responsibility lay with the trust board while 22% of LGBs felt this was the case while23% of trust boards felt this lay with the LGB compared to 37% of LGBs.

There is also a clear difference of perception between trust boards and LGBs from the same MAT as to the extent to which the LGB has decision-making powers[23] in relation to other functions and policy areas. Overall, responses from LGBs indicated that the trust board set the trajectory of the trust by ensuring clarity of strategic direction, vision and ethos while LGBs had decision-making powers for overseeing the functions in individual academies and holding academies to account. Responses at the trust board level, on the other hand, indicated that the trust board, CEO/Executive leader, and committees of the trust board more often had retained decision-making responsibility for overseeing these functions and holding academies to account. The result of this was large discrepancies between these two different levels of governance within the same MAT as to how commonly powers were delegated to LGBs. This was particularly evident in the following areas.

- **Monitoring the educational performance of pupils** – 58% of LGB responses reported that LGBs held this responsibility, while responses from trust boards indicated the responsibility was spread relatively evenly between trust boards (22%), CEO/Executive leaders (29%), and LGBs (25%).

- **Oversight and review of risk** – 50% of responses from trust boards reported that they held this responsibility and 10% said this was held by LGBs. Conversely, 42% of responses from LGBs reported that LGBs as responsible for this and 20% reported that the trust board were responsible.

- **Oversight of SEND provision** – among trust board responses, 42% reported that LGB held responsibility for this compared to 65% of LGB responses.

- **School improvement/development plans** – 41% of responses from trust boards reported LGBs as having responsibility for this area and 36% reported

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[23] It should be noted that this analysis was done at the cohort level by comparing all trust responses to all LGB responses, rather than comparing responses within the same trust at the individual level.

CEO/Executive leaders as having responsibility. Among LGBs, 63% reported that LGBs carried out this function.

- **Monitoring pupil safeguarding** – 67% from LGBs reported that local governing bodies oversaw this function, but this dropped to only 45% of trust boards.

In these areas of responsibility, there was a 20-30 percentage point difference between the proportion of trust board respondents and LGB respondents stating that the decision-making responsibility was delegated to the LGB. LGBs and trust boards were in closest agreement about where decision-making powers were held in the following areas: managing pupil attendance and exclusions and stakeholder and community engagement. In both areas, the majority of trust boards and LGBs reported that this was delegated to LGBs. It is also important to note that respondents from LGBs were notably more likely to not know where responsibility for a particular function was held, particularly with regards to stakeholder and community engagement, managing integrated curriculum and financial planning, and approving admissions policies for individual academies.

The qualitative data supports the survey findings that MATs utilise the scheme of delegation to give LGBs autonomy where possible. Many interviewees from MAT LGBs felt that their body had the majority of the decision-making power and workload, though the majority acknowledged that ultimate accountability and ratification power lay with the trust board. A minority perceived that all decisions were made at the local level. One trustee commented that: *'Finance sits at trust level, but schools have delegated a whole bunch of things, but in the end it is us* [the trust] *who decides'*.

The telephone interviews suggest that trust boards use the scheme of delegation, terms of reference, and other frameworks to define the parameters within which LGBs can operate autonomously, which may in part explain some of the differences in perceptions found in the survey. A minority of interviewees suggested the scheme of delegation caused confusion and/or conflict due to a lack of clarity or disagreement over how involved LGBs should be in the different elements of governance. The approach taken within a trust appeared consistent across schools, as very few individuals indicated the scheme of delegation varied for different schools within the trust.

Changes to the scheme of delegation

The majority of interviewees from SATs and maintained schools had not seen a change in where decision-making responsibility was held. Where changes were reported, this was often associated with a change in the governance structure such as the removal of committees. While most of these interviewees represented governance structures that included committees, overall there was a clear sense that the governing bodies were moving towards making more decisions at full governing body-level and in some cases removing or merging committees so those that remained only covered key specialist areas such as finance and resources.

Similar to the experience of interviewees from maintained schools and SATs, cases where interviewees from MATs reported that there had been a change to the scheme of delegation were often linked to a change in the trust's governance structure such as the formation or removal of committees and the growth or merging of the trust.

Only a small minority reported that the scheme of delegation was regularly reviewed and modified to reflect the needs of the trust and/or to ensure that all skills and resources were utilised effectively. For example, one interviewee explained how the trust had appointed an interim CEO who had changed the previous established scheme of delegation and removed powers from LGBs. The consequence of this was that relationships broke down between school and trust leaders and trustees, causing a fracture within the trust. A new CEO and trust board were appointed and the interviewee commented that they '[understand] *what the consequences are of what you do and don't delegate'* and so were reviewing the scheme of delegation. The interviewee felt that as a result of these appointments, particularly the CEO, '*they are getting better clarity and leadership'* from the trust board. This individual did, however, explain that it was challenging to communicate the new approach to local bodies and that '*it's really difficult for governors that are in schools that convert to get their heads around the changes'*.

2.4   Link governors

Analysis found that link governors/trustees were used extensively within the schools and trusts. Link governors/trustees are members of the governing body within the school or trust who have been given a specific responsibility for a discrete curriculum or policy area, particularly where the board has specific legal duties. As shown in Table 13, only 5% reported not using any link governors/trustees. Governing bodies appeared selective in how they used link governors/trustees. For example, 88% had a link governor/trustee responsible for safeguarding and 83% had a link governor/trustee for SEND provision, while just 30% had a link governor/trustee for issues relating to pupil behaviour.

Table 13   The use of link governors/trustees to support different areas of governance

For which of the following areas do you have a link governor/trustee?	Overall (%)
Safeguarding	88
SEND	83
Health and Safety	67
Teaching and learning (including curriculum and quality)	59
Finance/audit	56
Premises/property	39
Staff performance and wellbeing	33
Pupil behaviour	30
Other	21
We do not use link governors	5

N = 2,751[24]

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

There were some differences in the reported use of link governors/trustees when broken down by school characteristic such as school type, and urban and rural status. Interestingly, this analysis highlights that the differences tend to occur most in relation to a few common areas: premises/property, health and safety, and pupil behaviour.

The use of link governors/trustees was broadly similar across maintained schools' governing bodies and SAT trust boards, as shown in Table 14. However, MAT trust boards reported using link governors/trustees to a lesser extent than other types of schools/trusts, particularly in the following areas:

- Premises/property management
- Health and safety
- SEND.

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[24] Data has been weighted so that governing bodies with different number of respondents will not contribute differently towards the calculation of averages and proportions.

Table 14   The use of link governors/trustees by board type

For which of the following areas do you have a link governor/trustee?	Maintained School governing body (%)	SAT trust board (%)	MAT LGBs (%)	MAT trust board (%)
Safeguarding	90	90	87	85
SEND	87	87	81	74
Health and Safety	73	70	64	58
Teaching and learning (including curriculum and quality)	61	59	63	50
Finance/audit	58	60	51	57
Premises/property	45	41	37	29
Staff performance and wellbeing	33	32	35	31
Pupil behaviour	27	31	34	25
Other	23	19	22	17
We do not use link governors	4	3	3	9
N	894	614	686	462

N = 2,656[25]

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

As can be seen in the table above, in all but one area, MAT trust boards reported the lowest proportion of link trustees/governors, compared to all other board types. They also had the highest proportion stating that they did not use link trustees, compared to other boards (9% compared to between 3-4% for other governing bodies).

Analysis also showed that, overall, governing bodies at rural schools typically used link governors/trustees to a greater degree than urban schools. The biggest difference in link governor/trustee use was for premises/property management, where 49% of governing bodies at rural schools compared to 39% of urban schools had this type of link governor/trustee. Other areas where bodies at rural schools tended to utilise link governors/trustees notably more than urban schools were in the areas of teaching and

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[25] Data has been weighted so that governing bodies with different numbers of respondents will not contribute differently towards the calculation of averages and proportions.

learning, staff performance and wellbeing, and health and safety. The only area where bodies at urban schools had a higher reported use of link governors/trustees was for pupil behaviour. Note that this is descriptive analysis and so differences in phase or school type could be contributing to this variation.

2.5 The role of the Clerk

Clerks were asked to identify what activities they undertook as part of their role. The proportion of clerks who agreed that each of these activities was part of their role is as follows:

- Taking minutes – 96%

- Circulating papers in advance of meetings – 95%

- Providing administrative support as part of their role – 93%

- Providing procedural advice, before, during and after meetings – 89%

- Over a quarter of clerks (25%), however, did not consider providing or signposting to legal advice before, during and after meetings to be part of their role.

As shown in Table 15, there was some notable variation depending on the type of governing body they were supporting.

Table 15   Activities undertaken by clerks

Activity	Maintained School governing body (%)	SAT trust board (%)	MAT LGBs (%)	MAT trust board (%)
Take minutes at meetings	98	96	95	93
Circulate papers to governors in advance of meetings	97	93	95	93
Provide procedural advice, before, during and after meetings	90	88	82	95
Provide or signpost to legal advice before, during and after meetings	75	74	60	82
Provide administrative support e.g. collating and circulating papers, meeting organisations, taking forward actions etc.	93	94	92	93
Other	28	39	34	47
N	121	104	73	107

N = 405 respondents

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Clerks supporting LGBs within a MAT were least likely (60%) to identify providing or signposting to legal advice as part of their role, particularly when compared to their counterparts supporting MAT trust boards (82%). Clerks supporting LGBs within a MAT also considered providing procedural advice to be part of their remit less frequently than their counterparts supporting other types of board.

Similarly, Clerks supporting boards of primary schools (68%) less frequently stated providing legal advice as being part of their role than clerks at secondary schools (75%).

Overall, 95% of the governing bodies[26] we surveyed reported that they had the support of a clerk. The majority of clerks were employed by their school or trust and these two types of employers accounted for three-quarters of the respondents. Table 16 shows the

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[26] This percentage is based on data that has been weighted in order that multiple responses per school/trust do not contribute more information than schools for which there was only one response.

proportion of respondents employed in each category according to the type of governing body they support.

Table 16   Employers of clerks and the type of governing boards they support

Employer	Maintained School governing body (%)	SAT trust board (%)	MAT LGB (%)	MAT trust board (%)
Local authority	31	5	3	3
Private company that provides clerking services	5	2	8	3
School	54	53	43	3
Self-employed	8	8	6	6
Trust	0	29	40	83
Other	2	4	1	2
No response	0	0	0	1
N	121	104	73	107

N = 405 respondents

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

The majority (85%) of clerks who supported maintained schools' governing bodies were employed by the school or the local authority. Similarly, most SAT trust board respondents (82%) reported they are employed by the trust or school.

Among MATs, there was variability across the different tiers of governance. The majority (83%) of clerks from MAT trust boards were employed by their trust while 40% of clerks from MAT LGBs reported being employed by their trust. A further 43% of respondents from MAT LGBs reported that they were employed by their school and 8% by a private company that provided clerking services.

Table 17 below shows how clerks' employment differed by phase.

Table 17   Employers of clerks/governance professionals by the phase

Employer	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)
Local authority	18	10
Private company that provides clerking services	5	5
School	45	49
Self-employed	7	6
Trust	22	29
Other	3	2
N	150	178

N = 328 respondents

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Reflecting the higher proportion of maintained schools in the primary sector, a higher proportion of clerks from primary schools (18%) were employed by the local authority than clerks from secondary schools (10%). Furthermore, clerks supporting secondary school governing bodies were more likely to be employed by the school or trust (49% and 29% respectively) than clerks from primary school governing bodies (45% and 22%). Note that this analysis is descriptive and so has not accounted for the role that school type may have in explaining these variations.

For the 121 clerks that were answering this survey on behalf of a MS governing body, 52% stated that they supported a single board and the vast majority of the remainder supported less than 10 governing boards, reflecting the fact that the majority were employed by their school[27]. In SATs, the proportion of clerks supporting a single academy was 70%, with the remainder primarily supporting fewer than 6 boards. There was a distinctly different picture among clerks from MATs. Thirty-four per cent of respondents from MAT LGBs indicated that they supported a single board, 38% supported between 2 and 5 boards and 19% supported between 6 and 10 boards. Among respondents from MAT trust boards, there was even greater variability. While 19% of clerks indicated that they supported a single board, 27% supported 2 to 5 boards, and 31% supported between 6 and 10 boards.

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[27] In the survey, clerk respondents were asked to answer this question for all school or trusts that they support. This included any and all boards, bodies, or committees that they support. For example, a respondent would answer 4 if they supported a trust board as well as 3 LGBs in a MAT.

It was also more common for clerks from rural schools and primary schools to be supporting more than one board. Note, however, that 67% of respondents from rural schools are also from primary schools and so this overlap may be contributing to the variation observed.

The average number of boards supported by clerks who circulate papers, take minutes at meetings, provide or signpost legal advice, and/or provide administrative support are similar, ranging from a mean of 4.7 to 5.6 boards. The exception to this was among clerks who provide procedural advice. Clerks who undertook this as part of their role supported a mean of 9.1 boards each.

Clerks were also asked how they were remunerated for their services.

Table 18   Remuneration methods used for clerks

Remuneration method	Maintained School Governing body (%)	SAT trust board (%)	MAT LGBs (%)	MAT trust boards (%)
I'm paid based on an hourly rate	26	14	23	11
I am not paid for the role	10	9	7	8
I receive a fixed amount per meeting	15	14	15	9
I receive an annual salary	50	62	55	71
No response	0	1	0	1
N	121	104	73	107

N=405 respondents

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

While the majority of clerks were remunerated via an annual salary, there was a great deal of variation in this by board type. Half (50%) of respondents supporting a maintained school governing body said they received an annual salary for their clerking services, compared to 55% from MAT LGBs, 62% from SAT trust boards, and 71% from MAT trust boards. Approximately a quarter of respondents who supported MS governing bodies (26%) and MAT LGBs (23%) were paid an hourly rate, compared to 14% among SAT trust boards and 11% among MAT trust board respondents. The proportion of clerks receiving a fixed payment per meeting was similar across all board types except MAT trust boards, where less than 10% of respondents were remunerated in this fashion.

Among clerks who received an annual salary, the mean salary was £9,197.90 and with a median of £3,635. Among those who were paid an hourly rate, the mean rate was £29.33 per hour, with a median rate of £11 per hour. Finally, those who received a fixed amount per meeting were paid a mean amount of £188.44, with a median value of £181.

2.6   The role of the Members of the trust

When asked what their role involved, the vast majority of Members reported two types of activity. The first was to attend trust board meetings. The second was to receive a series of different documents, including the annual accounts and finance documentation, overall trust performance data, strategic documents, and board meeting minutes. Of these core activities, Members then identified that attending trust board meetings (primarily as a trustee themselves), reviewing board meeting minutes, and reviewing annual accounts and finance documentation were the main ways by which they were assured that trustees were undertaking their roles effectively. As previously discussed, the majority of Members were also trustees.

3.   Who is involved in governance and why

This chapter presents the demographics of respondents who were involved in the governance of schools and trusts at the time of the survey, which took place between November 2019 and January 2020. The chapter also explores respondents' reasons for becoming involved and reports on how long they have fulfilled their current governance roles.

Key findings

- More females than males were involved in all governance roles, except chairs, in all school types and in all types of governing body. In particular, 82% of clerks responding to the survey were female and 59% of executive leaders were female. Members had more evenly balanced proportions of females (49%) and males (44%). Over half (53%) of governors and trustees were female. Chair roles comprised equal proportions (49%) of females and males.

- The majority (over 80%) of respondents in governance roles in all school types and types of governing body were aged 40 or older, with 27% over the age of 60. The majority (88%) identified as White English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British. A minority (3.5%) of respondents identified as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic and volunteers in this category accounted for 3% of individuals in chair roles.

- The majority of chairs, governors/trustees, members and clerks (71%) were in some form of employment. The proportion of respondents in full-time employment was similar (44% to 49%) for all governance roles except for chairs (29%). Nearly two-fifths (37%) of clerks were in part-time employment.

- Around a quarter (26%) of chairs, governors/trustees, members and clerks were retired. More chairs than other governance roles, and more respondents in governance roles in maintained schools, were retired.

- When interviewed, chairs, governors and trustees said that a desire to volunteer, existing school links, having relevant experience and skills, and looking for new life challenges were the main reasons for deciding to become involved in governance. The majority (70%) of governors/trustees had been in their current governance roles between 1 and 9 years, 20% for 10 years or longer and 10% for less than a year. This indicates that school and trust governance can draw on considerable accumulated experience which is testament to the commitment of volunteers who fulfil these roles, though some are staying on boards longer than the best practice guidelines of two terms of office (8 years).

- Clerks said that existing school links, relevant experience and skills, and professional/life opportunities were the main reasons for deciding to become

involved in governance. Over half (57%) had been in this role for between 1 and 9 years, over a third (36%) for 10 years or longer, and 6% for less than a year. This indicates that school and trust governance can draw on a resource of well-established clerks and their accumulated governance knowledge.

3.1 Individual characteristics

Respondents' gender

The majority of the survey respondents were female: 58% compared to 39% male (3% did not disclose their gender). There were differences by role of respondent as set out in Table 19.

Table 19   Characteristics of survey respondents' gender by role

Gender	Governor/Trustee (%)	Chair (%)	Clerk (%)	Executive Leader (%)	Member (%)
Female	53	49	82	59	49
Male	43	49	12	38	44
Prefer not to say	4	2	6	3	7
N	974	665	416	625	71

N=2,751

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance 2019/2020

The table shows that there were more females than males in each role except for chairs. The difference was most pronounced in the role of clerk where 82% were female. A much larger proportion of executive leaders answering the survey were female: 59% compared with 38% male. There were also more females in governor and trustee roles where 53% were female compared with 43% male. The proportions of females and males were the same (49%) for the role of chair and more evenly balanced for the role of member where 49% were female and 44% were male, although due to small numbers of members, caution must be taken when interpreting these findings. Here it is worth noting that a recent survey by the National Governance Association (NGA, 2019)[28] found that 62% of school governance volunteers were female and that females were more likely to govern in all phases of schools except alternative provision.

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[28] National Governance Association report

The gender pattern in Table 19 was found across schools in federations, schools of religious character, special schools, and schools in urban and rural locations. There was a marked difference by education phase where 64% of respondents involved in governance at primary schools were female compared with 53% of those in secondary schools. The difference was the same when school type was taken into account: there were larger proportions of females involved in governance in primary (66%) and secondary (53%) maintained schools, in primary (62%) and secondary (56%) SATs, and in primary schools (64%) in MATs. In secondary schools in MATs the gender proportions (females 50%, males 48%) were closer.

Female respondents predominated in the governance structures in all sizes of MATs, ranging from 52% in starter MATs to 64% in system leader MATs.

Table 20 shows female and male respondents' representation across the different boards.

Table 20   Characteristics of survey respondents: gender by type of governing body

Gender	Maintained school governing body (%)	SAT trust board (%)	MAT (LGB, %)	MAT trust board (%)
Female	61	58	58	52
Male	37	37	39	44
Prefer not to say	3	5	3	4
N	894	614	686	462

N=2,656

Source: NFER survey of governance 2019/2020

The table indicates that there was a similar female-male pattern to that noted for other characteristics reported above: a larger proportion of female than male respondents was represented on the governing boards in each category.

Respondents' age range

Most of the respondents (87%) were 40 years of age or older and 9% were in the 18 to 39 years age bracket (4% did not disclose their age).

A recent survey by the NGA (2019)[29] reported that the over 40s accounted for 79.6% of the school governance population and that 10% were aged under 40.

Respondents to the NFER survey aged 40 or older predominated in all roles, ranging from 81% of clerks to 92% of chairs. It is worth noting that respondents with paid roles – executive leaders and clerks – were, on average, slightly younger than other respondents. Table 21 provides further details.

Table 21   Characteristics of survey respondents' age range by role

Age range	Governor/ Trustee %	Chair %	Clerk %	Executive Leader %	Member of Trust %
18 – 29 years	1	0	1	0	0
30 – 39 years	10	5	11	7	6
40 – 49 years	26	19	26	41	28
50 – 59 years	26	27	38	43	34
60 – 69 years	23	32	16	6	11
70+ years	9	14	1	0	13
Prefer not to say	4	3	6	3	8
N	974	665	416	625	71

N=2,751

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance 2019/2020

A similar age-range pattern was found for respondents when analysed by their type of governing body (maintained school governing body, SAT trust board, MAT LGB and MAT trust board), type of school (schools in federations, schools of religious character, and special schools), education phase (primary and secondary), location (urban and rural) and size of trust (starter, established, national and system leader). Further analysis showed that a larger proportion of respondents in maintained secondary schools (91%) compared to maintained primary schools (86%) and in MAT secondary schools (89%) compared to MAT primary schools (84%) were aged over 40. The proportion of respondents (86%) aged over 40 was the same for primary and secondary SATs. A similar pattern was found when the survey data was analysed by board type, except for

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[29] National Governance Association report

trust boards where a larger proportion of respondents on primary trust boards (90%) compared to those on secondary trust boards (88%) were aged over 40.

Respondents' ethnicity[30]

A minority of respondents (3.5%) identified themselves as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME). Indian respondents were the largest BAME category, accounting for 1% of all respondents. Most of the survey respondents identified themselves as 'White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British' (88%)[31]. The next largest ethnic groups were 'Any other white background' 2% and 'Irish' 2% (4.5% ticked 'Prefer not to say'). This ethnic profile is broadly similar to the figures reported by the National Governance Association (2019): 92.8% of its 2019 survey respondents identified as white and 5.4% identified as BAME. The National Governance Association (2019) also noted that 9.7% of volunteers joining boards in the past 2 years were from ethnic minorities.

The NFER survey found that BAME respondents accounted for 3% of chairs while the corresponding figure for volunteers in the 'White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British' category was 91%, 1.7 were 'Other white', 1.5% 'Irish' (2.9% preferred not to disclose their ethnicity). The National Governance Association (2019) also reported that respondents in its survey who identified as white were more likely to be chairs compared to those from other ethnic groups.

The NFER survey found that 'White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British' respondents accounted for 86% of governors and trustees, 88% of clerks, 89% of executive leaders, and 86% of Members of trusts.

The overall ethnicity pattern was the same when the survey data was analysed by type of governing body (maintained school governing body, SAT trust board, MAT LGB and MAT trust board), type of school (maintained schools in federations, schools of religious character, special schools), education phase (primary and secondary), and size of trust. A larger proportion of respondents in rural schools (92%) than in urban schools (87%) identified as 'White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British'.

BAME respondents were younger than those in the 'White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British' category. For example, 16% were aged 18-39 compared with 9% 'White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British'. The National Governance Association (2019) also reported that the youngest governors and trustees were more likely to be from an ethnic minority.

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[30] The Government's standard ethnicity categories were used for this survey question.
[31] The 2011 Census reported that 86% of the population in England and Wales were 'White' Ethnicity and National identity in England and Wales

BAME respondents had served fewer years on governing boards. While 17% had served for less than a year and 48% for 1-4 years, the corresponding proportions of 'White: English, Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British' respondents were 9% and 42%. No BAME respondents had served on boards for 15 years or more whereas 12% of 'White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British' had.

