

Staffordshire University Academies Trust		Trust Policy Document			
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Handbook of Good Governance

Purpose

At Staffordshire University Academies Trust (SUAT) we believe that the Trust Board and the Local Academy Councils need to exhibit certain behaviours. These are essentially:

- There will be a positive relationship between Directors / council members and Academy leaders based on trust, openness and transparency. The Trust Board and the LACs will systematically monitor the Academies' progress towards meeting agreed development targets. Information about what is going well and why, and what is not going well and why, will be shared. The Directors and council members will consistently ask for more information, explanation or clarification. This will ensure a strong contribution to robust planning for improvement.
- Directors and council members will be well informed and knowledgeable because they will be given high- quality, accurate information that is concise and focused on pupil attainment, progress, attendance and wellbeing. This information will be made accessible by being presented in a wide variety of formats, including charts and graphs.
- Directors and council members will take and support hard decisions in the interests of pupils: will back the Academy leaders when they need to change staff.
- Outstanding governance requires the Trust Board and the LACs to support honest, insightful self-evaluation by the Academies, recognising problems and supporting the steps needed to address them.
- Directors and council members will have absolute clarity about the different roles and responsibilities of the Academy leaders, LAC members and Directors; this, we believe, underpins the most effective governance. Protocols, specific duties and terms of reference will be made explicit in written documents.
- We hold the view that effective governance is driven by all of the members of the Trust Board and of the Local Academy