Respondents' current employment situation[32]

The survey data on respondents' current employment situation presented in Table 22 show that a larger proportion of Members (49%) and governors/trustees (44%) than chairs (29%) were in full-time employment. While similar proportions of chairs (14%) and governors/trustees (13%) were in part-time employment, fewer than one in ten (9%) of Members were in part-time employment. Nearly two-fifths (37%) of chairs were retired compared with over a quarter (28%) of governors/trustees and around a fifth (21%) of Members. The table also shows that 47% of clerks were employed full-time, 37% employed part-time and 11% self-employed. Four per cent of clerks reported being retired. These figures reflect clerks' remunerated role on governing boards/bodies.

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[32] All roles except executive leaders were asked to answer the questions on current employment status.

Table 22   Characteristics of survey respondents: current employment situation

Current employment situation	Governor/ Trustee %	Chair %	Member of Trust %	Clerk %
Unemployed	1	1	0	0
Retired	28	37	21	4
Studying full or part time	1	1	0	1
In casual or non-regular work	1	0	0	1
In part-time work	13	14	9	37
In full-time work	44	29	49	47
Self-employed	10	16	14	11
Prefer not to say	4	4	5	3
Other	2	3	5	1
N	974	665	43	416

Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not sum to 100%.

N=2,098

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance 2019/2020

The overall employment profile presented in the table above was similar for respondents in all sizes of trust, maintained schools in federations, special schools and schools of religious character. The main differences in the current employment situation of governors/trustees, chairs and Members by type of school and board were as follows:

- School type - a slightly higher proportion of respondents from SATs (43%) and MATs (41%) were in full-time work compared with 37% from maintained schools. Larger proportions of respondents in maintained schools (32%) and schools in MATs (32%) than in SATs (23%) were retired.

- Board type - larger proportions of respondents on governing bodies in SATs (41%) and MATs (40%) than in maintained schools (25%) and trusts (29%) were in full-time employment. Similar proportions (12% or 13%) were in part-time employment. The proportion of respondents on MAT trust boards (38%) was larger than in MAT LGBs (29%), SAT trust boards (24%) and maintained school governing bodies (22%).

- Location - a smaller proportion of respondents in rural schools (33%) compared with those in urban schools (38%) were in full-time work but a larger proportion (34% compared with 28%) were retired.

- Education phase - a larger proportion of respondents in secondary schools (38%) than in primary schools (36%) were in full-time employment while the proportion in part-time employment was similar (13% in primary schools compared with 12% in secondary schools).

The main findings for clerks' current employment situation were as follows:

- School type - a larger proportion of clerks in schools in MATs were in full-time employment (51%) than in SATs (43%) and maintained schools (39%). The proportion of clerks in part-time employment was larger in maintained schools (39%) and SATs (38%) than schools in MATs (31%).

- Board type – half of the clerks serving on MAT trust boards and serving on MAT LGBs were in full-time employment compared to 41% serving on SAT trust boards and 39% serving on maintained school governing bodies. A larger proportion of clerks serving on SAT trust boards (40%) and serving on maintained school governing bodies (39%) were in part-time employment compared to clerks serving on MAT trust boards (32%) and MAT LGBs (30%).

- Education phase - a larger proportion of clerks in secondary schools (49%) than in primary schools (34%) were in full-time employment.

- Location - a larger proportion of clerks in urban schools (46%) than in rural schools (28%) were in full-time employment.

- MAT size - more clerks in larger MATs were in full-time employment (established MATs 55%, national MATs 59%, system leader MATs 52%) than in starter MATs (36%).

The reasons chairs and governors and trustees became involved in school and trust governance are explored in the next section.

03.2 Reasons for involvement in governance and length of service

Reasons for involvement

The survey follow-up telephone interviews conducted in February 2020 explored the reasons interviewees became involved in school and trust governance. The 18 interviews with chairs and governors/trustees comprised: 10 chairs and one vice chair covering 2 trust boards, 2 MAT LGBs, 3 SAT trust boards, 4 maintained school governing bodies

(one of which was in a federation); 4 governors from maintained school governing bodies; and 3 SAT trustees.

The interviewees gave the following reasons for becoming involved in governance:

- **Desire to volunteer** for a worthwhile cause, such as an interest in helping to improve children's lives and giving back to the community. This reason is illustrated by these interviewees' comments: 'It's been really good for me to do something voluntary … I think that feeling of giving to something where you know you can have an impact' and 'I wanted to give something back really and then things escalated and I became vice chair which I love'.

- **Existing school links** such as involvement in their children's schools. This was exemplified by one parent who wanted to help improve the school their son attended and another parent who aimed to gain a better understanding of the school their children attended. A third parent wanted to give something back to their child's school, remarking that: 'I thought to myself this is a good way to pay back to the school because they helped my daughter … I became a co-opted governor'.

- **Relevant experience and skills** including being a local authority (LA) or parish councillor; working in the finance, service and industrial sectors; working in education formerly as an inspector of schools, a headteacher or a teacher; volunteering in the third sector; and previous involvement in school governance. Comments illustrating this reason for getting involved in governance were '... the skills are very connected to my job' and 'I have been utilised for my skills set'.

- **A new life challenge** such as the interviewee who had stopped working and had time available to become a school community governor and the interviewee who was looking for a new challenge and doing something meaningful following the end of his contract of employment.

Interviewees usually cited more than one reason for their involvement, and an analysis of the interviews showed these were common across governance roles, types of school and types of board. Around half said that the role had met their expectations as illustrated by the remark from a chair who confirmed that her expectations had been met: 'I love it. I'm passionate about education and about learning for all children' and the governor who observed that: 'I get satisfaction from the fact that I'm on the board of an outstanding school and I'm proud of it'. A different perspective was given by this chair:

> I don't think I knew what to expect to be honest … if I think about it, when I walked through the door, I think I was expecting it to be like a PTA [Parent Teacher Association]. I suppose I completely and utterly underestimated the responsibility of a governor and the more you do it, the more you realise it's a really difficult job, though very rewarding. *Chair*

Another chair noted the satisfaction gained despite the high workload:

> It's been an eye-opener … it's made me more appreciative of how important the governing body is … but no-one explains how much time it takes up, but the role has been very fulfilling. *Chair*

The challenge of fulfilling governance roles was voiced by other interviewees. For example, a chair pointed out that the governance role had become considerably more complex and demanding during his 20 years' experience in education. Another chair took a similar view, observing that the pressure on and scrutiny of governance had increased. Acknowledging that the workload and responsibility had increased, this chair felt that governance roles had become more clearly defined in recent years:

> There wasn't the training around when I started or the clarity. There is a lot more clarity now … the messages used to be critical friend whereas now it's still critical friend but with a lot more. *Chair*

Around half of the interviewees intended to continue in their governance roles, as typified by this chair's comment: 'As long as I feel I can be useful and I'm still learning, then yes'. A trustee said that she would probably continue because the role drew on her skills and offered new experiences: 'I have been exposed to new things such as exclusion panels and been recently asked to sit on a disciplinary [panel]'. A governor who was planning to continue his involvement in governance was looking to take up the role of chair in another school.

Although the experience had met his expectations, a chair explained that he was going to stand down once his term was up because of the high workload it entailed. A trustee was unsure whether to continue beyond his current term because he did not get on with the chair, saying 'that is questionable ... I'll play it by ear'. A chair who was in his 70s was uncertain about continuing, due to their age.

The telephone interviews explored why clerks decided to take up this role. The 9 clerks we interviewed – 3 carrying out clerking for maintained schools, 4 for schools in MATs, and 2 for SATs – gave the following reasons (some interviewees gave more than one reason):

- **Existing school links** such as children attending the school and employment. 'I think it definitely helps if you are already working in the school'.

- **Relevant experience and skills** including previously being a parent governor, chair of governing board and working for a local authority clerking service, as a school business manager, as a teacher, as an inspector of schools, in the civil service, in local government and in the finance sector.

- **Professional/life opportunity** such as providing remunerated governance services and taking up the role on becoming semi-retired.

There were no findings specific to school-type. Several clerk interviewees considered that their experience and skills were relevant to and useful for their clerking role. This was exemplified by the interviewee who said that her previous experience working for a local authority meant that she knew what to expect and what the role would entail.

While the 9 interviewees said that undertaking the role of clerk had broadly met their expectations, they pointed out that the role had changed significantly from when they took up post. For example, one interviewee who started clerking over 20 years ago commented that the role was 'less onerous then'. This view was echoed by an interviewee who noted that the expectations of the clerking role were very high. Some interviewees expressed frustrations with fulfilling the clerking role, as illustrated by the comments made by this interviewee who had 18 years' experience: 'I don't think people understand what clerking is and don't think they understand or recognise how significant the role can be and how encompassing … I'm a passionate advocate for clerking being professionalised'. The undervaluing of clerking was also observed by another interviewee who remarked: 'You despair sometimes because people just think it's a minute-taking role but it's not'.

Length of time on the governing body

The survey found that 70% of governors and trustees had been on their current governing body for between 1 and 9 years. In contrast, 20% had been on their current governing body for 10 years or longer. Further details are provided in Table 23.

Table 23   Length of time Governors and Trustees had been on Governing Boards/Bodies[33]

Length of time	%
Less than a year	10
1-4 years	43
5-9 years	27
10-14 years	9
15 - 19 years	5
20+ years	6

N=1,639

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance 2019/2020

It should be noted that a proportion of survey respondents (around a fifth, 20%) are staying on boards for 10 years or longer. As noted earlier, the survey follow-up interviews revealed that the continuing commitment of some governors/trustees was to the governance of a particular school attended currently or previously by their children.

The table indicates that school and trust governance drew on considerable accumulated experience of governors and trustees which is testament to the commitment of the volunteers who fulfil governance roles.

The survey provided a detailed picture of clerks' length of service. Over half (57%) of the clerks who completed the survey had spent between one and nine years in this role on all governing bodies of any type. In contrast, over a third of respondents had undertaken clerking for ten years or longer. Further details are provided in the table below.

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[33] The DfE guidance for maintained schools states that 'the term of office for all categories of governor is a fixed period of four years. A governor may be elected or appointed for a further term'.

Table 24   Length of time clerks spent on all governing bodies

Length of time	%
Less than a year	6
1-4 years	30
5-9 years	27
10-14 years	19
15 - 19 years	8
20+ years	9
Prefer not to say	1

N= 416

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

The survey findings indicate that school and trust governance can draw on a well-established resource of clerks and their accumulated knowledge. Four of the 9 clerks we interviewed had fulfilled this role for 18 years or longer.

The recruitment and retention of those involved in governance are covered in the next chapter which presents findings on recruitment approaches, vacancies and hard-to-fill roles and skill types.

4.   Recruitment and retention of those in governance

This chapter covers recruitment and retention of those involved in governance. This includes findings on vacancies on governing bodies, skills and positions that are hardest to fill, recruitment challenges and approaches. The chapter also explores the retention of governors/trustees and their reasons for choosing to leave their role.

Key findings

- The majority of governing bodies had vacancies. The average number of vacancies reported per board was higher for maintained schools (1.7 vacancies per board) and single-academy trusts (SATs, 1.8 per board) than for multi-academy trusts (MATs) trust boards (1.1 per board).

- The most common vacancies were for 'other' governors or trustees (such as community/co-opted and foundation governors), regardless of type of governing body, (for example 59% of maintained school governing bodies and 48% of MAT trust boards had a vacancy in this category). These governors/trustees were also seen to be the hardest to recruit. Although parent governor/trustee vacancies (the second most commonly cited vacancy) were not necessarily hard to fill, interviewees felt these were harder to retain than other types of governors/trustees.

- Despite the chair being a difficult position to fill, there were not many vacancies for chairs across the different types of boards (the proportion of boards with a chair vacancy ranged from 1% for MAT trust boards to none for SAT trust boards). Interviewees explained that succession planning was not always in place and existing governors or trustees, rather than volunteering for this role, were being asked to fill it.

- Financial management (28% rated this as a difficult skill to fill) and an understanding of education policy (23%) were seen to be the hardest skills and knowledge gaps to fill by governors/trustees, chairs, clerks, executive leaders and Members. MAT trust boards tended to differ from the other types of boards in terms of the skills they perceived to be difficult to recruit. They found understanding of parental and community engagement harder to fill than other skills/knowledge areas (23% stated this was a difficult skill to fill). This was not identified as a particular issue for other types of governing bodies.

- Perceived workload/lack of time was the main reason given for recruitment difficulties. Interviewees explained that they struggled to recruit people in full time jobs as they felt unable to commit sufficient time to the role.

- Most governors or trustees (77%) were planning to stay in their role for the next year. However, of those that were leaving, 34% said this was due to a 'change in

circumstances' and 32% said this was because 'the role takes up too much time/workload is too high'. Chairs most commonly said the reason was 'due to workload', whereas governors/trustees most commonly said it was 'due to a change in their circumstances'.

4.1   Recruitment of governors and trustees

Chairs and clerks were asked a range of questions about the recruitment of those involved in governance and the current vacancies on their boards.

Vacancies on boards

The majority of boards had one or more vacancies. Over three-quarters of respondents from MATs reported one or more vacancy on their board (77%). This figure was slightly lower for maintained schools (73%), SATs (67%) and MAT LGBs (62%).

The majority of maintained schools in federations reported having vacancies (81%).

A higher proportion of trust boards representing schools of religious character reported having one or more vacancy (76%) compared to those without religious character (64%). This difference was smaller for maintained schools or MAT LGBs (74% for schools of religious character and 66% for those without).

A higher proportion of respondents representing special schools reported having vacancies, regardless of whether they were a maintained school, SAT or MAT (75% to 86%) compared to those without special status (68% to 64%).

There were no notable differences by phase of education.

Despite a higher proportion of respondents from MAT trust boards reporting vacancies, the average number of vacancies per governing body was lower for MATs than for other school types (1.1 vacancies per trust board compared with 1.7 for maintained school governing bodies and 1.8 for SAT trust boards). The average number of vacancies for MAT LGBs was also 1.1. In order to look at vacancies in relation to the size of the board, the research team calculated what percentage of the reported average intended board was accounted for by the reported average number of vacancies. For MATs, this equated to 11% of the intended size of the average trust board and LGB. For SATs' trust boards, this was 13% of the intended size and for maintained school governing bodies, this also equated to 13% of the average board. More information on vacancies by board type is presented in Table 25.

Table 25   Average number of vacancies by board type

Type of board	Average number of vacancies per body
Maintained school governing body	1.7
SAT Board	1.8
MAT Board	1.1
MAT LGB	1.1

N=1,703[34], Clerks and Chairs were asked this question.

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Secondary schools appeared to have high numbers of vacancies on their board regardless of the type of school (2.1 in maintained secondary schools and 1.9 in trust secondary schools).

Special schools in trusts reported the highest number of vacancies per board (2.7). However, for maintained special schools, the figure was 1.7.

Typically, larger MATs reported fewer vacancies per trust board. Indeed, system leader and national MATs reported 0.6 and 0.8 vacancies respectively, compared with 1.2 vacancies for established trusts and 1.1 for starter trusts.

Types of vacancies

The most commonly reported vacancy[35], regardless of board type, was that of '**other' trustee or governor** (this category covered all governors/trustees except parent or staff governor/trustee and as such would have included community/co-opted and foundation governors/trustees, although no definition of 'other' was provided for the respondent). Overall, 59% of maintained schools' governing bodies reported a vacancy in this category, while 48% from MAT trust boards and 44% of SAT trusts and 38% of MAT LGBs recorded a vacancy in this area.

Special schools reported higher proportions of 'other' governor/trustee vacancies (69% compared to 49% for non-special schools). There was no notable difference between special schools in trusts and non-special schools in trusts. Furthermore, schools of

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[34] Reported Ns are based on data that has been weighted in order that multiple responses per school/trust do not contribute more information than schools for which there was only one response.
[35] Respondents were asked to identify vacancies from a prepopulated list of roles. Roles were dependent on type of board the respondent was answering about but included: Chair, vice/deputy chair, parent governor/trustee, staff governor/trustee, clerk, other governor/trustee.

religious character reported higher levels of 'other' governor or trustee vacancies (55% for other trustee and 57% for other governor) compared to schools without religious character (40% for other trustee and 47% for other governor). There were no notable differences for other governor/trustee by phase of education or between rural and urban schools.

The second most commonly cited vacancy was for **parent governors or trustees**, however the proportions reporting vacancies in this area were considerably lower (26% for maintained school governing bodies, 28% for SAT trust boards and 31% for MAT LGBs) when compared with those reporting vacancies for 'other' governor/trustee. The exception to this was MAT trust boards, where just 2% of respondents reported having a parent trustee vacancy. This reflects the DfE guidance which allows for MATs to have parent representation on their LGBs, if they have them, instead of on their trust board (Department for Education, 2019a).

SATs and MATs also reported notable proportions of vacancies for **Members** of the trust (15% for SATs and 22% for MATs). A slightly higher proportion of secondary schools reported Member vacancies (16% compared to 12% in primary schools), whereas a higher proportion of schools of religious character (18%) compared to schools without religious character (13%) reported Member vacancies. A much higher proportion of special schools (26%) reported Member vacancies compared to non-special schools (13%). There were no notable differences between rural and urban schools.

There were very few reported vacancies for **chairs** (1% of the MAT trust boards, maintained schools' governing bodies and MAT LGBs reported having a vacancy for a chair, while none of the SAT boards reported having this vacancy).

Very few boards reported vacancies for **clerks** (ranging from 3% for SAT trust boards, maintained schools' governing bodies and MAT LGBs to less than 1% for MAT trust boards). However, there were some notable differences by school characteristics. Primary schools had a higher proportion of vacancies for clerks, regardless of type of school type (7% of trust boards to 5% of maintained schools' governing bodies and MAT LGBs) compared to secondary schools (1% for all types of board). Rural maintained schools' governing bodies and MAT LGBs also reported having higher levels of clerk vacancies compared to those in urban areas (7% in rural areas compared to 2% in urban areas). This difference was not seen on trust boards (for both MATs and SATs) and some of this difference may reflect the higher proportion of primary schools being in rural areas. Maintained schools in federations (which accounted for 9% of the organisations who responded) reported higher vacancies for clerks (5%) compared to those not in a federation (2%). Again, some of this difference may reflect the higher proportion of primary schools being in federations.

Rural maintained schools' governing bodies and MAT LGBs reported lower levels of vacancies for **vice-chair** compared to urban schools (less than one per cent compared to 5%). These differences were not seen on trust boards (for both MATs and SATs). This difference was also not seen by phase of education.

Recruitment to governance roles

Regardless of type of board, the hardest positions to fill were 'other' governors and trustees (this excludes parent and staff governor/trustees), reflecting the current vacancies on boards. Figure 7 presents the survey findings.

Figure 7   Difficulty of filling 'other' governor/trustee positions, by governance type
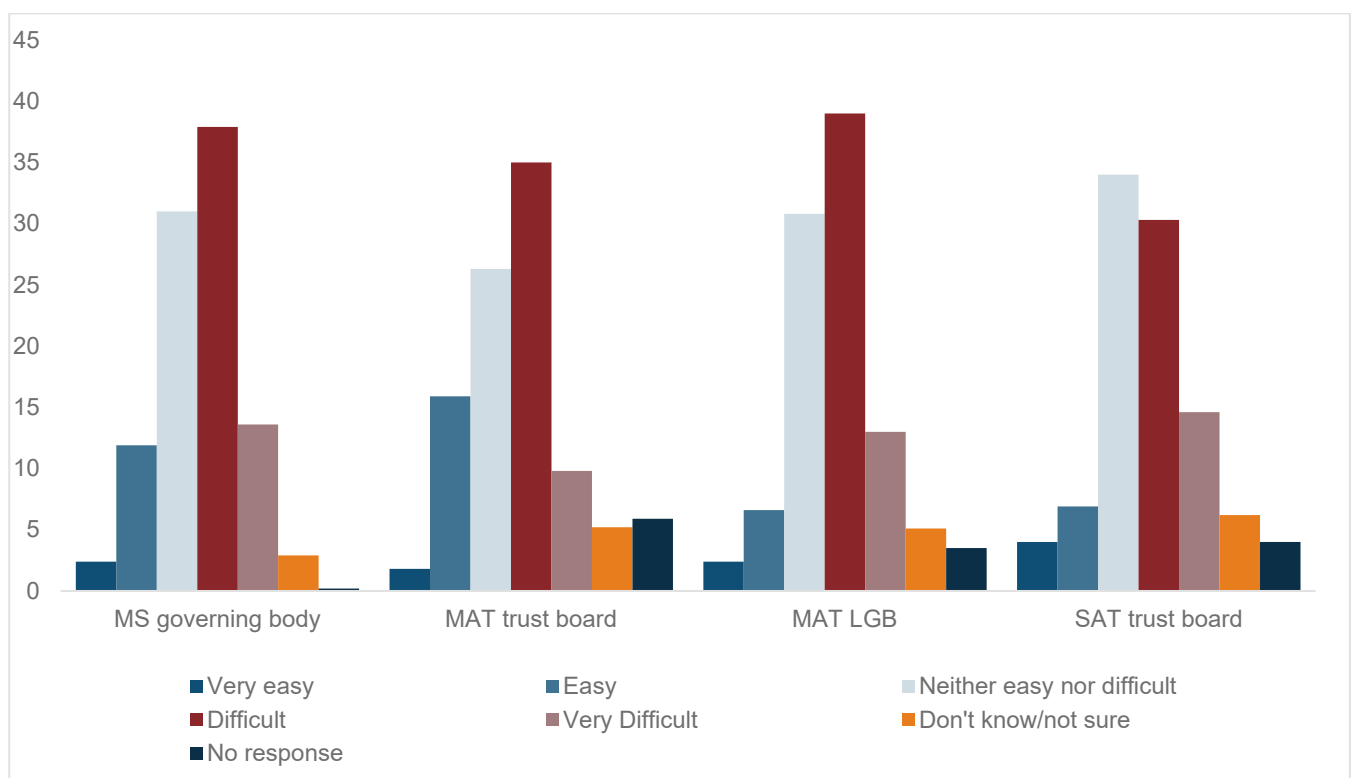
N=1,028, chairs and clerks only asked this question.[36]

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

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[36] Data has been weighted so that governing bodies with different number of respondents will not contribute differently towards the calculation of averages and proportions.

The position of chair was also reported to be difficult to fill. Overall, 23% of respondents described the role of chair as 'very difficult' to fill while a further 26% described it as 'difficult' to fill.

Figure 8   Difficulty of filling the position of chair, by board type
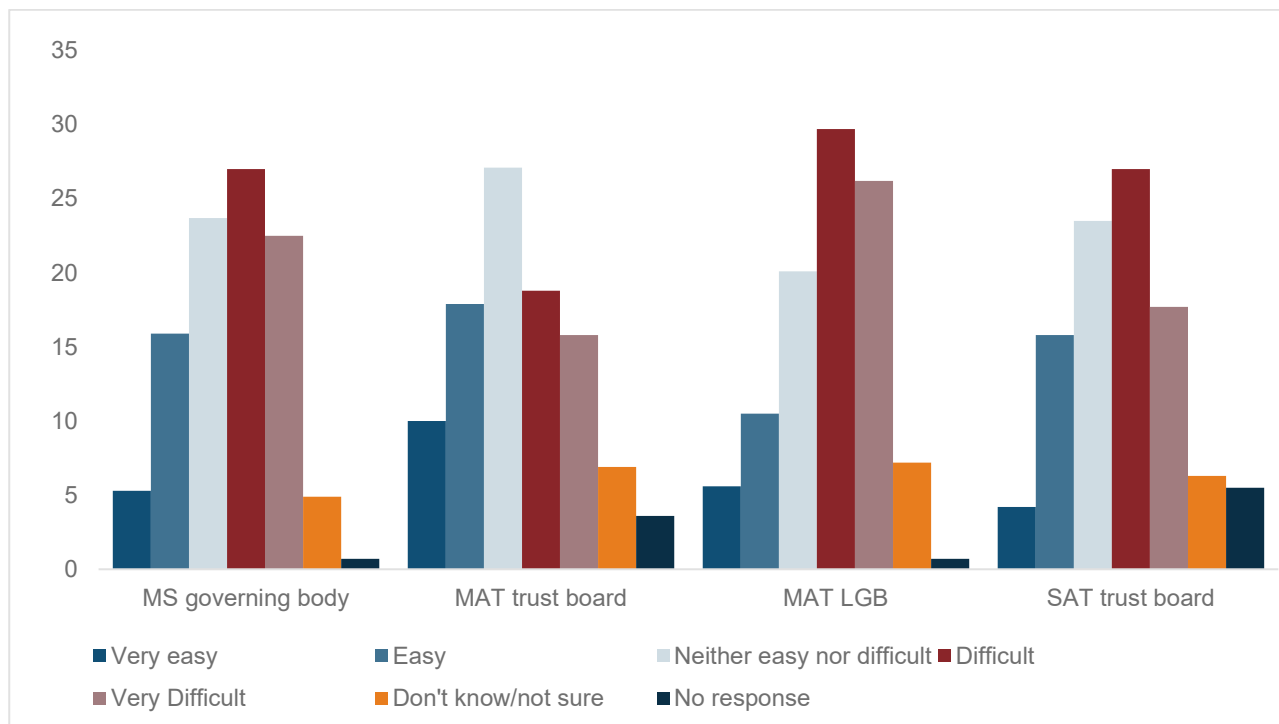
N=1,028[37], chairs and clerks only asked this question.

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

For the recruitment of chairs, there were some notable differences by school characteristics:

- Higher proportions of respondents from primary schools reported difficulties in appointing chairs compared with secondary schools. This pattern was seen in both maintained schools and trusts.

- Higher proportions of respondents from schools with special status reported it to be difficult to appoint chairs compared to non-special schools. There was no difference between special schools and non-special schools in trusts.

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[37] Data has been weighted so that governing bodies with different number of respondents will not contribute differently towards the calculation of averages and proportions.

- Schools in rural trusts found it more difficult to appoint a chair of trustees than those in urban areas. This difference was not seen for chairs in LGBs and maintained schools.

- Schools of religious characters found it more difficult to appoint chairs of trustees than schools without religious character. This difference was not seen for chairs in LGBs and maintained schools.

Parent governors or trustees were not seen to be as difficult roles to fill compared to other governors or trustees and chairs. For example, 22% of respondents felt parent governors/trustees was a 'difficult' position to fill, while 10% described this as 'very difficult' to fill. In comparison, 29% felt this was 'easy' to fill and a further 6% felt this was a 'very easy' position to fill. For trust boards, the same pattern was seen with a higher proportion reporting parent trustees as an easy position to fill (17% 'easy' and 7% 'very easy') compared to difficult (17% 'difficult' and 5% 'very difficult').

Respondents from trust boards described Members of the trust as a relatively difficult position to fill. Overall, 25% described Members as a 'difficult' position to fill and 9% as 'very difficult'. In comparison 14% described this as 'easy' to fill and 7% as 'very easy'. Primary schools reported this role as more difficult to fill than secondary schools (16% of primary schools rated Members as a 'very difficult' position to fill compared to 5% of secondary schools). There were no notable differences by urban or rural location or faith status of the school.

Most difficult skills to fill

Respondents were asked to identify which skills were hardest to fill on their board. They identified 'financial management', knowledge of 'local, regional and national policy priorities', and 'data analysis' as the three most difficult areas of skills, knowledge or expertise to fill.

Figure 9   Most difficult skills to fill on boards

N= 2,571

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Analysis by board type revealed differences in the top three most difficult skills to fill. For example, for MAT LGBs 'financial management' (32%), knowledge of 'local, regional and national policy priorities' (23%), and 'educational expertise' (22%) were seen to be the three most difficult skills to fill. However, MAT trust boards most commonly reported 'parental and community engagement' (23%), followed by 'premises and facilities management' (21%), and 'financial management' and 'data analysis' (both 19%). Responses from MAT trust boards were also more evenly spread across a wider range of skills than was seen for other types of board, suggesting that there were no clear areas of skills and or knowledge that MAT trust boards particularly found difficult to recruit. Details are provided in Table 26.

Table 26   Proportion of respondents rating skills as difficult to fill by board type

Skills/Knowledge	Maintained school governing body (%)	SAT trust board (%)	MAT LGB (%)	MAT trust board (%)
Financial management	27	30	32	19
Strategic planning	23	17	19	15
Data analysis	22	20	20	19
Safeguarding	6	5	5	7
Premises and facilities management	14	15	14	21
Parental/community engagement	16	14	17	23
Local, regional and national policy priorities	27	21	23	16
Critical appraisal of school policies	14	13	16	16
Pay and performance management	4	5	6	3
Educational expertise	18	14	22	14
School improvement expertise	24	27	20	18
Challenging conversations	12	8	8	9
Risk management	n/a	11	n/a	9
Human resources	22	22	21	17
Managing wellbeing and workload	17	15	19	18
None of these are difficult to fill	10	10	13	15
N	894	614	686	462

N=2,656[38]

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance 2019/2020

Generally, there were very few differences by role of respondent, particularly between governors/trustees and those who were also chairs. Across all roles, 'financial management' was reported as a difficult skill to fill. However, when comparing executive leaders with those in governance roles it can be seen that higher proportions of executive leaders felt that 'school improvement expertise' and 'education expertise' were difficult skills or attributes to fill. For example, 28% of executive leaders reported 'school

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[38] Data has been weighted so that governing bodies with different number of respondents will not contribute differently towards the calculation of averages and proportions.

improvement expertise' as one of their 3 most difficult skills or attributes to fill on their governing body, compared to 18% of governors/trustees and 21% of chairs. For 'educational expertise' the figures were 23% of executive leaders compared to 15% of governors/trustees and 17% of chairs.

The telephone interviews provided further insight into skills gaps. Around half of the telephone interviewees believed they did not have any skills gaps on their board, mentioning their board had finance, education, legal and human resources skills and experience and as such they felt their board was well equipped to fulfil their functions.

> We've got two accountants, one lawyer, and a senior teacher and ex-teacher and the others have had a long association with the school.
> *Chair, maintained school*

Of those who did identify skills or knowledge gaps, most interviewees felt their board was only lacking in one area. Most commonly this was either in finance or education experience or knowledge.

> I think we are fairly lucky because we have H&S [health and safety] experts and things like that. If anything, it's people that have an awareness of education [that we are lacking], I think we only have one person who has an educational background. *Executive leader, MAT school*

Other skills gaps mentioned were human resources, legal skills, social care background for mental wellbeing and marketing skills in order to help the school promote itself better. One interviewee commented that while they have representation of a range of professional skills, they lack people with an understanding of governance:

> [Skills lacking are] the actual role of governance and how necessary it is to have effective governance… In their own lives lots of them have top jobs in the City and amongst them they have people who are experts in GDPR or HR or whatever it is. *Clerk, SAT*

Reflecting the findings from Chapter 3, many of the interviewees felt that whilst their board did not have any skills gaps, they did lack diversity. This did not affect the functioning of the governing body, but rather they felt their board was not representative of the local community. This included wanting more diversity with regards to ethnicity socio-economic status and age (specifically younger governors).

> The problem we have is getting the diversity that's from the Trust probably all the way through the LGB irrespective of the demographic

and that area the skill is within… our board is nearly all White, middle-aged, middle-class men or women. *Clerk, MAT*

Reasons for difficulties in recruitment

The main reasons perceived for difficulties in recruitment were: 'potential candidates not having enough time'; 'perceived workload of governors'; and 'lack of interest'. These three reasons were the most commonly reported reasons across all types of schools and school characteristics. Further details are presented in Figure 10.

Figure 10   Challenges to recruitment
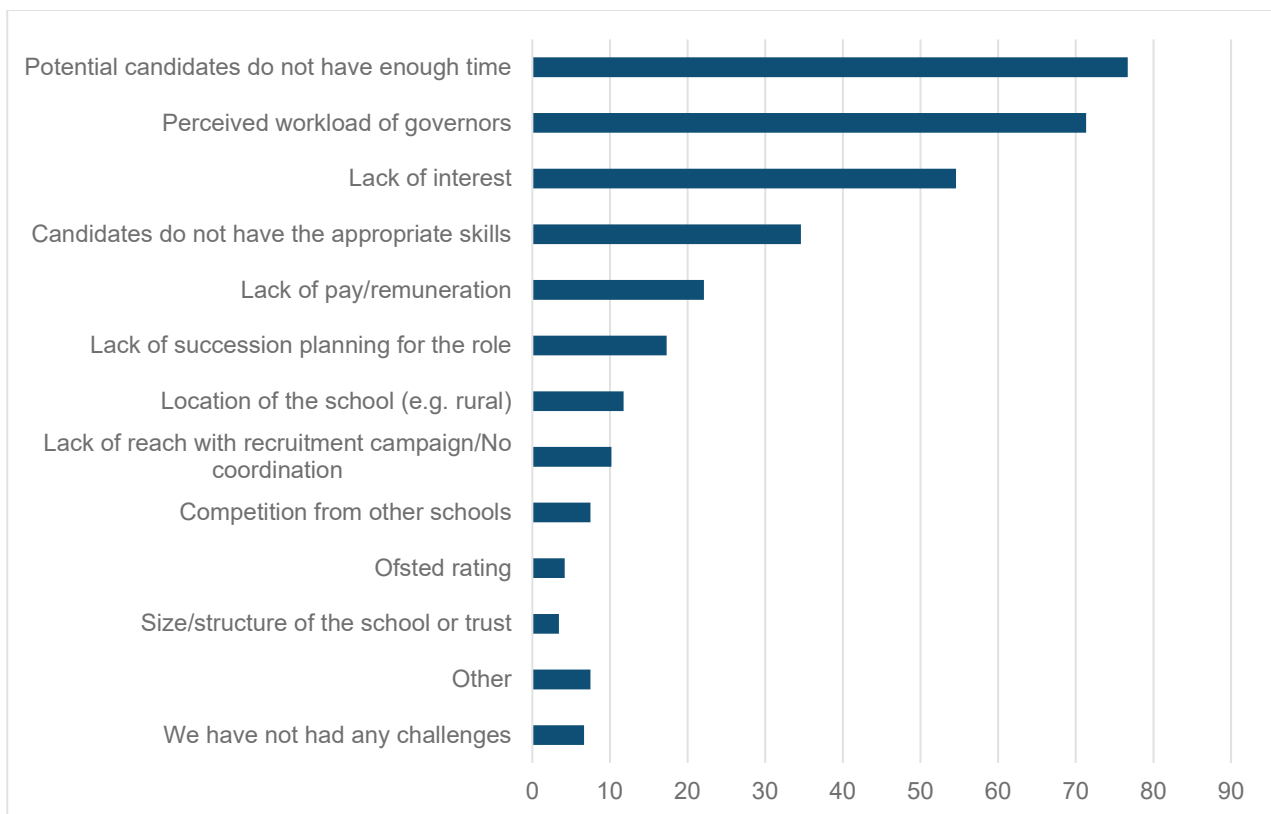
N=1,081

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

There were, however, some interesting differences that emerged when looking at the proportions of respondents that reported particular difficulties by school type and characteristics:

- A smaller proportion of SAT trust boards reported 'lack of interest' as a difficulty (45%) compared to all other types of schools, and in particular MAT LGBs (62%). These findings appear to be unrelated to phase of education, given the proportion of primary and secondary schools within these two groups were relatively even.

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- MAT trust boards reported a 'lack of succession planning for the role' more often as a reason for recruitment difficulties than other types of board (25% compared with between 11-16% for other types of boards).

- MAT trust boards reported that 'candidates do not have the appropriate skills' as more of a barrier than other types of board (44% compared to between 31% and 34% for other board types).

- 'Location of the school' was perceived to be more of a challenge when recruiting for MAT trust boards (18%) and maintained schools (15%) compared with LGBs and SATs (8% and 7% respectively).

- 'Lack of pay' was perceived to be more of a challenge for MAT LGBs (32%) compared to other types of board, and in particular maintained schools (19%).

There were very few differences in the reasons for recruitment difficulties by phase of education. For example, there were no notable differences in the proportions of secondary schools and primary schools who felt that 'location of school' was one of the barriers to recruitment. However, a higher proportion of respondents from primary schools reported 'lack of interest' as a reason for recruitment difficulties compared to secondary schools (59% compared with 47%).

There were some differences between the different sizes of MATs, suggesting that MATs experience different challenges in recruitment depending on the number of schools within their MAT. 'Lack of interest' was seen to be more of a challenge when recruiting for system leader trust boards and LGBs (75%) compared to smaller-sized MATs (between 54% and 58%). Similarly, 'candidates not having the appropriate skills' was more often reported as a reason for recruitment difficulties for system leader MATs (45%) compared to smaller MATs (36% to 37%). However, 'competition from other schools' was less often reported as a reason by system leader trust boards and LGBs (3%) compared with smaller MATs (between 10% and 11%)

Other differences by school characteristic included:

- 'Not enough time': this was a particular issue for maintained schools in federations (81% reported this as a barrier).

- 'Location of the school' was also an issue for maintained schools in federations (26%), which was likely to be related to the finding that a much higher proportion of rural schools said this was a barrier (26% of rural schools compared to just 5% of urban schools).

- 'A lack of succession planning': this was comparatively more of an issue for Special schools (25%).

When asked what the most difficult challenge was, the responses remained the same, namely that the most difficult challenges were candidates 'not having enough time', followed by the 'perceived workload of governance' and 'lack of interest'.

Telephone interviewees were able to explain further their challenges with recruitment. The majority of interviewees explained that they had encountered recruitment challenges with many experiencing current vacancies on their board. Most of the interviewees explained that the perceived workload and time commitment required was the biggest barrier to recruiting governors and trustees. Interviewees said that the people they wanted to recruit, due to having the professional skills required or the right experience, were the hardest to recruit as they did not have the time to give. This was often because they were working full time:

> Many of the people we need are still in employment and have busy
> lives with their own families... people are often loath to commit.
> *Clerk, MAT*

A few interviewees said that their board was working to address this by reducing the number of meetings. In one trust, the board was looking to task the LGBs with more delegated responsibility to reduce their own workload. They were planning to provide the LGBs with resource packs that would help them with the monitoring so that they could be more effective and take on more responsibility.

Interviewees felt there were unique challenges when trying to recruit for different types of governors/trustees. Parent governors or trustees were often seen as the easiest to recruit, however applicants were seen to drop away once the role was explained to them and they realised the time commitment. Some of the MAT interviewees noted that some of the schools within their own trust were able to better recruit parents to LGBs than other schools. Where schools were in more deprived areas or where there was less parental engagement generally, LGBs struggled to find parents to become members.

Co-opted governors/trustees were seen as particularly difficult to recruit but also highly valuable as they brought independence to the role along with an understanding of the community. They also tended to stay in the role longer than parent governors/trustees and were able to commit the time.

> The main problem is recruiting independent people to the board. We
> get plenty of parents volunteer but that results in a parent-heavy
> governing body. *Chair, SAT*

Interviewees had mixed experiences of recruiting foundation governors or directors. Interviewees whose schools had links to very active churches, found recruitment of

foundation governors or directors to be easy. However, other schools were struggling to recruit foundation governors, which meant leaving vacancies on the board.

Vacancies on the board were generally reported to result in added pressure on the current board as the remaining governors/trustees had to cover the vacant posts. This was seen to become more problematic where only a small proportion of governors/trustees were shouldering most of the workload on a board. This situation was described by a small number of interviewees, who explained that they are reliant on a core team of governors/trustees to take on the majority of tasks.

Clerks working across different schools and at different levels within MATs often noted that MAT trust boards were easier to recruit for than MS governing bodies or MAT LGBs. For example, one clerk in a MAT noted that:

> If we had a vacancy on our trust board we wouldn't struggle to fill it with the appropriate experience… we put a lot of effort into reviewing our structure, we are of a significant size now that we wouldn't struggle to attract suitable applicants. *Clerk, MAT*

However, the same clerk explained that at the local level, there had been challenges recruiting governors. This view was reflected in other MATs.

Reporting on their current issues with recruitment, the majority of telephone interviewees explained that future challenges to recruitment and retention related to the time required to undertake the role. Some respondents felt this meant that they would not be able to fill vacancies, while others felt that they would not be able to recruit experienced, working professionals.

> Because people with spare time are getting less and people's lives are getting busier and busier. *Executive leader, MAT*

> Recruiting people who need to commit to daytime meetings while also working full time will always be a challenge. This will impact on who can become governors. *Chair, Maintained school*

One interviewee was concerned that this would result in their board having over-representation of retired volunteers. In contrast, another chair felt that their board should change their approach to recruitment to actively recruit retired individuals as they are able to deal with the workload and provide the time commitment required to undertake the role:

> If we go on doing it as we have been, I think the problems will continue… we've lost one of two governors of my generation

recently, what we really need is someone who is about to retire.
Chair, Maintained school

Methods of recruitment

The survey revealed that the most common ways in which schools or trusts said they recruited for vacancies was through 'word of mouth' (80%) and 'school-led recruitment' (66%). Fewer reported using the 'Inspiring Governance' (30%) and 'Governors for Schools' (25%) connection services, which both connect potential governor or trustee volunteers with vacancies.

Across all school types, 'word of mouth' was reported to be the most commonly used form of recruitment. As would be expected, MAT trust boards used 'Inspiring Governance' and 'Academy Ambassadors' more than other boards did when recruiting.

Details of recruitment methods are presented in Figure 11.

Figure 11   Most common forms of recruitment across all types of board
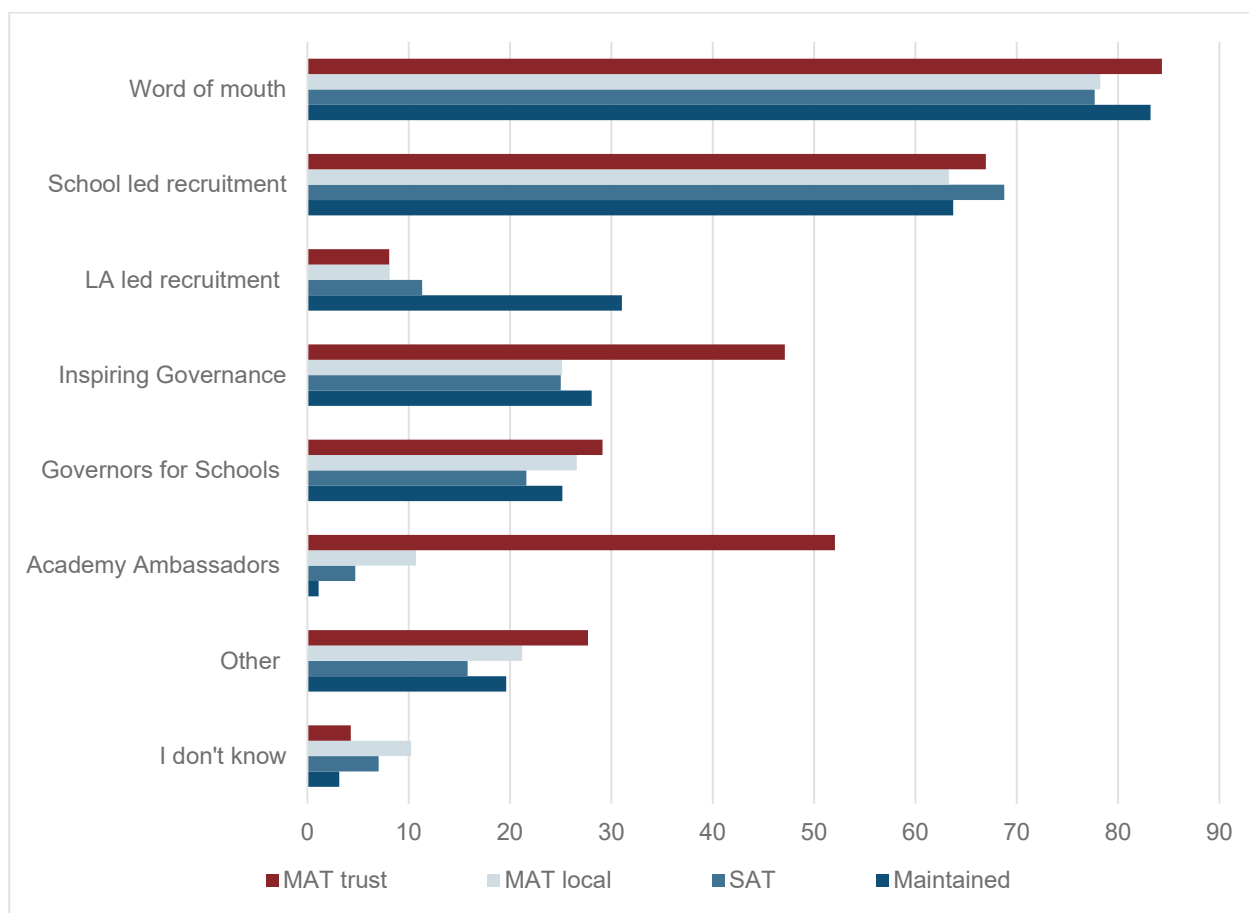
N=1,081[39], Chairs and Clerks asked this question.

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

As would be expected, 'LA led recruitment' was mainly used by maintained schools and not utilised as much by trusts.

There were few differences by phase of education. Primary schools were less likely to be using 'Inspiring Governance', although the difference was not large (25% compared to 32% for secondary schools) and 'Academy Ambassadors' (5% compared to 13% for secondary schools). This may reflect the composition of the sample, with a slightly higher proportion of the primary school sample being maintained schools than was seen in the secondary schools sample.

There were some interesting differences by school characteristics. Schools of religious character reported using 'Inspiring Governance' (14% compared to 33%) and 'Governors

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[39] Data has been weighted so that governing bodies with different number of respondents will not contribute differently towards the calculation of averages and proportions.

for Schools' (13% compared to 29%) less than those without a religious character. Some of this may reflect the higher proportion of primary schools that were schools of religious character as primary schools are also less likely to use these tools. Schools of religious character reported using 'other' recruitment methods more (26%) when compared to schools that were not of religious character (16%).

A higher proportion of respondents from special schools used 'Governors for Schools' when recruiting (36% compared to 24% of non-special schools). Federations reported using more informal methods of recruitment such as 'school led recruitment' (76% compared to 59% for non-federated schools) and 'word of mouth' (95% compared to 79% for non-federated schools). This does not appear to be related to phase of education, as no difference in these areas was seen between primary and secondary schools.

Reflecting the survey findings, telephone interviewees explained how they most commonly used word of mouth and informal networks to recruit governors or trustees. Governors and trustees explained that they tended to recommend or approach people within their own networks who they believed have the right skills:

> Usually from the local area – people will introduce those they think are appropriate. *Governor*

One clerk raised concerns about the use of word-of-mouth methods. This interviewee said that their board took this approach to recruitment which had resulted in a very 'insular' board. The clerk had suggested alternative recruitment strategies, but these had not been taken up.

Parent governors or trustees were often recruited through school newsletters. Some interviewees explained that they would strategically target parents of pupils just entering the school when a vacancy occurred to ensure there was representation across the year groups and that these parents were more likely to stay for their full term.

More formal methods of recruitment included firstly identifying skills gaps, then advertising for vacancies with a focus on those gaps. Alternatively, some boards were using connection services such as 'Academy Ambassadors', or local governance services.

> That service [Governance Connected] also gives us access to governor hub… they are firmly based here in the authority, there is no one in governance that they don't know! *Governor*

Nearly all interviewees explained that their board regularly undertook a skills audit to identify skills gaps to help with recruitment. The majority of boards were doing this annually, however a minority said they did this less frequently or as

and when a vacancy appeared. One interviewee stated that their governing body never did this.

Skills audits were used to help with recruitment and also to identify any training needs for the current governors or trustees. One interviewee explained that they used their skills audit to identify gaps, recruit strategically and were comfortable keeping a vacancy open if they did not get the right candidates apply:

> Sometimes we wait to find the right skills and the right fit and hold a vacancy strategically. *Chair*

However, other interviewees explained that when recruiting they did not necessarily refer to their skills audit. This was for one of two reasons: firstly, that applicant numbers were generally low or the board needed to fill a particular type of vacancy such as a foundation governor, which meant it was more difficult to press for particular skills. Secondly, some boards felt that a commitment to the role or softer skills such as being able to look at the strategic vision and being able to challenge executive leaders were more important, and so focused their recruitment on these skills.

4.2   Retention of governors and trustees

Of the governors, trustees, clerks and Members surveyed, 77% were planning to stay in their post for the next 12 months, 10% were planning to leave and 13% were unsure.

Of the 300 respondents who were planning to leave their position in the next 12 months, 34% said this was due to a 'change in circumstances'. A similar proportion (32%) said this was because 'the role takes up too much time/workload is too high'. One quarter of respondents (25%) were leaving because their 'current term is up'. A further 36% had an 'other' reason not captured by the survey responses.

A total of 88 chairs were planning to leave their role and a further 83 governors or trustees. Despite the small numbers of responses, there were some interesting differences between these two groups in their reasons for leaving their role. While almost the same proportion of governors/trustees and chairs were leaving due to their term being up (29% and 28% respectively), a higher proportion of chairs were planning to leave their role within the next year was due to 'the role taking up too much time/the workload being too high' (43%, or 38 of 88) compared to governors/trustees (23%, or 19 of 83). Governors and trustees were more likely to say their reason for leaving was due to a 'change in their circumstances' (35%) than any of the other reasons.

Retention was explored further through the telephone interviews. Around a third of the interviewees stated that their board had good retention of governors or trustees. Most of

these reflected that this was due to strong recruitment processes which included interviewing candidates and outlining from the outset what the expectations and time commitment entailed. One chair explained:

> I will sit down for an hour with each applicant to talk through the role in depth. Applicants then meet the head on their own. Next, the MAT trust needs to approve the applicant. It's a long process to ensure we have the correct candidate. *Chair*

A small number of interviewees believed that their strong retention of governors and trustees was due to the high levels of support the governors/trustees received from the clerk. For example, one executive leader in a MAT explained:

> We are very blessed to have an amazing professional clerk and she is a large part of the reason that we retain our governors. They feel well supported, they know what they are doing, they get strong legal advice and good training… that's the silver bullet for me that makes the governance work well. *Executive Leader*

However, two-thirds of interviewees did identify particular barriers to retention. Reflecting the findings from the survey, the most common reasons given for governors or trustees resigning was due to a change in personal circumstance or the time commitment required to fulfil the role. Interviewees explained that the time commitment or workload issues generally meant that governors or trustees resigned early on in their tenure. In order to address this, interviewees felt that new governors/trustees needed good training and an explanation of what the role entails from the outset. They generally felt that when governors or trustees understood their role and responsibilities, they were less likely to resign, as illustrated by this comment:

> Once governors are trained and understand the role, they are very engaged and involved, which keeps their interest and maintains them on the board. *Governor*

A minority of interviewees identified particular issues with parent governors or trustees not staying the full term. This was either due to them leaving their post when their children left the school or due to the workload associated with being a governor/trustee.

Succession planning

Most of those interviewed did not have any formal succession planning in place. For most of these interviewees, it was an area of concern, particularly if they did not have a natural successor in place for the chair, and something that they were hoping to address soon. A small number of schools were having difficulties filling chair and vice chair roles and this

was due to potential candidates not putting themselves forward; rather, people were being asked to take up the role. Interviewees in these instances felt that the workload of the chair was seen to be off-putting to potential candidates.

> Since we lost a very strong chair a couple of years ago, people have had their arms put up their backs to do it and they are very nice people, but they really haven't got the skills or the time to do it. Sometimes the chair turns up and he hasn't even read the agenda. *Clerk*

> All of a sudden [the governor has] been coerced by all of us into being the chair, because he's a good bloke, but it's quite a big ask I think because of the amount of work they have. *Executive leader*

One interviewee explained that their board had tried succession planning but that it had not worked well. The board tried to give vice chairs more responsibility through chairing committees, but it did not help and they had since removed the committees. The interviewee explained that while the governors were all committed, they were reluctant to take on the extra responsibility.

For a small proportion of interviewees, the lack of succession planning was not seen as an issue. Two of the interviewees explained that they were hoping a vice-chair would take on the role but that this had not been explicitly discussed. One interviewee explained that, while they did not have succession planning in place, they tended to recruit someone specifically for the post of chair, which they felt worked very well.

Where succession planning was in place, interviewees reported that they had no difficulties recruiting for chairs or vice chairs. Interviewees explained that the training of vice chairs was essential to ensure they were ready to step into the role of chair when required. One interviewee explained that across their MAT they had put processes in place to ensure that all trustees and members of LGBs were taking on responsibility so that they were not reliant on a few key individuals, commenting:

> We ensure across the trust that we have vice chairs that are capable of becoming chairs… we ensure that the workload is shared and that every single person is properly trained to do what we need them to do. *Governor*

The next chapter explores the experiences of those involved in governance, including the support and training they have received in their role.

5.   Experiences of governance

This chapter covers the views of governors, trustees and clerks on their confidence to undertake their role. It also covers the amount of time governance activities take and whether this is manageable, barriers to governance and the training and support governors and trustees have received.

Key Findings

- The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were confident about their ability to undertake a range of different tasks within their governance role, in particular 91% agreed they were confident holding the senior leadership team to account and confident having difficult conversations with senior staff. Respondents from MAT LGBs were less confident compared to those from other board types.

- The vast majority of clerks agreed that they had received sufficient training (77%), were well supported in their role (74%), and had adequate time to undertake their responsibilities (70%). A minority of clerks (40%) reported that the chair of the board did not oversee their performance.

- Most telephone interviewees were aware of the three core functions of governance. Those that were initially unsure, demonstrated that they understood the core functions when prompted. All interviewees felt able to contribute in a variety of ways to the core governance functions.

- On average, respondents spent 17 hours per term preparing for meetings, 16 hours attending meetings, and 23 hours undertaking all other activities related to their governance roles. The overall total time spent on governance is in line with other research in this area (NGA, 2019[40]). This varied considerably by role and board type.

- The majority of telephone interviewees felt that their current workload and commitment were considerable and, at times onerous, but that overall, it was manageable as they had developed strategies to manage the workload. Just under half of interviewees perceived that there were no unnecessary aspects of their workload.

- Governors/trustees and chairs generally found training, support, and guidance useful where they had received it. In particular, they valued 'face-to-face external training' and 'training provided by the school or trust' (51% found both of these types of training very useful). They were less likely to have received certain types

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[40] National Governance Association's (2019) full report is available here: School Governance 2019

of support, including support from a National Leader of Governance (NLG) (74% had not received this) and opportunities to observe how other boards work (63% had not received this training).

- A greater proportion of respondents from special schools reported having not received: 'external face-to-face training' (22% compared to 13%) and 'guidance from a clerk' (25% compared to 14%). However, an even smaller proportion of respondents from special schools reported not receiving or using the 'DfE governance competency framework' (9% had not received or used this compared to 17% of those not from a special school).

- Most telephone interviewees were aware of the DfE support and guidance documents and approximately half found the documents useful, although some found them to be not as accessible as they could be and approximately one third felt the documents were too long. Over half of interviewees outlined other support and guidance that they used: the National Governance Association (NGA); their local authority (LA); their trust; and The Key.

- Respondents cited the most common areas for which they wanted further training and support as financial management and planning, followed by data analysis and interpretation, statutory policy areas, and staff management.

5.1 The experience of those involved in governance

Confidence levels of governors/trustees in their abilities to undertake their role.

The survey showed that overall, governors/trustees and chairs were very positive about their ability to undertake their governance roles, as shown in Figure 12 below.

Figure 12   Confidence levels of governors/trustees in their abilities to undertake their role
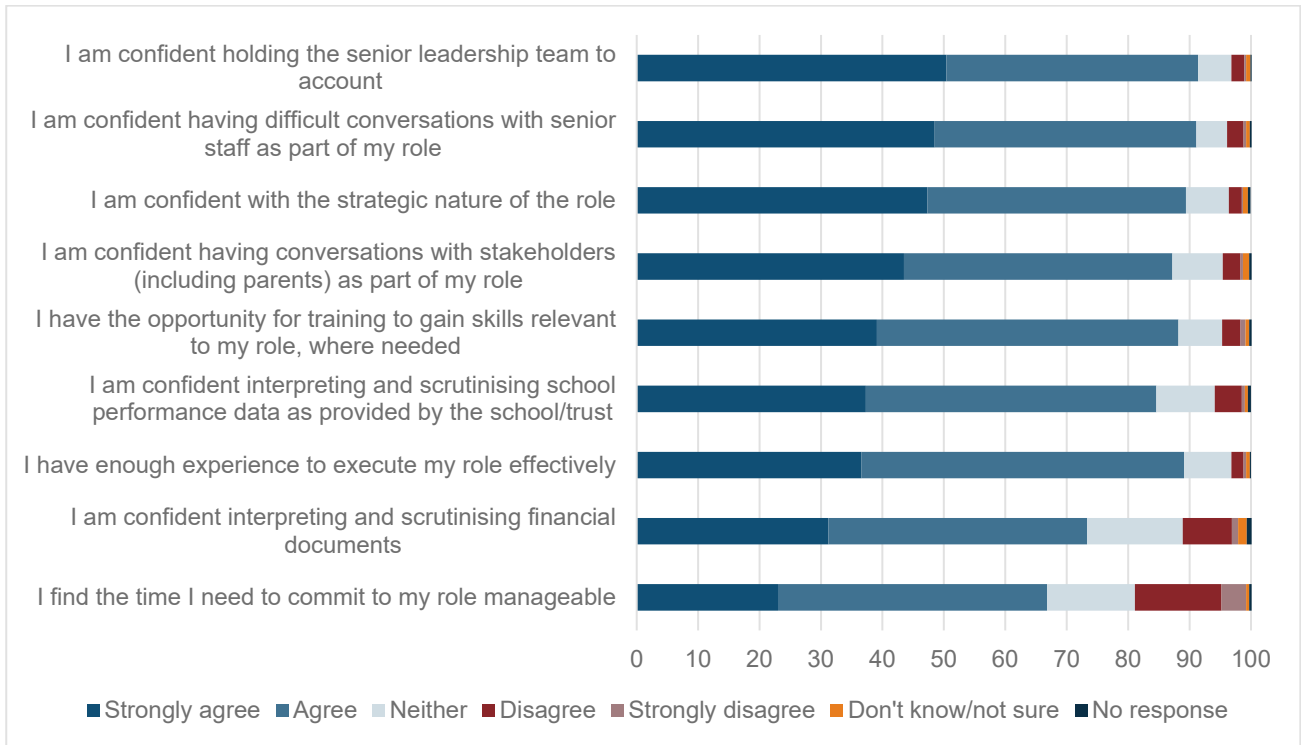
N = 1,639

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Over 90% of respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' they were confident holding the senior leadership team to account and having difficult conversations with senior staff as part of their role. The proportion of positive responses, however, is notably lower in relation to respondents' confidence in 'interpreting and scrutinising financial documents' (73%) and to 'I find the time I need to commit to my role manageable' (66%). In terms of the latter, 18% 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' that finding the time needed for their role was manageable.

Further analysis revealed very similar trends by role type. However, chairs were the most positive about their ability to undertake their role. Governors/trustees were still positive but to a lesser extent. For example, approximately 60% of chairs 'strongly agreed' they were confident 'holding senior leaders to account' compared to 44% of governors/trustees. The exception to this was whether the 'time required for the role was manageable' where 70% of governors/trustees 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' and only 61% of chairs 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed'. Indeed, 25% of chairs actively disagreed with this statement, suggesting that they find their workload unmanageable. This is in line with the findings from the NGA's research (NGA, 2019) which found that 24% of chairs felt their workload was either somewhat or completely unmanageable.

When looking at differences between the different types of boards, it can be seen that across all board types, respondents themselves to be overwhelmingly positive about their ability to undertake their governance role. The proportion of role type within each board was relatively similar with chairs accounting for between approximately 35% and 45% of the responses for each of the board types and governors/trustees accounting for between 55% and 65%.

There were, however, some differences between respondents from maintained schools and single-academy trusts (SATs) in terms of how confident they felt in undertaking their role. For example, marginally more respondents from SAT trust boards 'strongly agreed' that they felt confident with the 'strategic nature of the role'. Conversely, in relation to finding 'the time needed to commit to the role manageable' – 17% of respondents from maintained schools' governing bodies 'disagreed'/'strongly disagreed' with this statement compared to 21% of SAT respondents. There were no notable differences between respondents from primary schools and those from secondary schools.

Some interesting differences also emerged among respondents from MATs at both the local governing body (LGB) level and trust board. While respondents on LGBs were on average somewhat less confident in their ability 'to interpret and scrutinise both school performance data and financial documents' than maintained schools' governing bodies or SAT trust boards, MAT trust board respondents were distinctly more confident in their ability to complete this aspect of their governance role. More MAT trust board respondents 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that they had 'enough experience to execute their role effectively' than all other types of board, but particularly in comparison to respondents from LGBs. Interestingly, there was very little variation between different types of board when asked about how 'manageable the time commitment' was and it consistently attracted the most 'disagree'/'strongly disagree' responses across all school and board types.

The telephone interviews supported the findings from the survey in terms of interviewees' general positivity about their ability to undertake their governance roles. Most of the governors, trustees and chairs stated that they knew the three core functions of governance to some extent. For example, one governor from a starter trust commented:

> For educational-type things we hold to account very well, we get involved in the strategic discussion about the curriculum… in terms of strategic vision, yes, we very much set the vision for each of our schools and these align with the trust's values. The vision and ethos comes very much from the school… in terms of financial stuff, the trust board has overarching responsibility… we get involved in ensuring that the money is well spent. *Governor*

In addition, one chair explained: '*It's about being a critical friend that the school needs, so you hold the school to account. I think that's the main role of the governing body'*.

Other interviewees, when prompted with the three core functions, demonstrated that they understood the functions of governance as the following example from a vice-chair of an established MAT illustrates:

Clarity of vision, ethos, and strategy: The vice-chair explained that the board has a working party and have agreed a strategy for the next 5 years on how they will grow. They also call an ad-hoc governance working party when they feel that there are a number of issues that they haven't 'nailed' and then they report recommendations to the board.

Holding heads to account: An external advisor meets with the CEO twice a year for an appraisal and sets clear performance targets. Targets are agreed and shared confidentially with all directors (trustees).

Finance performance: A strong scheme of delegation has been developed to oversee school financial performance.

Governor, trustee and chair interviewees reported that they felt they contributed in a variety of ways to the governance core functions by, for example:

- attending the chair's briefings and keeping up-to-speed on what is happening nationally by reading documents and filtering the important information to the rest of the governing body

- asking questions and challenging the executive leader

- taking an active role in terms of sharing information with the LGB and developing a productive working relationship with them

- bringing skills from a business background, including finance, to the board

- utilising business experience on the contracting side, saving money and achieving the best value for money

- drawing on previous experience in paid employment to hold people to account.

Confidence levels of clerks in their abilities to undertake their role and support received

The survey also asked clerks about their ability to undertake their role and how supported they felt in their governance position. Responses are displayed in Figure 13 below.

Figure 13   Confidence levels of clerks in their abilities to undertake their role and support received
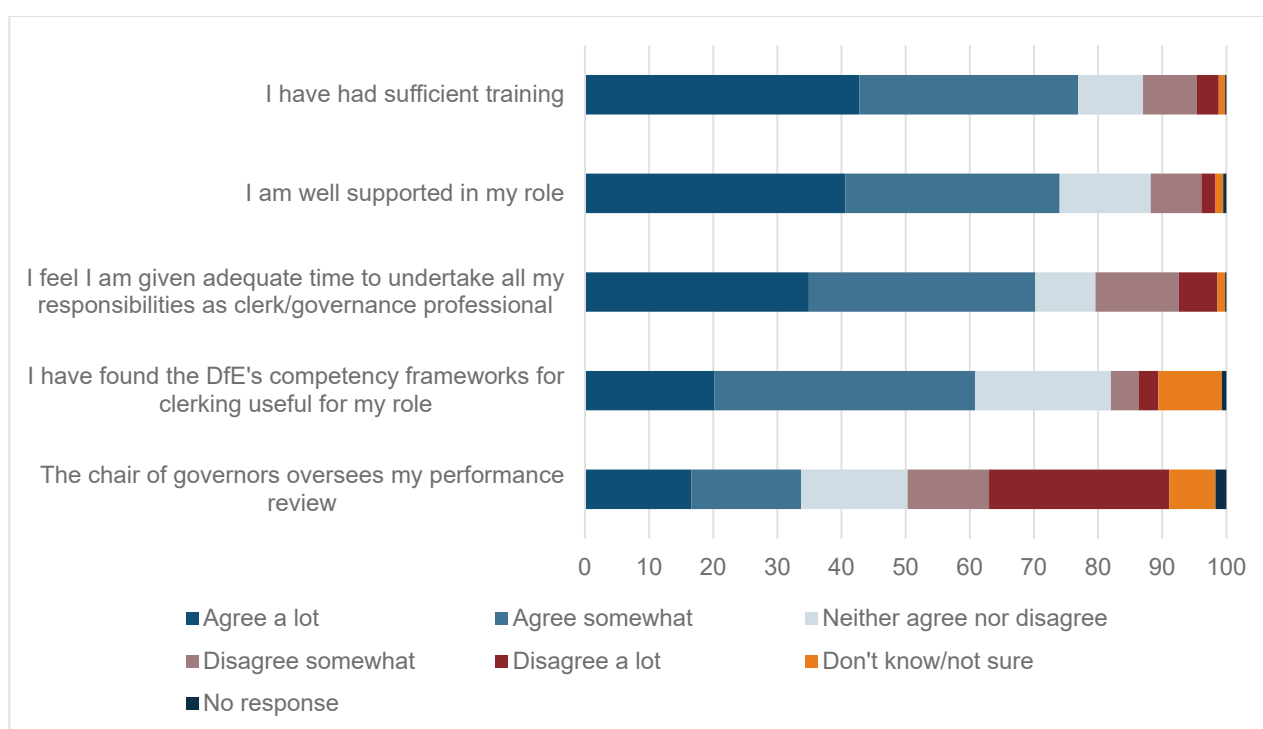
N = 416

Clerks were broadly positive that they had 'received sufficient training' (77% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed') and were 'well supported in their roles' (74% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed'). While 70% of clerks also 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they had 'adequate time to undertake their responsibilities', about a fifth (19%) 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with this.

Further analysis revealed that clerks in maintained schools and on MAT trust boards were more confident that they had 'sufficient training to undertake their role', had 'adequate time to carry out their role', and felt 'well supported in their roles', than clerks at SAT trust boards or on MAT LGBs. In addition, only half (51%) of respondents from MAT LGBs 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that 'DfE's competency frameworks for clerking had been useful for their role'.

Overall, 41% of respondents reported that the 'chair of the board did not oversee their performance'. Interestingly, there was a high level of variation between clerks from maintained schools' governing bodies (32%), MAT LGBs (29%), and MAT trust boards (30%) who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that the chair of the board oversaw the clerk's performance and those from SAT trust boards (43%). A high proportion of clerks 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' that the chair oversaw their performance, suggesting that this was undertaken by another individual or not at all. While among respondents from maintained schools, SATs, and MAT local bodies the proportion ranged from 37% to 41%, this rose to 50% of respondents from MAT trust boards.

A notable minority of clerks, however, either did not know or reported that they 'neither agreed nor disagreed' that the chair of governors oversaw their performance review: for example, approximately 20% of respondents from MAT trust boards and SAT trust boards compared to 26% among maintained schools' governing body respondents and 32% of clerks/governance professionals from MAT LGBs. Interestingly, the majority of those reporting they 'neither agreed nor disagreed' or did not know were employed by the school or trust they were working in.

There were also some key differences between clerks from schools of religious character and those without a religious character, though again responses are broadly consistent with the overall trend previously discussed. Most notably, while 79% of respondents from schools with no religious character 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' they were 'well supported in their role', this dropped to 70% among respondents from schools of religious character. Conversely, while 74% of respondents from non-religious schools 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' they had 'received sufficient training to undertake their role', this rose to 81% among clerks/governance professionals from schools with religious character. In response to whether they had 'adequate time to complete all their responsibilities', 68% of respondents from non-religious schools 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' compared to 74% among respondents from religious schools.

Most clerk interviewees believed they knew the core functions of governance and reported that they felt they contributed in a variety of ways to the functions by, for example:

- guiding and preparing the chair and sending them all the latest legislation

- asking relevant questions on all three core functions

- having the skills, knowledge and confidence as a full-time professional clerk with a lot of experience.

Two clerks (out of nine interviewed) were not aware of the three core functions. One of these was new to post while the other felt that it was not the clerk's role to contribute other than by providing advice and support. The latter interviewee explained that: 'I give advice at the meeting but it's up to the actual chair and vice chair to hold headteachers to

account on both of the other two things [educational performance and finance]. Clarity of vision now is mainly set by the trustees'.

Time spent on governance activities and how this varied by role and type of school

The time spent on governance activities per school term was highly variable depending on role type, board type, and school characteristics as shown below.

Table 27   Time spent per school term on governance activities by role[41]

Governance activity	Governor/ trustee (hours)	Chair (hours)	Clerk (hours)	Executive Leader (hours)	Member of the trust (hours)
Preparing for governance meetings	8.1	15.0	37.8	15.8	16.6
Attending meetings (including committees/ sub-groups)	11.5	17.3	25.8	13.3	13.5
Undertaking all other activities related to your role(s) e.g. school visits	13.7	30.9	N/A	N/A	22.0
Total amount of time per term	33.3	63.9	63.6	29.1	52.1
N	962	662	403	623	68

N=2,718

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

As shown in Table 27 above, clerks reported spending by far the most time preparing for meetings (38 hours per school term) – double that of any other role type, which would be expected given the nature of the role. Chairs spent the most amount of time undertaking all other activities related to their role at 31 hours per school term. Governors/trustees

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[41] While the question explicitly asked respondents to answer only for the school in which they had been contacted about, it may be the case that some respondents who have governance roles in multiple schools (for example clerks) may have added up all hours spent on these activities across all schools they are involved with, rather than just the one school the survey asked about. This is likely to be the case for clerks from trust boards.

reported on average the smallest amount of time preparing for meetings, attending meetings, and undertaking all other activities related to their governance role. Executive leaders and Members spent comparable amounts of time preparing for and attending meetings. That said, a common challenge cited by governors/trustees when asked how governance could be improved in their school or trust was that it was difficult to balance the time commitment and workload alongside their work and life commitments, suggesting that the comparatively low hours reported by governors/trustees could be constrained by the small amount of time they have to give to the role. Respondents to the survey also often commented that governors/trustees did not always engage with or prepare for meetings as much as they ought to and highlighted this as an area for improvement (see Chapter 6).

The NGA (2019) reported that 77% of volunteers (including chairs and governors/trustees) were spending over 20 days per year on governance. When the figures from this research are converted into approximate yearly figures (assuming a three year term and a 7 hour day), it can be seen that chairs were spending approximately on average 27.3 days per year on governance activities, while governors/trustees were spending approximately on average 14.2 days.

The tables below show the time reported spent on different aspects of their role by both board type and role type.

Table 28 shows that MAT trust board respondents reported spending the most time preparing for meetings, than other board respondents, regardless of their role. Chairs from MAT trust boards spent on average 10 hours more per school term preparing for meetings compared to chairs of MS governing bodies, and 15 hours more than their equivalents in SATs and MAT LGBs.

Table 28   Time spent on preparing for governance meetings per school term by type of board and role

Board type	Governor/trustee (hours)	Chair (hours)	Clerk (hours)	Executive leaders (hours)
Maintained school governing body	7	17	28	15
SAT trust board	9	12	30	17
MAT LGB	6	12	36	12
MAT trust board	11	27	66	21
N	902	652	393	611

N = 2,564

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Members of MAT LGBs spent less time preparing for meetings than governors or trustees from other types of board. Clerks from trust boards spent a considerable amount of time preparing for meetings compared to clerks of other types of board. However, as trust boards were not contacted with reference to a particular school in their trust, the clerks of trust boards may have been answering this question in relation to all boards they work with within the trust, which may include multiple LGBs as well as the trust board.

Trustees from SATs and MATs spent more time attending trust board meetings and committees than governors from maintained schools' governing bodies and members of MAT LGBs. Chairs of MAT trust boards stated that they spent more time attending meetings and committees than chairs from other types of board.

Table 29   Time spent on attending governance meetings per school term by type of board and role

Board type	Governor / trustee (hours)	Chair (hours)	Clerk (hours)	Executive leaders (hours)
Maintained school governing body	10	19	24	12
SAT trust board	14	17	24	14
MAT LGB	9	14	18	11
MAT trust board	14	25	40	18
N	902	652	393	611

N = 2,564

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Trustees (from both SATs and MATs) spent the most amount of time on other governance activities. Governors from maintained schools' governing bodies spent less time on all other governance activities compared to their equivalents in other types of boards. However, chairs from maintained schools' governing bodies spent more time on other governance activities than both SAT trustees and MAT LGB members.

Table 30   Time spent on undertaking all other governance related activities per school term by type of board and role

Board type	Governor/trustee (hours)	Chair (hours)
Maintained school governing body	9	36
SAT trust board	14	32
MAT LGB	10	25
MAT trust board	14	46
N	908	652

N = 1,560

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Chairs of the MAT trust board spent the most amount of time on other activities (between 10 and 21 hours more than chairs of other boards). As with attending and planning for

meetings, those respondents from MAT LGBs spent less time on other governance activities compared to those from other boards.

Respondents from primary schools spent on average 8 hours less per school term preparing for governance meetings (12 hours compared to 20 hours) and undertaking all other activities related to their role (19 hours compared to 27 hours), and 5 hours less attending meetings (13 hours compared to 18 hours).

Overall, governors/trustees on MAT and SAT trust boards spent the most amount of time per school term on governance activities (39 and 37 hours or over 5 days[42]), whereas this was 25 and 26 hours per term (almost 4 days) in total for governors/trustees from maintained schools and MAT LGBs. The total amount of time spent on governance activities for chairs differed greatly. MAT LGB chairs spent comparatively the least amount of time on governance activities at 51 hours or around 7 days per school term, followed by SAT trust board chairs at 61 hours (9 days per term) and maintained school chairs at 72 hours (10 days per term). MAT trust board chairs spent the most amount of time on governance activities at 98 hours or 14 days per school term.

Analysis by some school characteristics found that while there were differences between the amounts of time reported for preparing for governance meetings, attending meetings, and undertaking all other activities related to their governance roles, the total amount of time spent per term across all three categories was similar. This was true for federated versus non-federated schools, urban versus rural schools, and special versus non-special schools.

Extent to which clerks, chairs, governors, trustees and executive leaders think their role is manageable

The majority of the telephone interviewees felt their current workload and commitment as a governor/trustee was considerable, but manageable. They described the strategies they have developed to manage their workload:

- **Delegation.** For example, a chair of a federation outlined how they delegated tasks to committees. A governor in a maintained school said his workload was manageable because their governing body's 6 sub-committees meant that people did not have to get involved in everything. They were responsible for key areas and sit on the relevant committee(s) and look after policy documents, which relate to their area: 'Splitting the workload that way, they report to the main board…

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[42] Based on a 7 hour work day

there is no way you can cover everything'. Another chair explained that having 2 vice-chairs had contributed to easing the workload.

- **Using additional school staff to help with governance**. One clerk in a SAT explained that her school had a secretary who helped with internal administration and provided information to her. The clerk could then focus on the meetings, agenda and research around areas that need further clarification. A chair in a different school said the workload was only manageable because the senior leader / senior staff helped with preparation of documents and a 'very competent' business manager, who was a qualified accountant, helped to prepare the financial information.

- **Having effective and efficient meetings.** One member of a LGB explained that they kept full board meetings moving at pace and made sure they did not duplicate the work of committees.

- **Standardising practice**. A chair explained that they had significantly reduced workloads by adapting the standard County Council's model policies.

Some clerks indicated that in terms of managing their workload, they valued working in a team and having support from their school and the board. For example, one clerk said she had discussed what is 'achievable and necessary' with her board. Clerks also mentioned that it was helpful to have contracted hours agreed by the governing board. For example, one said: *'If I was only paid for 9 hours per meeting which is the LA standard then a) I would feel like I wouldn't have the time and b) I would feel overwhelmed by it'.* One clerk pointed out the expectations for professional clerks in general were very high.

> In most schools, clerks are not paid much more than the cleaners… you want that really high level of professionalism but you're not offering very many hours and quite often you have to turn up in the evenings… I think a lot of schools have benefited from the fact that it suits people because their children are at school. But the expectations are way above the salary and the working conditions… if you were to scale it up to a full-time job and make those kinds of demands on those kinds of salaries, you'd have no applicants. *Clerk*

Another clerk pointed out that although the workload can at times be very high, she used her experience and skills to manage her workload.

Several chairs, of the ten telephone interviewees, believed that their workload was only manageable because they were retired. This is reflected in the survey responses in which 9% of those who were retired disagreed that their workload was manageable, (79% agreed it was manageable) compared to 23% of those who were not retired (62% felt agreed it was manageable). One commented: '*It* [the workload] *is miles beyond the numbers* [of hours] *that get quoted in the booklets…'* While another felt that although the

workload was manageable, the workload could still be stressful. One trustee believed the workload was manageable because she worked for the public sector and so got time off to do governance work.

When asked which activities were considered to take the most amount of time, interviewees cited a range of tasks. The following were quoted by a range of interviewees in different roles (unless explicitly stated).

1. Background reading and understanding important documents such as the figures relating to pupil performance to help inform the school improvement plan

2. Preparing documents ahead of meetings

3. Reporting requirements/appeals on exclusions

4. Writing up minutes from meetings (clerks only)

5. Email support for governors/administration for governing bodies (clerks only)

6. Attending meetings

7. Communicating with third parties e.g. the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and Ofsted (chairs only).

Overall, there were no discernible differences between the school types in terms of perceived time-consuming activities. However, one clerk observed that there was 'double handling' and that local committees appeared to be reluctant to relinquish control. For example, the trust board issued policies for policy management, but there were also local policies within the individual academies and local committees had no power to approve the local policies. The local committees still drafted them and put them on the agenda, but they had to be sent to the trust board for approval.

Despite finding their workload onerous, just under half of interviewees, thought that there were no unnecessary aspects of their work. However, other interviewees pointed out that they considered a number of activities to be unnecessary. Firstly, one trustee felt that it was not necessary to read the full range of school policies and DfE documents expected of him. He also suggested that the frequent changes to DfE documents had a negative impact on workload, because trustees had to update school policies in response. Similarly, a clerk felt the number of policies governors/trustees had to read and agree were unnecessary:

> Some of the policies we review year in year out, but we are following LA guidance – it just means governors are getting wads of paperwork that have already been reviewed at a higher level anyway. *Clerk*

Secondly, reflecting the observation above about how there is duplication between trust and local level policy setting, a chair in a different trust noted that because he had both a

trust role and a local role, he had two separate inboxes and these produced a spread of documents that needed to be read.

Thirdly, another chair felt that the requirements placed upon them by the ESFA were unnecessary. He believed that the requirements were geared towards MATs and within his SAT they could only afford to pay a finance officer 12 hours a week which was not long enough to accommodate all the ESFA's demands for a small SAT of 100 pupils.

Lastly, one clerk observed that the governing body (at one school) focused unnecessarily on operational issues rather than strategy. For example, they reviewed all school policies and spent too long suggesting amendments, rather than focussing on important strategic issues.

On the whole, the majority of the clerks interviewed perceived that their governing board/body used their expertise effectively. Some clerks in MATs and one in a SAT were particularly emphatic that their schools valued their skills and expertise and were using them effectively. However, several clerks who believed that their expertise was being used effectively also expressed some concern that their knowledge and skills were not necessarily valued at all levels of governance. For example, one clerk said that '*some* [LGBs] *still use me to just to go and take the minutes'.*

In interviews, two clerks explained that they did not feel their expertise was being used well. One explained: *'They* [the governors] *think the clerk is there just to take the minutes, but from the training I have been on I know there is a lot more to it now, the role has really evolved'.* The other explained that despite good working relationships with the governing body, the body was not sufficiently using the clerk's skills.

Finally, one clerk explained that it depended on the awareness of each governor as to how effectively they utilised her:

> Some governors do [use my expertise] and some don't… I have a few governors who are not pulling their weight. Those who are pulling their weight, understand the role of the clerk and ask me questions and make me search for them. Those governors who are not really doing anything, don't engage with me and would barely know who I am*. Clerk*

Perceived barriers to governance

When considering barriers to undertaking their governance role, the majority of the governors, trustees and clerks interviewed did not identify any barriers. Those who did identified the following barriers most commonly;

1. **lack of engagement and access of documents**. For example, one clerk explained how she uploaded documents to the Cloud to ensure they comply with

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and knows that a handful of governors have not accessed them so it is unlikely they have read them before meetings.

2. **lack of communication from chairs** about agendas and minutes so that governors/trustees do not receive them in sufficient time for meetings.

3. some **chairs not being confident** in their role to be able to challenge strong head teachers.

4. **some schools not accessing a professional clerk service,** because of budget constraints.

5. the **governing body not challenging or questioning**. One clerk said that she continues to advise and support as best as she can:

> There's lots of arguments and discussions on things they don't need to discuss, but the things they need to discuss they're not discussing such as the strategic direction of the school. *Clerk*

Other barriers identified by individual interviewees were:

1. **clash of priorities** between the interviewee's governance role as a clerk and in-school role.

2. **lack of appraisal**, one clerk felt an appraisal may help to identify gaps in her role.

3. **lack of access to carry out monitoring visits as part of link governor/trustee responsibilities** due to challenging working relationships with the school. This had made the interviewee feel she was not able to be as effective in her role as she could have been.

4. **the number of current changes to documentation** which a trustee deemed unnecessary and time consuming for schools to produce and governors/trustees to read. For example, the interviewee mentioned changes to finance whereby they now have to produce additional financial statements which is more time consuming for trustees reading the statements and also for the finance team in the school in terms of producing the documents.

5.2   Experiences of training and support

The vast majority of survey respondents had received some form of training, support and guidance, and they were broadly very positive about what they had received. Only a small minority reported finding any given form of training, support and guidance to have not been useful. This is shown in figure 14 below.

Governors/trustees and chairs were also notably more positive about the usefulness of 'external face-to-face training' and 'training provided by the school or trust' (51% 'very

useful') than 'external online training' (30% 'very useful'). This trend was consistent for both governors/trustees and chairs.

Figure 14   Usefulness of training, support and guidance used by governors/trustees and chairs
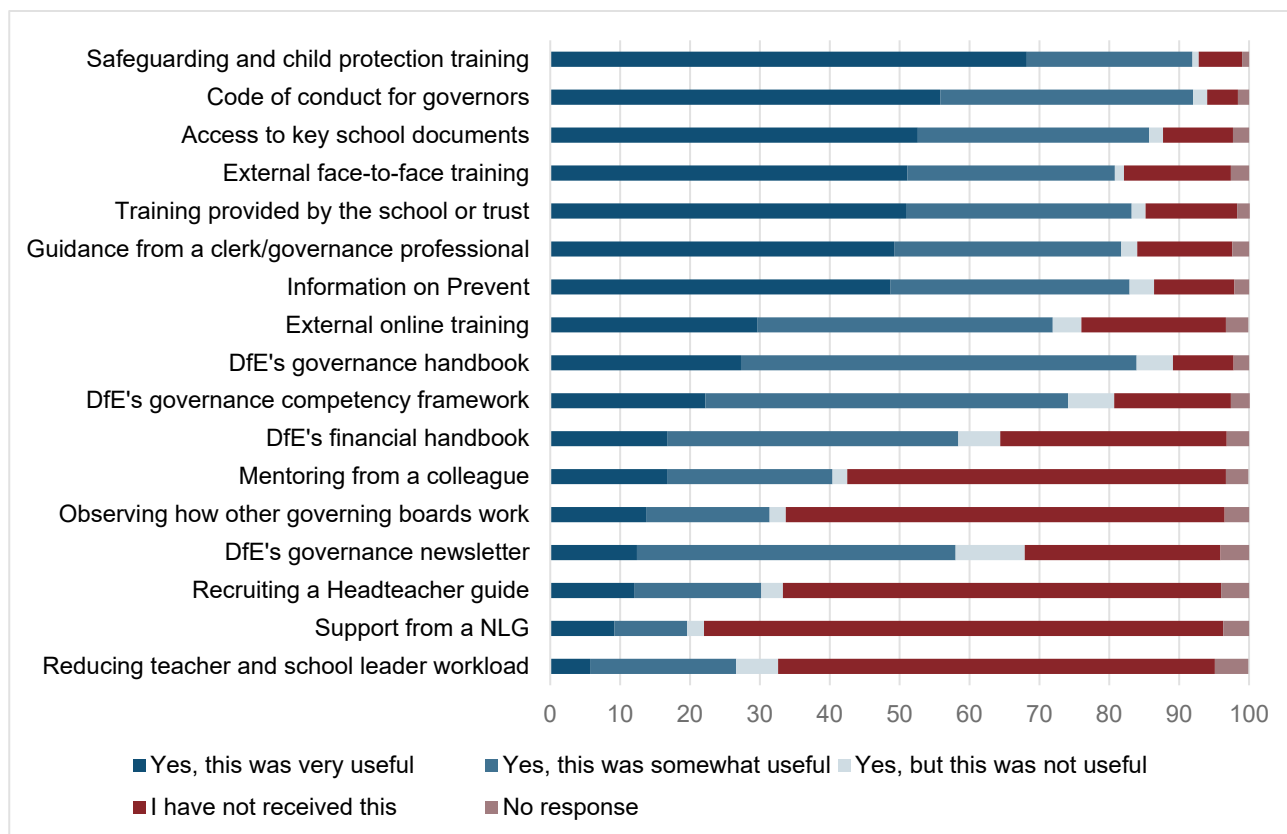
N=1,639

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

The analysis revealed, however, that there were a number of areas where the majority of governors/trustees and chairs had not received support. Overall, 74% of governors/trustees and chairs had not received support from an NLG and 63% had not observed how other governing bodies work, received the recruiting a headteacher guide, or received reducing teacher and school leader workload guidance. 54% had not received mentoring from a colleague.

Chairs and governors/trustees had similar responses. However, in a minority of areas, the difference in responses from chairs and governors/trustees was statistically significant to the 0.05 level[43]. Chairs were significantly more likely to have received or

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[43] For significance testing we applied the Bonferroni method to control for multiple tests error inflation.

used the DfE's governance handbook and have found this 'very useful' than governors/trustees. Similarly, chairs were significantly more likely to have 'support from a National Leader of Governance (NLG)', as would be expected, and have found this 'very' or 'somewhat useful' compared to governors/trustees. On the other hand, when asked about the 'DfE's governance newsletter', chairs were significantly more likely to have received this but were more likely than governors/trustees to rate this as 'not useful'.

Analysis was also conducted to compare governors' responses by board type. Typical respondents from maintained schools and MAT LGBs were more likely to have not received a particular form of training, support or guidance than trust board respondents from both MATs and SATs. For example, only 14% of MAT and 17% of SAT trust board respondents had not received/used the 'DfE's financial handbook', but this rose to 39% of respondents from MAT LGBs.

Where training had been undertaken by almost all respondents, those from different board types were broadly in agreement as to how useful this had been, with similar proportions of respondents rating the training, support, and guidance as somewhat or very useful.

Differences in responses from different school types were found to be statistically significant in a few cases. Respondents from trusts were significantly more likely to have received 'external face-to-face training' and 'the code of conduct for governors' and found them 'very useful' than respondents from maintained schools' governing bodies. MAT respondents were also significantly more likely to have received these forms of support and found them 'somewhat useful' than respondents for maintained schools' governing bodies. Similarly, respondents from MAT trust boards were significantly more likely to have received or used the 'recruiting a headteacher' guide and to have found this 'somewhat' or 'very useful' than maintained school governing body respondents. MAT trust board respondents were also significantly more likely to have received this and found it to be 'very useful' than SAT trust board respondents. There were no statistically significant differences between trusts of different sizes.

Responses from special schools were broadly similar to those from non-special schools, but there were some specific exceptions. A greater proportion of respondents from special schools reported having not received: 'external face-to-face training' (22% compared to 13%) and 'guidance from a clerk' (25% compared to 14%). However, an even smaller proportion of respondents from special schools reported not receiving or using the 'DfE governance competency framework' (9% had not received or used this compared to 17% of those not from a special school). A greater proportion of respondents from special schools however reported finding the following training, support, and guidance 'somewhat' or 'very useful'. Please note these differences have not been tested for significance:

- 'the recruiting a headteacher guide' (41% of those from special schools felt this was useful compared to 31% of those not from special schools).

- 'the DfE's governance newsletter' (71% of those from special schools felt this was useful compared to 59% of those not from special schools).

- 'the DfE's governance competency framework' (86% of those from special schools felt this was useful compared to 73% of those not from special schools). Part of this difference will be due to a higher proportion of those from mainstream schools having not received or used this document.

There was little difference in the responses from schools with religious character and those without.

The majority of the 21 governor/trustee telephone interviewees (chairs, trustees and other governors) felt that it was easy to access both face-to-face and online governance training (and it was noted that there is a place for both). Face-to-face training was valued highly, but geographical locality was important as one interviewee explained:

> It's easy, where the training venues are, they are local to me so I'm fortunate, I don't have to travel too far. *Trustee*

The majority felt that their LA governance services provided a range of accessible training for them and some interviewees mentioned accessible training via their trust. Several interviewees said that they felt training was best via the trust due to their inherent understanding of the schools involved. One interviewee mentioned accessible training from their diocese, while another liked the availability of the NGA services.

Interviewees also considered that there was a place for online training. For example, one chair outlined how she liked online training as she can access it from home at a time to suit herself. In addition, one interviewee described how the full governing body sometimes undertook short training sessions as part of their governors' meetings accessing tools and resources from the internet and spending for example half an hour as a group going through these:

> We've done governor development sessions… I've used some of those YouTube-type videos about how to be a better governor and how you do the questioning and challenge. *Chair*

Several interviewees felt there were barriers to accessibility, such as geographical distance from face-to-face training; the cost of training; no structured planning within the MAT for training; and the time needed, especially in the evening, to carry out training.

The majority of the governor, trustee, and chair interviewees discussed the usefulness of different forms of training. Approximately one third emphasised the usefulness of face-to-

face training (such as opportunities to network and mentoring), describing them as 'informative', 'helpful' and 'enjoyable'. Additionally, one third of interviewees outlined other aspects of training that they found useful such as:

- training addressing a specific area such as safeguarding, inclusion and wellbeing, rather than generic governance training

- training provided by the LA particularly for new governors/trustees and mini LA inspections

- Ofsted local training and updates.

The majority of clerks interviewed gave positive comments about the amount and type of training available. They explained how they were either accessing all the training they felt they currently needed or said they currently had few training needs thanks to their extensive experience and prior training. For example, one MAT clerk said:

> I've been doing this job for 20 years and I'm working in a large trust with lots of professionalism, I would be concerned if I attended training and they were telling me things I didn't know. *Clerk*

Clerks accessed training and support from a number of places, including their LA, their trust, local networks, the NGA, or (a few years ago) the National College for School Leadership (NCSL)[44].

Only one clerk indicated that she found engaging in training challenging. The interviewee said that she had found some training to be ineffective in the past and felt that she did not have a lot of time to be able to attend. Additionally, she explained that she had occasionally identified independent training that she would like to access but it was viewed as too costly, so the school budget prohibited it.

The majority of interviewees were aware of the DfE support and guidance documents on governance. Approximately half found the documents useful. The governance handbook was seen to be particularly useful to new trustees or governors as it outlines roles and responsibilities well. The governance competency frameworks had been used by governing bodies to help with their self-evaluation. One governor explained how the governance newsletter had helped their board to initiate a skills audit. Generally, these documents were seen to be useful when the governing body is facing particular challenges or issues such as complaints or appeals.

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[44] The National College for School Leadership (NCSL) no longer exists.

However, a third of the interviewees felt that these documents were too long, as illustrated by the following comments:

> Some of the documents are extremely useful especially those that give you the rules but it's a lot of reading isn't it?' *Executive leader*

> It [the DFE governance competency framework] is too much for volunteers… they don't have time to plough through 120 pages. *Clerk*

> The guidance is often quite woolly or long winded. *Chair*

In addition, a couple of interviewees found the DfE documents difficult to access because information was not always located in the most obvious place. In addition, they felt that the documents set out the policy (as a White Paper does) but left interpretation to the individual reader. Interviewees suggested that the competency framework could be improved by avoiding repetition. While others felt there needed to be separate frameworks for each type of governing body.

Further training and support required

The survey asked governors (including chairs) to type in an open response box if there were any areas they felt they required more training or support[45]. The most common area cited was financial management and planning. Examples include training on financial data analysis, managing financial risk, understanding financial regulations in the context of a MAT, and planning in the current climate of school funding. This was followed by data analysis and interpretation, statutory policy areas, and staff management. Respondents also highlighted that they wanted to observe examples of good governance practice and good internal governance training. The data from the interviews supports these findings.

In addition, respondents also highlighted some of the barriers they faced with regards to accessing training and support. The most common issue was insufficient time to attend training because of their existing workload and external commitments as well as feelings that expectations on volunteers' time were unrealistic. Respondents also commented that training often seemed irrelevant or was poor quality, training times and locations were often not accessible or convenient and school budgets were unable to fund training in the absence of government support or funding.

Two interviewees mentioned that they used skills audits to identify future development areas. On the basis of this, one chair had decided that all governors should carry out two

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[45] 959 governors responded to this question

online courses per annum; but only three-quarters of governors on their governing bodies have actually complied with this request.

Lastly, another chair felt that it should be compulsory for all new governors to undertake training on governance within their first six months, especially for parent governors.

Most interviewees who had a view felt there was no need for further support. However, several interviewees made the following suggestions:

- One clerk suggested that a simplified version of the DfE Governance Handbook and a simplified summary of the DfE Clerking Competency Framework targeted at governors/trustees would be helpful, particularly for those new to the role.

- A headteacher suggested '*anything that can make* [the DfE documents] *quicker and simpler to find information would be helpful'.*

- Guidance on governance from Ofsted would be helpful.

6   Perceived effectiveness of governance

This chapter covers the perceived effectiveness of respondents' governing bodies and whether they have the skills needed in order to be effective. It also identifies areas that would improve effectiveness, barriers to effectiveness and monitoring and evaluation.

Key findings

- Respondents believed their boards had a range of skills enabling them to complete their role effectively. Respondents were particularly confident they had skills, knowledge and/or experience in the areas of safeguarding (96% agreed they had this skill), financial management (90% agreed), risk management and strategic planning (both 89%).

- Respondents did not agree as strongly that they had skills or knowledge in local, regional and national policy priorities (72% agreed they had these skills), managing wellbeing and workloads (74% agreed) or human resources (75% agreed).

- An analysis of differences between respondent groups showed that MAT board respondents tended to be more positive about the skills of their board members compared to other school types, while executive leaders were less positive about their boards' skills than chairs, Members, and in some instances governors/trustees.

- Perceived levels of effectiveness of the board were high in relation to their overall effectiveness of the board (38% of respondents rated their board as 'very effective' while 53% rated it as 'effective') and were similarly positive about their performance in the three core functions of governance. MAT trust boards in particular were more positive about their effectiveness than MAT LGBs.

- Despite high levels of perceived effectiveness, respondents were still able to identify ways in which the effectiveness of their boards could be improved. Survey respondents suggested these related to ensuring the right people with the right skills and commitment were involved in governance, and the provision of more training and support.

- Related to this, the most common barriers to effectiveness, reported by telephone interviewees included individuals not being effective in their role, pressure on the board (including financial and time), and poor working relationships.

- A notable minority of boards (14%) reported that they were not undertaking any evaluation or monitoring activities to assess the effectiveness of the board. Of those who were, most activities related to self-evaluation, skills audits and annual away days.

6.1   The skills of the board

Survey respondents were shown a list of 15 areas and asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that their board or body had the right skills, knowledge, and/or experience to address these areas. As shown in the figure below, respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the perceived skills of their board or body, with the majority either agreeing or strongly agreeing that they had the necessary skills or knowledge in each area. Most notably, respondents either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they had 'safeguarding' knowledge (96% 'agreed' to some extent, with 55% 'agreeing strongly').

Figure 15   To what extent respondents agreed their board had the right skills/ knowledge and/or experience in a range of areas
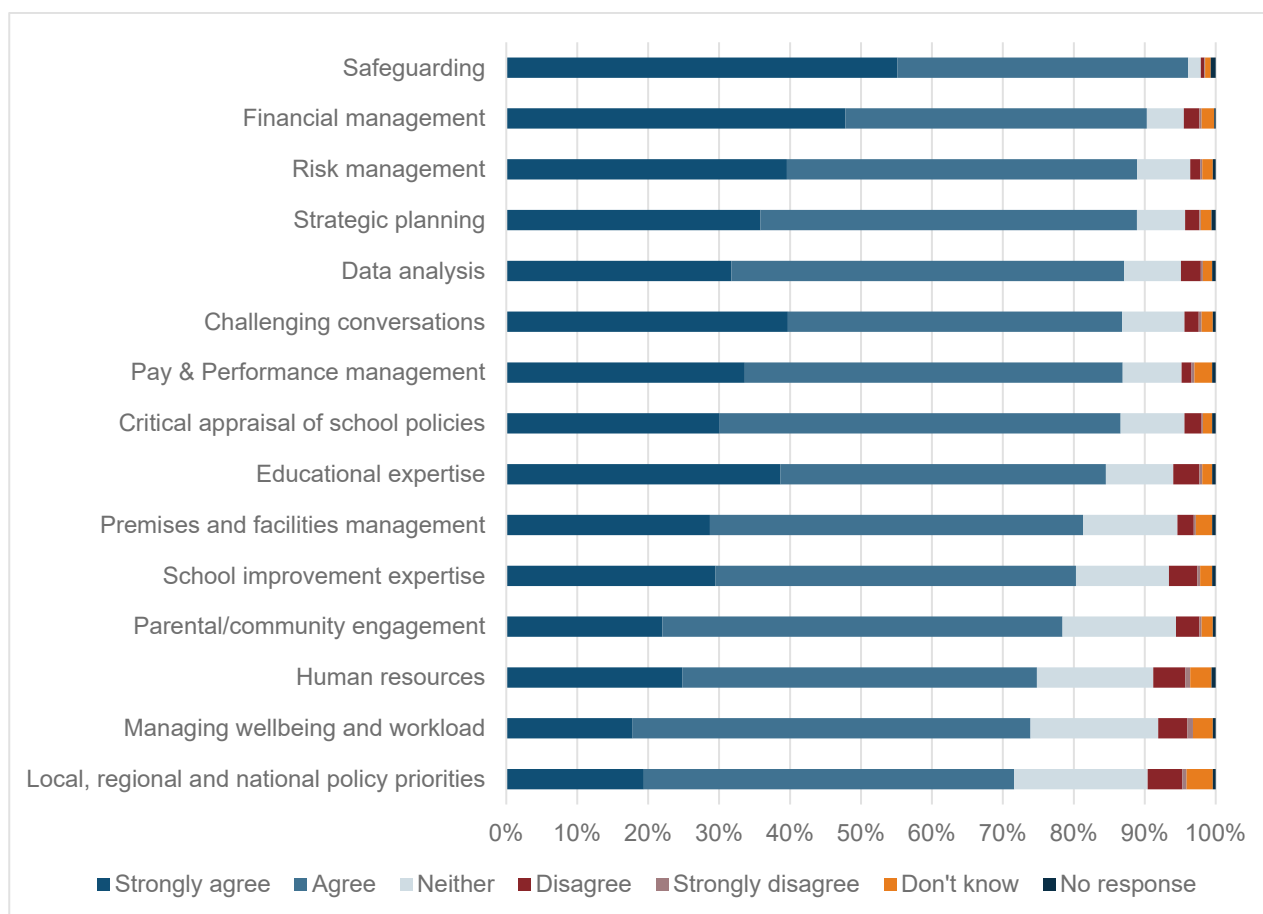
N=2,571

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

The vast majority of respondents (90%) agreed that they had 'financial management' skills (48% 'strongly agreed' and 43% 'agreed'). It is interesting to note that while respondents felt their board had skills in financial management, this was one of the key areas respondents as individuals felt they were less confident in comparison to other

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areas and the area they most wanted training in, as was discussed in the previous chapter, 'Risk management' and 'strategic planning' were also similarly highly rated.

There was less strong agreement that the board had the necessary skills in 'local, regional and national policy priorities' (19% 'strongly agreed' and 52% 'agreed'). However, even with lower levels of agreement, just 6% of respondents actively disagreed with this statement (5% 'disagreed' and 1% 'strongly disagreed'). Five per cent of respondents also disagreed that their board or body had 'human resources' skills (5% 'disagreed' and 1% 'strongly disagreed'[46]).

There were no notable differences in responses from respondents when analysed by school characteristics such as special status, schools in federations, those with religious character or phase of education.

Differences in perceptions of skills of the board by role type

There were some statistically significant differences by role type, often with chairs and governors/trustees and Members of trusts more likely to 'strongly agree' that their board had a particular skill than executive leaders. The most notable statistically significant differences are outlined below.

- Chairs were significantly more likely to 'strongly agree' than executive leaders that their board or body had 'data analysis' skills and experience of 'challenging conversations'.

- Chairs, Members and governors/trustees were significantly more likely to 'strongly agree' than executive leaders that their board or body had experience or knowledge of 'critical appraisal of school policies' and 'educational expertise'.

- Executive leaders were significantly more likely to 'disagree' than governors/trustees that their board or body had 'school improvement expertise'.

- Members were significantly more likely to 'strongly agree' that their board or body has skills and knowledge in 'critical appraisal of school policies' and 'school improvement expertise' than all other roles.

- Members were significantly more likely to 'strongly agree' that their board or body had skills and knowledge in 'managing wellbeing and workload', 'pay and performance management' and 'local, regional and national policy' than executive leaders.

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[46] Discrepancy due to rounding.

Differences in skills by type of board

There were some statistically significant differences in responses from different types of schools, particularly between MATs (trust board and LGB combined) and maintained schools. In the areas of 'premises and facilities management', 'parental engagement', and 'pay and performance management', MAT respondents were significantly less likely to 'strongly agree' that the board had the right skills than respondents from maintained schools. On the other hand, MAT respondents were significantly more likely to 'strongly agree' that the board had the right skills, knowledge and experience to address 'local, regional, and national policy priorities' than maintained respondents. Other statistically significant differences included:

- 'Strategic planning' – MAT respondents were significantly more likely to 'strongly agree' than maintained school respondents.

- 'School improvement expertise' – MAT respondents were significantly more likely to 'strongly agree' than maintained school or SAT respondents.

- 'Challenging conversations' – MAT and SAT respondents were significantly more likely to 'strongly agree' than maintained school respondents.

- 'Risk management' – MAT respondents were significantly more likely to 'strongly agree' than SAT respondents.

- 'Human resources' – MAT and SAT respondents were significantly more likely to 'strongly agree' than maintained schools respondents.

Within MATs, there were differences in the proportions of respondents stating that they 'strongly agreed' their boards had particular areas of skills or knowledge, depending on whether they were from a trust board or a LGB. A higher proportion (71%) of respondents from MAT trust boards 'strongly agreed' that they had 'financial management' skills on their boards compared to MAT LGBs (28%). This pattern was seen across a range of the areas, as outlined in the table below.

Table 31   Proportion of respondents strongly agreeing that their board had a range of skills by board type

Strongly agree that our board has:	Maintained school governing body (%)	SAT trust board (%)	MAT trust board (%)	MAT LGBs (%)
Financial management	45	55	71	28
Strategic planning	32	38	56	29
Data analysis	31	33	44	27
Safeguarding	56	56	60	48
Premises and facilities management	30	32	31	20
Parental and community engagement	22	23	16	20
Local, regional and national policy	16	17	32	14
Critical appraisal of school policies	30	34	30	23
Pay and performance management	33	39	48	21
Educational expertise	35	37	59	30
School improvement expertise	25	26	51	23
Challenging conversations	34	41	57	35
Risk management	n/a	34	52	n/a
Human resources	21	26	42	17
Managing wellbeing and workload	15	18	24	14
N	894	614	686	462

N=2,656[47]

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance 2019/2020

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[47] Data has been weighted so that governing bodies with different number of respondents will not contribute differently towards the calculation of averages and proportions

The biggest differences between MAT trust boards and their LGBs were in the areas of 'financial management' (as mentioned above), 'educational expertise', 'school improvement expertise', 'pay and performance management' and 'strategic planning', with MAT trust boards reporting stronger agreement that their boards have this skill compared with MAT LGBs. This reflects the decision-making responsibilities that were outlined in Chapter 2, with trust boards retaining powers related to finance and the strategic direction of the trust.

Notable statistically significant differences by size of MATs, are outlined below.

- 'Financial management' – larger trusts (national and system leader trusts) were significantly less likely to 'strongly agree' that the board had these skills than smaller trusts, though system leaders were more likely to 'agree' than established trusts.

- 'Safeguarding' – starter trusts were significantly more likely to 'strongly agree' that their boards had the necessary skills than system leader trusts.

- 'Local, regional and national policy priorities' – national trusts were significantly more likely to 'disagree' that they had this knowledge than starter trusts.

- 'Pay and performance management' – system leader trusts were significantly less likely to 'strongly agree' than smaller trusts.

- 'Educational expertise' – larger trusts were significantly less likely to 'strongly agree' than established trusts.

- 'Managing workload' – established trusts were less likely to 'strongly disagree' than larger trusts.

Perceptions of what makes a good governor and trustee

Telephone interviewees were asked what they believed made a good governor or trustee. The majority of interviewees also explained that a good governor/trustee understood the strategic nature of the role:

> To be supportive yet challenging and to always have that strategic head [on] and not take things personally. If you are a parent, [you need] to see this isn't about your family's experience but about the school's experience… and to keep yourself informed and up-to-date.
> *Chair*

The minority of interviewees who did identify particular skills associated with being a good governor/trustee mentioned strong analytical skills, financial skills and organisation skills with education knowledge and expertise most commonly mentioned:

> Finding people who are committed and who understand the school
> and the community they serve. Also, someone with a good level of
> understanding and interest in education, both locally and nationally.
> *Member of a LGB*

However, the most common response, given by interviewees covering all school types, related to governors and trustees needing to have a commitment to the role and a passion for education and children. Comments included:

> Got to be keen and go into it with your eyes open. You have to fully
> commit to the job. *Chair*

> Beyond anything else, it's understanding that the role is a big
> commitment. They must attend meetings, engage and read
> documentation they are sent. *Clerk*

Related to this, others noted that having enough time to give to the role was an important factor in being a good governor/trustee. One clerk in a MAT explained:

> There is a lot of work to be done and it is a big ask of volunteers.
> *Clerk*

6.2 The perceived effectiveness of governing bodies to fulfil their functions

Overall effectiveness

Those involved in governance had an overwhelmingly positive view of their board or body's effectiveness. Over a third (38%) of respondents said that their board or body was 'very effective' overall, while 53% said it was 'effective'. Just one per cent said it was 'ineffective' and less than one per cent said it was 'very ineffective'. When looking at perceived effectiveness by the school or academy's Ofsted rating, it can be seen that a higher proportion of those respondents from schools rated as 'outstanding' rated their governance as 'very effective' (50%) compared to those rated as 'good' (38%) or 'requires improvement' (26%). Numbers of those schools in the sample rated as 'serious weakness'/'special measures' were too small to include in this comparison. There were not differences in the proportions rating their governance as 'ineffective' or 'very ineffective' by Ofsted rating.

The figure below shows how perceived effectiveness varied by type of board. A higher proportion of respondents from trust boards (both SATs and MATs) described their board

as 'very effective' overall (46% in both) compared with MAT LGBs (29%) or maintained schools' governing bodies (34%).

Significance tests were run on the effectiveness of the board or body by role type. This identified chairs as being more likely to rate their board or body as 'effective' overall than governor/trustees and Members. There were no other significant differences by role.

Looking at roles within board type, it can be seen that for governors/trustees and chairs, the pattern seen by school type remains, with higher proportions of these respondents for SAT and MAT trust boards rating their board as 'very effective' compared to those on maintained schools' governing bodies or MAT LGBs.

Figure 16   Perceived overall effectiveness of the board, by chair and governor/trustees within each board type
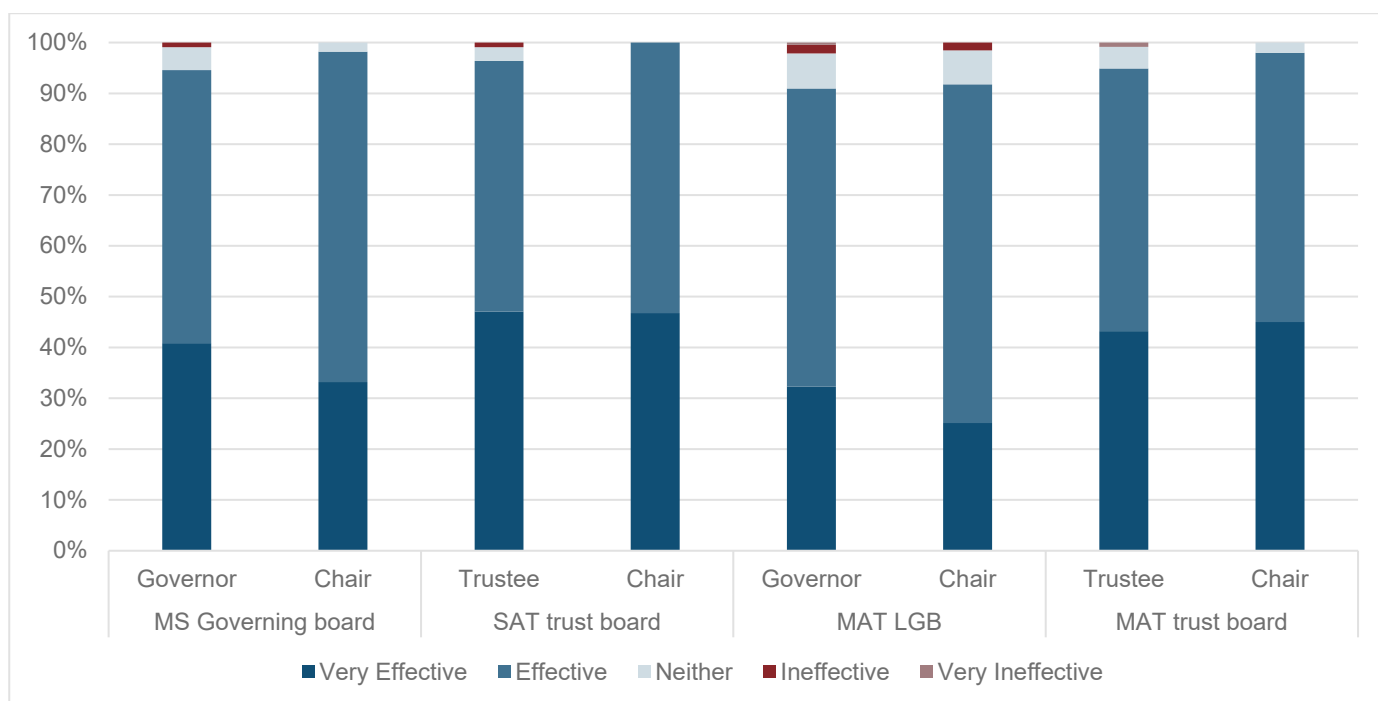
N=1,639

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance 2019/2020

While trustees and chairs of the trust board were seen to have similar views in both SATs and MATs, a smaller proportion of chairs in both MAT LGBs and maintained schools rated their board as 'very effective' compared to the proportion of governors/LGB members rating their board as so. For example, 41% of governors on maintained schools' governing bodies rated their board as 'very effective' whereas 33% of chairs rated their board in this way. For MAT LGBs the figures were 32% and 25% respectively.

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Clerks and executive leaders followed the same pattern as was seen for school type, with higher proportions of both clerks and executive leaders from trust boards (both SAT and MAT) rating their board as 'very effective' compared to those from MS governing bodies and MAT LGBs. For example, 52% of executive leaders from MATs and 48% of executive leaders from SATs rated their trust board as 'very effective'. This compares to 37% from maintained schools and 34% from MAT LGBs. For clerks, 44% from MATs and 41% from SATs rated their trust board as 'very effective' compared to 32% from maintained schools and 35% from MAT LGBs.

Within MATs, a smaller proportion of respondents from national trusts described their board as being 'very effective' overall (26%), compared with other sizes of trusts (between 36 and 39%). A slightly higher proportion of respondents from secondary schools (40%) described their board or body as 'very effective' overall compared with primary schools (34%).

Perceived effectiveness in the core functions of governance

Respondents were asked how effective their board or body were in relation to the three core functions of governance, namely:

- ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
- holding the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils
- overseeing the financial performance of the school.

The survey questionnaire asked respondents to rate the perceived effectiveness of their board or body in each of these areas. As with overall effectiveness, respondents were overwhelmingly positive.

Forty per cent of respondents described their board or body as 'very effective' at ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction, while 53% said they were 'effective'. Just one per cent said 'ineffective' with less than one per cent saying 'very ineffective'.

With regards to holding the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, 45% of respondents rated their board or body as 'very effective' at this while 49% rated it as 'effective'. Again, just one per cent of respondents rated their board or body as 'ineffective' in this area, while less than one per cent as 'very ineffective'.

Almost half of all respondents (48%) felt their board or body was 'very effective' at overseeing the financial performance of the school. A further 43% rated their board or body as 'effective' at this. One per cent felt they were 'ineffective' at this while a further 1% felt they were 'very ineffective' in this area.

There were some differences by type of board, as outlined in Figure 17.

Figure 17   Proportions of respondents rating the three core functions of governance as very effective, by type of board
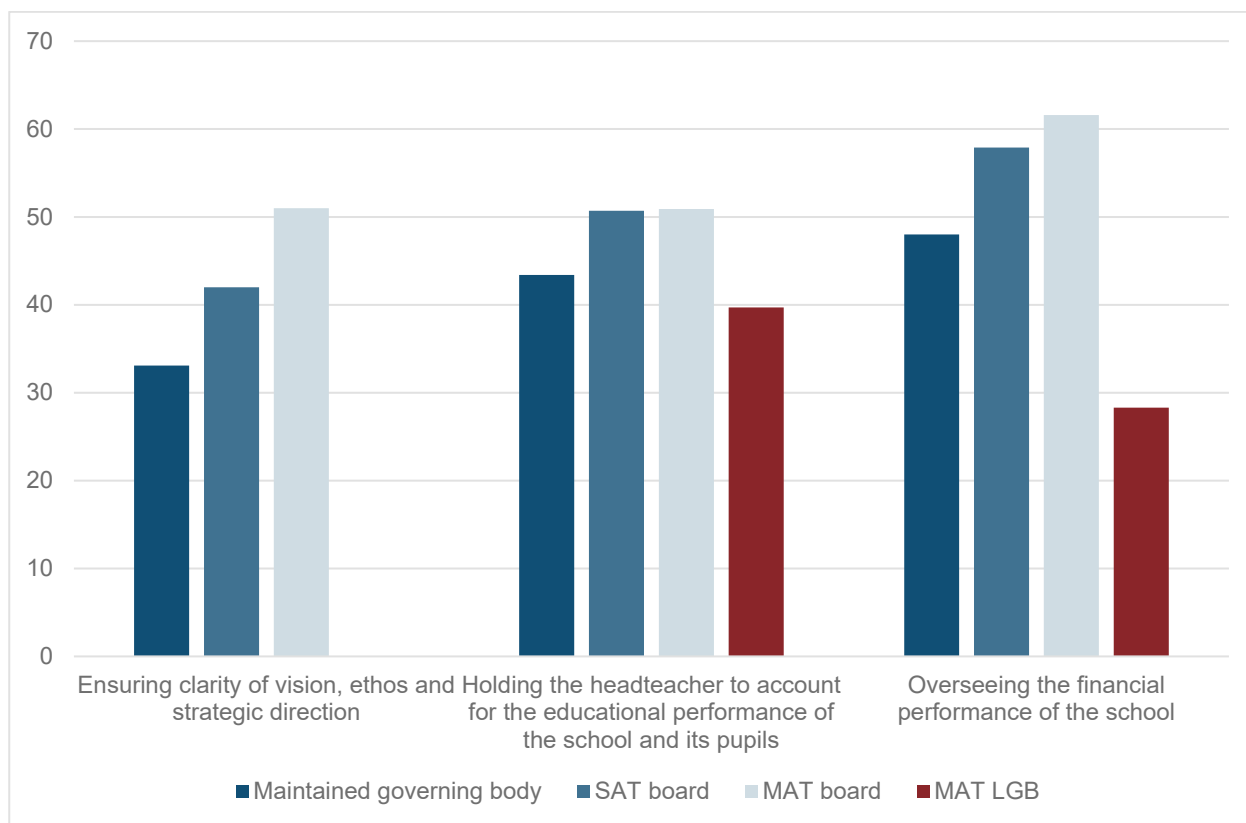
N=1,898[48] (ensuring clarity of vision) to 2656 (holding headteacher to account and overseeing financial performance)[49].

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Overall, respondents from maintained schools felt their governing body was more effective at overseeing the financial performance of the school and holding the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils than at ensuring the clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction of the school. Both MAT and SAT trust boards felt they were more effective at overseeing the financial performance of their school than the other two core functions.

When comparing across board type it can be seen that a higher proportion of respondents from MAT trust boards felt their board was 'very effective' at ensuring the

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[48] MAT LGB respondents were not shown 'Ensuring clarity of vision' in the survey.
[49] Data has been weighted so that governing bodies with different number of respondents will not contribute differently towards the calculation of averages and proportions.

clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction compared to other types of board. In contrast, a smaller proportion of respondents from MATs described their LGBs as being 'very effective' at overseeing the financial performance of the school (28%) compared to other boards, and in particular MAT trust boards (62%) and SAT trust boards (58%). This may reflect the decision making responsibility in MATs whereby responsibility for finance is likely to sit at the trust board level rather than at LGB level. Smaller proportions of respondents from maintained schools felt their boards were 'very effective' across the 3 core functions compared with trust boards, for example 33% of maintained schools responded that their board was 'very effective' at 'ensuring the clarity, ethos and strategic vision' of the school compared to 42% of SATs and 51% of MAT trust boards.

Starter and established trusts were consistent with their views on the effectiveness of their boards/bodies across the three core functions with the proportion of starter trusts stating 'very effective' ranging from 43-47%, and for established trusts the figures ranged from 42-50%. In comparison, a higher proportion of respondents from national trusts believed their boards were 'very effective' at ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction (65%) than at holding the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils (36%), however a much smaller proportion rated their overseeing the financial performance of the school as very effective (26%). System leader trusts were more likely to rate their board as 'very effective' at ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction (62%) than at holding the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils (40%) and overseeing the financial performance of the school (39%).

Respondents for special schools felt their board was 'very effective' at overseeing the financial performance of the school (59%, the figure is 44% for mainstream schools) but comparatively less so at ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction (31% for special schools, while the figure for mainstream schools is 36%). There were no differences by role across the core functions.

Perceived support and challenge of executive leaders

Executive leaders were asked to what extent they felt supported by the board or body, and to what extent they felt challenged and scrutinised. As was seen with the three core functions of governance, executive leaders were overwhelmingly positive about the support and challenge they received from their board or body.

- Half (51%) of executive leaders 'strongly agreed' that they felt adequately supported. The same proportion 'strongly agreed' that they felt adequately challenged and scrutinised. The proportion agreeing was 38% and 40% respectively.

- Very few executive leaders actively disagreed with these statements. Just 3% 'disagreed' and 2% 'strongly disagreed' that they were adequately supported by their board or body, while 3% 'disagreed' and 1% 'strongly disagreed' that they were adequately challenged and scrutinised.

A higher proportion of executive leaders working with MAT trust boards 'strongly agreed' that they were adequately supported by the board (63%) compared with other board types. In contrast, 42% of those working with MAT LGBs 'strongly agreed' with this statement.

Figure 18   The extent to which executive leaders feel supported, by board type
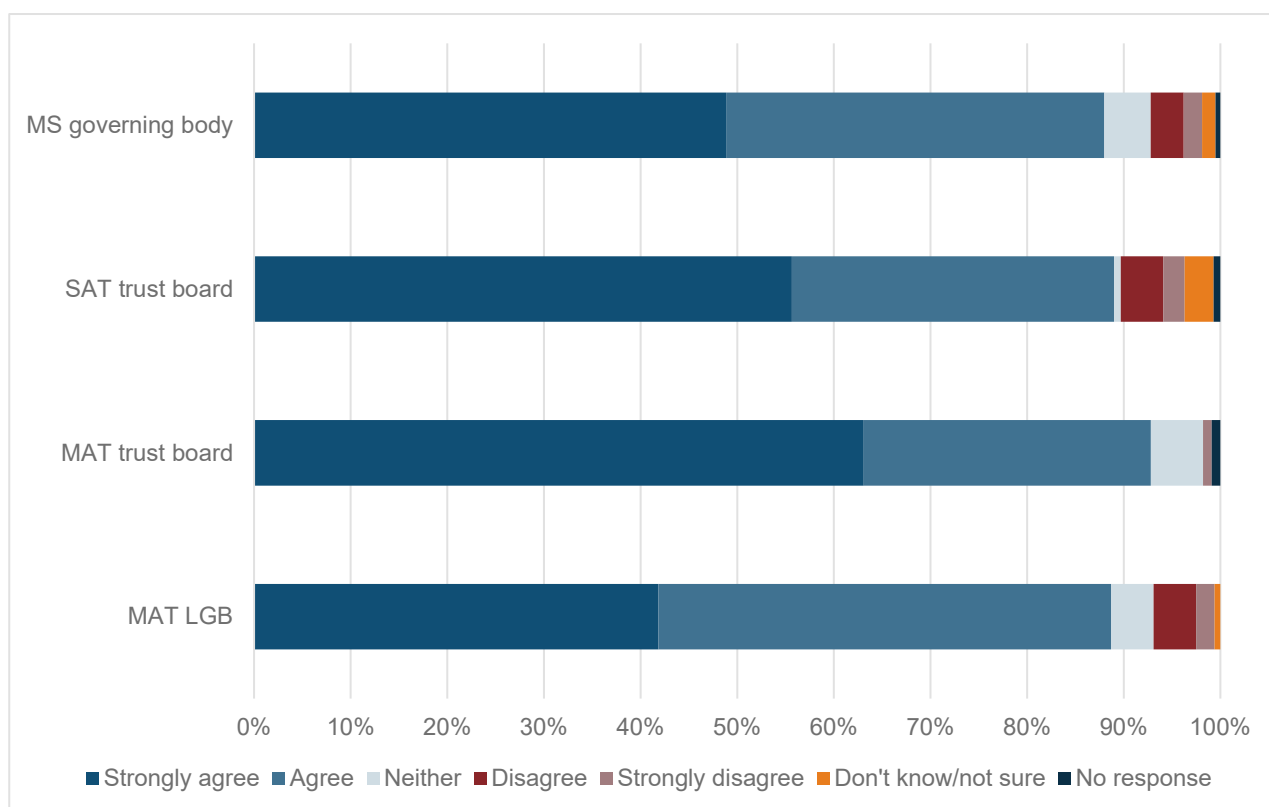
N=611

The same pattern by board type was seen for whether executive leaders felt adequately challenged and scrutinised by their board. A higher proportion of those working with MAT trust boards 'strongly agreed' (69%) with this statement compared to other boards, and in particular those from MAT LGBs (42%).

Figure 19   The extent to which executive leaders feel adequately challenged and scrutinised by board type
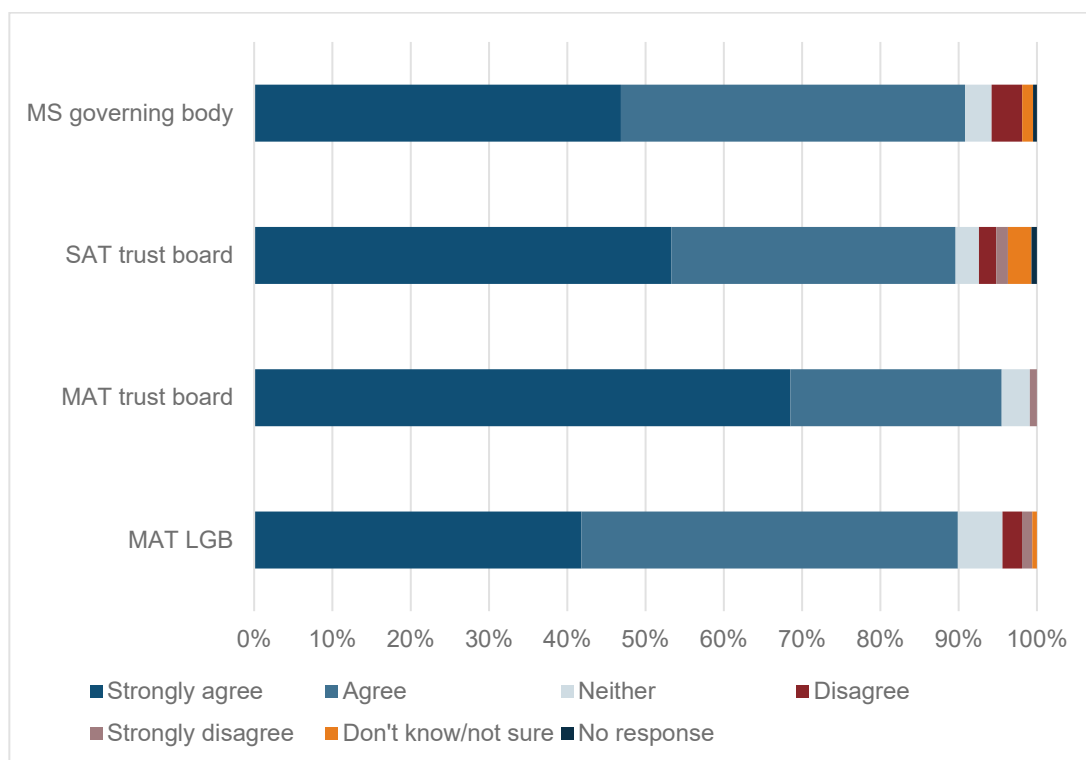
N=611

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Within the MAT group, over half of executive leaders working with established (59%), starter (53%) and system leader (51%) trusts 'strongly agreed' that they were adequately challenged and scrutinised compared to just 39% of those from national trusts.

The three telephone interviews with executive leaders reiterated this positive view of support and challenge. Comments from two of them explaining why they felt both supported and challenged included:

> They [board of governors] are the best trained [governors], they know their stuff, they very much read materials and come with questions prepared but at the same time they are realistic about the issues the school is facing. They are compassionate to staff whilst offering a strong level of challenge and they are also very supportive of the work within the school. *Head*

> They [board of governors] are willing to ask and challenge but also willing to accept the views of school staff... we [senior leadership team]

try to make sure our governors know how to challenge and what kinds of things they should be challenging. *Head*

Improvements to effectiveness

Survey respondents were asked how they felt the effectiveness of their board or body could be improved. In total, 2536 respondents provided an answer to this question and a wide range of suggestions were given. However, the three most commonly cited categories of response all related to having the right people with the right skills and access to training. For example, responses related to:

- improved or more external support and training (including induction) as a way of improving their board (12%)

- improved recruitment and retention of those sitting on the board (again 12% of responses fell into this category)

- improving the knowledge and skills of the board (10%).

Examples of comments to an open-ended survey question asking about ways to improve governance effectiveness included:

- Continual training for trustees so they remain up-to-date and strategic in the way they operate.

- Ensuring governors have the skills that we need in order to offer support and challenge. Governors need to have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and understand the difference between operational and strategic.

- Reduce the number of parent governors to allow us to recruit to fill specific skills gaps, rather than to have a parent elected who may be very enthusiastic, but not bring any skills that we could benefit from. We complete skills gaps [audits] regularly, but until we get an academy governor vacancy, there is little we can do to fill any gaps.

- We need to fill the vacancies within the board and improve our succession planning.

Eight per cent of the responses related to having better engagement, both within the board and with stakeholders. However, a similar proportion stated that they did not need to improve the effectiveness of their board or body. Other comments related to:

- Governors/trustees needing more time or availability to fulfil the role, particularly in relation to availability to visit schools during the working day (6%).

- Less workload for those involved in governance (6%).

- Better communication and coordination (6%).

- Funding, including remuneration for the chair (5%).

- Improving the structures and schemes of delegation (5%).

- Clearer understanding of the roles and responsibilities of governors/trustees (5%).

6.3 Barriers to effectiveness

Interviewees were asked what barriers their board faced to being effective. Generally, interviewees who were governors or trustees felt their boards were not facing any barriers. In contrast the majority of chairs, clerks and executive leaders interviewed were able to identify barriers.

Most of the barriers identified by interviewees related to three areas, namely: the effectiveness of individuals, pressure on the board, and relationships. These are discussed in more detail below.

The (lack of) effectiveness of individuals

Most of the barriers to effectiveness discussed related to governors or trustees not doing their job as effectively as they could. This is in direct contrast with the findings in the survey, in which the vast majority of respondents felt that their board was 'very effective' or 'effective'. In a few instances, clerks in particular had observed that their governors/trustees were not challenging or asking the right questions:

> All our governors are a really friendly bunch and I think they need to challenge more rather than just say yes everything is good. *Clerk*

> There's lot of arguments and discussions on things they don't need to discuss, but the things they need to discuss they're not discussing such as the strategic direction of the school or for example pupil premium children not doing as [well as] other groups. They should be asking why. *Clerk*

Related to this, a small number of interviewees felt that a lack of understanding of the role and responsibility meant that some governors/trustees were trying to get involved in management, rather than remaining strategic. Some also mentioned instances where newly-appointed parent governors/trustees focused on issues affecting their own children, rather than focusing on priorities for the school as a whole.

Many of the interviewees who had mentioned roles and responsibilities agreed that more training would be beneficial to overcome these barriers. Similarly, one clerk felt that new headteachers should have training on governance to understand the role of the governing board to ensure they utilised it effectively.

A small number of trustees and clerks thought that their chair was a barrier to the board being as effective as it could be. For example, one clerk felt their chair was controlling which meant they only discussed the issues the chair was interested in and would 'brush aside' other important issues. Others felt that their chair did not have the necessary expertise in education which meant that they could potentially cause more damage than good, or they lacked expertise in chairing which meant they were not as effective in meetings or as open to discussion as they should be.

Pressure on the board

Chairs in particular, across all types of schools felt that increased pressure on the board was a barrier to being effective. This included financial pressures such as budget concerns and also time pressures. One chair explained that there was a conflict as it was a voluntary role and many of the governors worked full time. This meant chairs were fully reliant on board members' commitment and passion to get the work done and the chair sometimes had to pick up the slack.

Ofsted was also reported by chairs and executive leaders to be putting an added pressure on the board that could negatively impact their ability to be effective. For example, one chair explained:

> It [Ofsted inspection] is always very onerous and with the new curriculum and what they are saying there's always a constant pressure, it's a bit like teaching to the exam rather than teaching what's best for the pupils. We are doing things for Ofsted which I think are distracting from getting on and giving children a good education.

Adding to this pressure, a small number of interviewees reported challenges with recruiting enough governors or trustees to fill vacancies. This was seen to have a knock-on effect on workloads with other governors/trustees having to take on more work and responsibility. One headteacher in a MAT explained that they had experienced a high turnover of chairs, due to the high workload. Another executive leader commented that since becoming a MAT, the workload had increased, which has been further exacerbated by vacancies on the board:

> When there were two governing bodies there was a lot to do [but since becoming a starter MAT with another school] their workloads have become pretty huge so I think that's the main challenge, we still have some vacancies, it's a huge ask of volunteers. *Executive leader*

Relationships

A small number of interviewees from MATs suggested that conflict or lack of communication between the LGBs and the trust board was causing barriers to effectiveness. Clerks and chairs felt that the scheme of delegation was not fully understood by new schools converting to academies in MATs, which led to conflict with the trust board. Others at a local level felt frustration with the trust board overruling their decisions.

Finally, a small number of interviewees felt that the balance of power between the senior leadership team and the governing body was a barrier to effectiveness. For example, one chair felt that their headteacher had already decided on what they would like to do rather than discussing it with the trust board and felt that better communication would improve the functioning of their board. A vice-chair within a large trust felt that some of the executive leaders were effectively leading their governing bodies rather than being accountable to them.

6.4   Monitoring and evaluating effectiveness

Most survey respondents said their board or body was actively monitoring or evaluating their effectiveness: 73% of respondents stated that they did this; 13% stated that they did not; and 15% did not know whether or not they were undertaking this activity. Table 32 presents further details.

Table 32   Proportion of respondents reporting their board monitors or evaluates their effectiveness, by board type

Do you monitor or evaluate your board's effectiveness?	Maintained school governing body (%)	SAT trust board (%)	MAT LGB (%)	MAT trust board (%)
Yes	70	76	67	82
No	17	11	15	9
Don't know	13	13	18	9
Missing	<1	<1	<1	<1
N	894	588	670	439

N = 2591[50]

A higher proportion (82%) of those responding from MAT trust boards stated that they did monitor and evaluate their board compared to 67% in MAT LGBs. For maintained schools' governing bodies the proportion was 70% and for SAT trust boards it was 76%. Seventeen per cent of respondents from maintained schools' governing bodies and 15% of those from MAT LGBs said that they did not monitor and evaluate their effectiveness compared to 11% of SAT trust boards and 9% of MAT trust boards.

Those respondents who had indicated they were evaluating or monitoring their effectiveness were asked what activities they undertook in relation to this. In total, 1748 respondents provided an answer to this question. The majority of respondents described doing a variety of things with the most common activity relating to self-evaluation (mentioned by 23% of all those undertaking monitoring or evaluation activities). This included informal self-evaluation, self-evaluation against internal key performance indicators, data and school improvement plans, or self-evaluation using external forms of support such as checklists and guidance from DfE, NGA and Ofsted. Comments included:

> School improvement plan has governor roles and KPIs [key
> performance indicators]. FGB [full governing body] reviews at least

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[50] Data has been weighted so that governing bodies with different number of respondents will not contribute differently towards the calculation of averages and proportions

termly use of governor tools for monitoring, including 20 questions for governors[51] and more.

> We have used the 20 key questions every governing board should ask itself and created an action plan to take forwards. We have held a GB development session where we have looked at our structure and organisation. Governors have completed the Together People self-review questionnaire and analysed the results.

The second most common response was undertaking a skills audit (14%) as illustrated by the following comment:

> We carry out a skills audit every year and evaluate the results. This is then used to inform succession planning for any upcoming vacancies. We also check our skill sets [against] the school development plan to ensure we have the correct skill set to support and challenge the school.

The third most common response was undertaking an annual meeting or away day (10%) as explained below:

> The Trust Board reviews its effectiveness as part of an away day annually/bi-annually using [a] recommended self-assessment model. A skills audit confirms that the range of skills, knowledge and experience of current Trustees enables the Trust Board to set and monitor an appropriate strategic direction and hold executive team members to account effectively. The skills audit is updated when new Trustees join. Proposal for peer review under consideration.

Eight per cent of responses referred to externally provided evaluation or review, including NGA reviews and NLG reviews.

> We have an independent review, carried out by an experienced professional at 3-4 yearly intervals. The action points from that review are acted on and any training organised.

A minority of respondents were undertaking monitoring and evaluation activities at the end of each meeting (7%) and a similar proportion was scrutinising and discussing their

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[51]Please see: Governing Board Self Review - Twenty-Questions

internal reports and meeting minutes to evaluate their effectiveness. Other activities included:

- Performance review of chairs and governors/trustees (4%).
- Through the recording of training and development activities (4%).
- Stakeholder feedback (staff, parents and pupils) (3%).

7   Conclusions

The final chapter of the report presents concluding remarks and highlights the key lessons identified by the research. The conclusions and lessons are part of the independent evidence provided by this study whose primary purpose was to inform future policy development and enable evidence-based prioritisation of resources to support school and trust governance throughout England. Furthermore, the messages from this extensive landscape picture will help to inform the practice of school and trust governance.

The chapter presents the overall conclusions, then draws out the key considerations for the different types of schools.

7.1   Overall conclusions

Time commitment of governance

Regardless of the type of school, board or phase of education, governors and trustees commit a significant amount of time to their governance roles. They spend on average over 4.5 days[52] per term on governance activities. Even with this time commitment, volunteers often felt that their role required more time and attention than they could provide due to their commitments away from governance. This meant that the time they could give was not always enough to engage with and execute the role effectively/fully.

Chairs spend almost double the amount of time a term on governance activities compared to governors/trustees (equivalent to approximately 9 days per term, and even more so for chairs of MAT trust boards), making it a considerable undertaking for someone. The higher proportion of chairs who were retired suggests that these are the individuals who have the time to be able to commit to the role, compared to those who are working.

Inefficiencies in governance practices, unclear roles and responsibilities and vacancies can further exacerbate the challenges faced by governors and trustees by causing frustration and increasing their workload even further. The research suggests that repetitive decision-making practices can lead to inefficiencies and duplication of work. There was evidence that some governing bodies were **taking steps to try and reduce workload and duplication**, for example by reducing the number of committees in place and limiting them to specialist areas, such as finance.

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[52] Figure based on a 7 hour day.

Recruitment of governors and trustees

There are considerable challenges in the recruitment and retention of governors and trustees. Most governing bodies had vacancies (averaging from 1.1 for MAT trust boards to 1.8 for SAT trust boards) and time commitment and workload were seen to be the biggest barriers to recruitment. Since it is a voluntary role, the considerable time commitment was felt to be off-putting to those who work full time, yet interviewees suggested that working professionals are the very people they want to recruit because they have desirable skills.

Co-opted or foundation governors/trustees were seen to be the hardest roles to fill across all board types, but vital to the effective functioning of the board as they provide essential skills and can provide an independent, objective perspective to the governing body's functions because they do not have a direct link to schools. Parent governors/trustees were often easier to recruit than other types of governor/trustees. However, there was a general feeling that some lose interest once their child leaves the school, which can lead to retention difficulties.

Despite the majority of boards having vacancies and struggling to recruit governors and trustees unrelated to the school, **most governing bodies were relying on word-of-mouth recruitment** from their local and personal networks, which may be restricting their ability to recruit to high quality, skilled and effective individuals. This may help to explain why co-opted or foundation governors/trustees were seen to be the hardest roles to fill. **Schools and trusts could make greater use of connection services** that connect schools/trusts with applicants with the right skills who are interested in becoming governors or trustees, although it should be noted that MAT trust boards were already using these services more than other governing bodies. This issue deserves further consideration in order to understand what more could be done to help governing bodies recruit and retain the right people to fulfil their role.

Good succession planning is essential to ensure changes in leadership do not impede the governing body's effectiveness. It allows governing bodies to create a pipeline of future chairs and vice chairs, and, when linked with appropriate training, ensures those coming through have the right skills. However, it was clear from the research that succession planning was not commonly happening, with individuals generally being asked to fill the role following a resignation, rather than volunteering. Given the significant time commitment and specific skills set required, it is not surprising that chair is seen to be one of the most difficult positions to fill, and one that will be made harder to fill without appropriate succession planning in place.

The composition of the board

Broadly, there was a lack of diversity among those involved in governance, with regards to age and ethnicity, which means that boards are not necessarily representative of the communities they serve. The research found that White ethnic groups and people over the age of 60 are over-represented on governing boards compared to the national population[53,54]. This was acknowledged by research participants, some of whom reported that they were actively seeking to improve the diversity of their board, especially in terms of age and ethnicity. Links with local community groups, increased use of recruitment services and monitoring the make-up of the board can all help to broaden diversity.

Skills needs and further training

Training and support were well received and greatly valued by governors/trustees. It was seen as essential to ensure new governors/trustees understood their roles and responsibilities, particularly around how to be strategic rather than operational. Generally, face-to-face training was seen to be very valuable, as was training on specific topics, such as safeguarding. However, **time and cost were considerable barriers to training**, meaning that not all governors and trustees were able to access the training they needed. Guidance documents were perceived as helpful, but given the time demands and voluntary nature of the role, **guidance documents need to be readily digestible and accessible** or few governors or trustees will use them.

There was a **mismatch between the skills the governors/trustees felt their governing body had and those which the executive leaders felt they had**, particularly in relation to knowledge and understanding of the education sector. While governors/trustees, including chairs, were very positive about the skills they held collectively as a governing body, the responses from executive leaders suggest that they feel their governing body are comparatively lacking in skills that directly relate to the education context, such as knowledge and understanding of school improvement, data analysis and education policy. It may be the case **that governing bodies need more training in how to apply their skills to the education context** to ensure they are of most use to the schools and more support keeping up to date with educational policy developments.

Overall, respondents were **very positive that their governing body had the appropriate finance skills**. However, individually, respondents were much less positive about their own abilities in this area and wanted further training. While it is not necessary for all governors/trustees to have strong skills in this area, they should be able to discuss

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[53] Please see: Population of England and Wales - latest
[54] Please see: Ethnicity Facts Figures

finance data confidently, and therefore this is an area where further training and support could be targeted.

Professional clerking

The **effective use of clerks on governing bodies is key to effective governance**, but not all bodies are making the most of the resource clerks can provide. Professional and/or experienced clerks often have accumulated knowledge and expertise to draw on and are able to offer insight into the effectiveness and efficiency of the governing bodies they support, particularly regarding repetitious decision-making processes and maintaining a strategic focus. This breadth of knowledge and understanding is an asset that should be drawn on to ensure the effective running of the entire governing body. Importantly, the support of an effective professional clerk was seen to help with the retention of governors/trustees.

Governing bodies may benefit from greater external or independent input.

Those involved in governance rate the effectiveness of their governing body highly, regardless of type, and this is despite not all bodies monitoring and evaluating their effectiveness. Where monitoring was happening, this was generally through self-evaluation methods and most respondents had not had an opportunity to observe other boards, despite many feeling they would benefit from such an opportunity. This suggests that bodies may benefit from more external input, to ensure they do not become too insular and to provide greater support and challenge and a broader perspective on issues, though it would be important to consider the best ways of making this work.

7.2   Specific conclusions for different types of governing bodies

Governance in trusts

There is a lack of separation between the different levels of governance in trusts, due to individuals taking on multiple roles across different levels. Trustees are often also Members, as are executive leaders. If Members are also acting as trustees or executive leaders, this may impact their objectivity and ability to oversee trust governance impartially. While the survey did not identify the extent of overlap at an individual board level, the fact that around half of trustees were also Members would suggest that this was a common practice in trusts and something that is worthy of further investigation. Effective monitoring and evaluation of the governing body, with the input from independent external sources (whether that be a professional support organisation,

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or observing other boards), may help to ensure trust boards do not become too insular and are objectively challenged.

Governance in MATs

The **complexity of MAT governance presents a unique challenge in ensuring clarity in the roles and responsibilities of the different tiers of governance** particularly where trust boards are delegating powers to enable schools to have some autonomy. It is clear from this research that roles and decision-making responsibilities are not always clearly defined in a way that is understood by all involved in governance, which can lead to duplication of work, frustration and ultimately breakdown in relationships. The scheme of delegation is a key part of effective and efficient governance within MATs. If the scheme of delegation is clear about where responsibility lies and what this means in practice, there is less likely to be confusion across the different levels of governance. This is particularly important in areas prone to overlap, for example in relation to monitoring educational performance and school improvement.

Part of the confusion around where responsibility lies seems to stem from when maintained schools convert in order to join a MAT. There was evidence that schools joining MATs did not notice any changes to their governance responsibilities from when they were a maintained school governing body to when they became a MAT LGB. This suggests that more needs to be done to ensure new MAT LGBs fully engage with and understand the new structure they sit within and what their role means in practice, and how it has changed. MAT trust boards should also consider how they can ensure that the scheme of delegation is clearly communicated and consistently implemented across the trust.

MATs appear to experience **unique challenges in their recruitment of trustees**. This research suggests that while MAT trust boards, particularly in larger MATs, do not struggle to attract applicants for roles, they are more likely to have difficulties recruiting candidates with the right skills. The skills that MAT trust boards find hardest to fill are not the same as other board types. While MAT trust boards struggle to recruit people with skills in parental and community engagement and premises and facilities management, they have less difficulty recruiting individuals with educational expertise and knowledge than other board types.

There are discrepancies in the training and confidence of those involved at the different levels of governance in trusts. While trustees in MATs generally felt confident in their abilities and the experience they bring to the role, members of LGBs were less so. In particular, they lacked confidence in scrutinising of data and financial management. The findings also indicate that members of LGBs were less likely to have received training, support or guidance than trustees. Similarly, clerks in LGBs felt less supported and reported not having received sufficient training compared to their peers providing

clerking services for trust boards. This suggests more needs to be done to ensure all involved in governance, not just those working at a trust level, have the training and support required to do their role. This is particularly important for ensuring that responsibilities that have been delegated to a local level are carried out effectively.

Governance in SATs

Clerks in SATS appear to be underutilised, compared to their counterparts in MAT trust boards. They were less likely to be providing the broad spectrum of activities, in particular signposting to legal or procedural advice. They were also less likely to have their role overseen by the chair of the trust board. Relatedly, clerks in SATs were less likely to feel that they had the support and training to undertake their roles in comparison to their counterparts in maintained schools and MAT trust boards. Why this is the case needs further investigation, as does the training options available to clerks in SATs.

Governance in maintained schools

Maintained school governing bodies appear to feel **less confident in their strategic oversight role than trust boards**. Respondents from maintained schools governing bodies were less likely to rate their board as very effective at the three core functions of governance compared to trust boards. They were also less confident about their boards' skills and knowledge relating to strategic planning, financial management and challenging conversations than their counterparts on trust boards. This was confirmed by executive leaders in maintained schools, whereby a smaller proportion strongly agreed they were adequately supported and challenged by the governing body compared to those overseen by trust boards. This research also found that governors in maintained schools were **less likely to have received most forms of training, support and guidance** than trustees. In particular they were less likely to have received external face-to-face training and important documents such as the code of conduct for governors and recruiting a headteacher guide. Taken together, this suggests that more training would be beneficial to governors on maintained school governing bodies, particularly relating to the strategic nature of the role.

Maintained school governing bodies were less likely to be monitoring or evaluating their effectiveness compared to trust boards. This is something that should be investigated further to understand why this is not happening and what can be done to support governing bodies to evaluate their effectiveness.

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Appendix 1

The survey sample

The sample was selected using the 'Get information about schools' database (September 2019) as the sampling frame. All independent and 16 plus schools were excluded from the database. The target sample size was 5,000 schools.

The Sample was selected by using the eight different school types:

- LA maintained schools,

- LA maintained, in a federation,

- LA maintained supported by a trust (not academy),

- Single-academy trust,

- Starter trusts (1-5 academies),

- Established trusts (6-15 academies),

- National trusts (16-30 academies),

- System leader trusts (30+ academies)

We stratified on these categories and on phase of education (primary and secondary) simultaneously. The effect of this is that the 16 resulting groups are sampled in equal proportion and all other variables not included in the stratification are left to vary as per the random selection process.

For both samples, the number of schools available was not sufficient and thus other categories were inflated in order to reach the 5,000 school sample plan

Achieved responses

The table below shows the final achieved responses for each of the categories stratified. For established, national and system leader trusts, the trust board was contacted separately to the individual schools. As larger trusts often had multiple schools within the sampling frame, these responses are not linked to the school characteristics, and as such have been treated as a separate category.

Table 33   Achieved sample by stratification variable

School type	Primary schools sampled (N)	Primary schools with at least 1 response (N)	Individual responsesfrom Primary school (N)	Secondary schools sampled (N)	Secondary schools with at least 1 response (N)	Individual responses from Secondary school (N)	Total schools with at least 1 response (N)	Total individual responses (N)
LA maintained schools	380	96	239	380	127	292	223	531
LA maintained in a federation	380	77	169	45	14	26	91	195
LA maintained schools, supported by a trust (not academy)	270	67	132	72	20	47	87	179
Subtotal maintained schools	**1030**	**240**	**540**	**497**	**161**	**365**	**401**	**905**
Subtotal single-academy trusts	**380**	**132**	**300**	**380**	**128**	**348**	**260**	**648**
Academies in starter trusts (1-5 academies)	380	64	146	380	86	213	150	359

School type	Primary schools sampled (N)	Primary schools with at least 1 response (N)	Individual responsesfrom Primary school (N)	Secondary schools sampled (N)	Secondary schools with at least 1 response (N)	Individual responses from Secondary school (N)	Total schools with at least 1 response (N)	Total individual responses (N)
Academies in established trusts (6-15 academies)	380	65	109	380	67	155	132	264
Academies in national trusts (16-30 academies)	380	58	113	200	26	46	84	159
Academies in system leader trusts (30+ academies)	380	46	80	233	24	42	70	122
Trust board responses	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	110	294
Subtotal for MATs	**1520**	**233**	**448**	**1193**	**203**	**456**	**436**	**1198**
Overall Total	**2930**	**605**	**1288**	**2070**	**492**	**1169**	**1097**	**2751**

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

The table below shows the breakdown of respondents by role and school type.

Table 34   Role of respondents by type of school

School type	Chair (N)	Governor/ Trustee (N)	Executive leader (N)	Clerk (N)	Member (N)	Total (N)
Maintained school	228	345	208	122	2	905
SAT	129	245	140	108	26	648
MAT academy	246	313	207	111	27	904
MAT trust	62	71	70	75	16	294

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Schools and trusts were encouraged to provide multiple responses to the survey to capture a range of views from those with different roles within governance. The table below shows the breakdown of respondents by role and whether they were the only respondent representing their school or one of multiple responses.

Table 35   Role or respondent by number of responses from school or academy

Number of responses from school	Chair (N)	Governor/ Trustee (N)	Executive leader (N)	Clerk (N)	Member (N)
Schools/academies with one response (i.e. the only response from the school)	165	41	189	72	7
Schools/academies with multiple responses	388	760	311	226	35

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Characteristics of the achieved sample

Characteristics by school type

As can be seen from the table below, responses by role type were similarly distributed across the different school types.

Table 36   Role by school type

Role type	Maintained (%)	SAT (%)	MAT (%)	Total (n)
Governor/trustee	38	38	32	974
Chair	25	20	26	665
Clerk	13	17	16	416
Executive leader	23	22	23	625
Member	0	4	4	71
Total	905	648	1198	2751

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

The proportions of primary and secondary schools in each of the school type categories were similarly distributed across trusts, with a slightly higher proportion of secondary schools to primary schools. The reverse pattern was seen in maintained schools, with a higher proportion of primary to secondary schools. This difference would be expected given the national make up of schools. However, the proportions of primary and secondary schools within these categories are not substantially different as to impact on interpretation of results.

Table 37   Phase by school type

Phase	Maintained (%)	SAT (%)	MAT (%)	Total (n)
Primary	60	46	45	1200
Secondary	40	54	55	1151
Total (n)	905	644	802	2351

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Characteristics by Urban/rural classification

Urban schools were relatively evenly distributed by type of school. However, a higher proportion of rural schools were maintained schools than other types of schools. This may reflect that the higher proportion of maintained schools being primary schools and, as shown below, primary schools are more likely to be in rural locations.

Table 38   School type by urban/rural classification

Phase	Urban (%)	Rural (%)	Total (N)
Primary	46	67	1200
Secondary	54	33	1151
Total (N)	1792	559	2351

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

The sample contained a higher proportion of rural schools that were primary compared to the proportion for urban schools. This will need to be taken into account when interpreting the findings based on rurality, as it may also be identifying a difference due to phase. Where this is likely to be the case, this is mentioned in the report.

Table 39   Phase by urban/rural classification

Phase	Urban (%)	Rural (%)	Total (N)
Primary	46	67	1200
Secondary	54	33	1151
Total (N)	1792	559	2351

Characteristics by religious status

A higher proportion of schools with religious character were maintained compared to SATs and MATs. This may reflect the higher proportion of maintained schools that were primary schools (see table below).

Table 40   School type by religious status

School type	Schools without religious character (%)	Schools with religious character (%)	Total (N)
Maintained	40	45	905
SAT	31	26	644
MAT	30	29	645
Total (N)	1542	652	2194

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

The sample contained a higher proportion of schools with religious character that were primary compared to the proportion for schools without religious character. This will need to be taken into account when interpreting the findings based on faith status, as it may also be identifying a difference due to phase. Where this is likely to be the case, this is mentioned in the report.

Table 41   Phase by religious status

School type	Schools without religious character (%)	Schools with religious character (%)	Total (N)
Primary	44	72	1151
Secondary	56	28	1043
Total (N)	1542	652	2194

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Ofsted rating of the schools in the achieved sample

The table below highlights the Ofsted ratings of the achieved sample. As would be expected, the majority of schools were rated as 'good' (72% of the overall sample). A further 16% were rated as 'outstanding'.

Table 42   Ofsted rating of schools in the achieved sample

Ofsted rating	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)
Outstanding	322	12	16
Good	1417	52	72
Requires improvement	211	8	11
Serious Weaknesses/special measures	17	1	1
Missing	784	26	n/a
Total	2751	n/a	n/a

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Sample Representativeness Analysis

Method

The characteristics of the schools population that were intended for the sample to represent were the phase of education and the type of school (maintained school or trust). Consequently, the sample was stratified on these two variables. Moreover, it was also considered important, at a later stage, to evaluate whether the sample represented the proportion of schools with special status (SEN) provision, geographical region and the religious ethos of schools.

In order to assess whether the achieved sample is representative of the population from which it was drawn, the proportions for the aforementioned variables were compared for the target sample and the achieved sample. The target sample is the sample of 5,000 schools that was drawn from the 'Get information about schools' database. Please note, since the sample was stratified in order to obtain a sample of equal proportions in regards to phase of education and type of school, these characteristics might differ from those of the full sampling frame of existing schools.

In order to establish whether the differences observed between the target and achieved sample are considerable, Cohen's h criterion for evaluating the effect size or distance between proportions was used. This criterion is calculated with the following formula:

h = (2 * arc-sine(square_root(proportion_1))) - (2 * arc-sine(square_root(proportion_2)))

Cohen (1988) provides the following descriptive interpretations for h:

An h of 0.20 is considered a "small effect size", an h of 0.50 a "medium effect size" and an h of 0.80 a "large effect size."

Although the differences between proportions can be assessed through hypotheses test, significance on its own should not be the primary criterion since the size of the sample is influential in determining the p-values obtained. Consequently, although we supplement the information with p-values, h values are the defining statistics that should be used.

Phase of education

As can be seen from the table below, the difference in proportions for the phase of education across the target and achieved sample was below 0.20 ($p < 0.05$). This provides evidence that the sample is representative of the target sample with regard to the proportion of primary and secondary schools

Table 43   Representativeness of achieved sample by phase of education

Characteristic	Target frequency	Target proportion	Achieved frequency	Achieved proportion	Cohen's h	p-value
Primary	2937	0.587	565	0.539	0.097	0.004
Secondary	2067	0.413	484	0.461	0.097	0.004

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

School type

As can be seen from the table below, the difference in proportions for the school type across the target and achieved sample was below 0.20 ($p < 0.05$) except for schools supported by a single-academy trust which were slightly over sampled in relation to other school types. Nevertheless, since the distance for the proportions of target and achieved samples is well below 0.50, this provides evidence that the sample is reasonably representative of the target sample with regard to the proportion of school types.

Table 44   Representativeness of achieved sample by school type

Characteristic	Target frequency	Target proportion	Achieved frequency	Achieved proportion	Cohen's h	p-value
Established trusts (6-15 academies)	762	0.152	116	0.111	0.124	0.001
LA maintained schools	762	0.152	223	0.213	-0.157	0.000
National trusts (16-30 academies)	577	0.115	70	0.067	0.170	0.000
Starter trusts (1-5 academies)	762	0.152	133	0.127	0.074	0.039
Supported by a federation	425	0.085	91	0.087	-0.006	0.896
Supported by a single-academy trust	762	0.152	259	0.247	-0.238	0.000
Supported by a trust (not academy)	341	0.068	87	0.083	-0.056	0.102
System leader trusts (30+ academies)	613	0.123	70	0.067	0.193	0.000

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Special status

As can be seen from the table below, the difference in proportions for the special status provision across the target and achieved sample was below 0.20 ($p < 0.05$). This provides evidence that the sample is representative of the target sample with regard to the proportion of special status provision.

Table 45   Representativeness of achieved sample by special status

Characteristic	Target frequency	Target proportion	Achieved frequency	Achieved proportion	Cohen's h	p-value
No special status	4747	0.949	982	0.936	0.054	0.118
Special status	257	0.051	67	0.064	0.054	0.118

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Region

As can be seen from the table below, the difference in proportions for the geographical region across the target and achieved sample was below 0.20 (p < 0.05). This provides evidence that the sample is representative of the target sample with regard to the proportion of schools in the different geographical regions.

Table 46   Representativeness of achieved sample by region

Characteristic	Target frequency	Target proportion	Achieved frequency	Achieved proportion	Cohen's h	p-value
East Midlands and the Humber	630	0.126	115	0.110	0.051	0.159
East of England and North-East London	625	0.125	109	0.104	0.066	0.066
Lancashire and West Yorkshire	611	0.122	132	0.126	-0.011	0.777
North-West London and South-Central England	701	0.140	147	0.140	0.000	1.000
North of England	353	0.071	73	0.070	0.004	0.965
South-East England and South London	812	0.162	183	0.174	-0.033	0.356
South-West England	642	0.128	166	0.158	-0.086	0.011
West Midlands	630	0.126	124	0.118	0.023	0.526

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Religious status

As can be seen from the table below, the difference in proportions for the phase of education across the target and achieved sample was below 0.20 (p < 0.05). This provides evidence that the sample is representative of the target sample with regard to the proportion of religious and secular schools.

Table 47   Representativeness of achieved sample by religious status

Characteristic	Target frequency	Target proportion	Achieved frequency	Achieved proportion	Cohen's h	p-value
Schools of religious character	1302	0.26	359	0.327	-0.147	0
Schools without religious character	3702	0.74	738	0.673	-0.147	0

Source: NFER survey of school and trust governance, 2019/2020

Conclusion

As it is clear from the distances between the target and the achieved sample proportions, the sample is representative of the target population with regard to all variables that were considered important at the time of the study's design.

Follow-up telephone interviews with survey respondents

Follow-up semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with 30 individuals with the following characteristics, ensuring there was a spread across English regions:

Table 48   Characteristics of telephone interviews

Number of interviews	Role	School type	Phase
2	Chair	Maintained	Secondary
2	Clerk	Maintained	Secondary
3	Governor	Maintained	Secondary
2	Chair	Maintained	Primary
1	Clerk	Maintained	Primary
1	Chair	MAT - Starter trusts	Primary
1	Head	MAT - Starter trusts	Primary
1	Chair	MAT - Established trust	N/A
2	Clerk	MAT - Established trust	N/A
1	Trustee	MAT - Established trust	N/A
1	Chair	MAT - National trusts	Secondary
1	Governor	MAT - National trusts	Secondary
1	Clerk	MAT - System leader trusts	Primary
1	Head	MAT - System leader trusts	Primary
1	Chair	SAT	Secondary
2	Clerk	SAT	Secondary
3	Trustee	SAT	Secondary
2	Chair	SAT	Primary
1	Clerk	SAT	Primary
1	Head	SAT	Primary

Source: NFER telephone interviews of school and trust governance, 2020

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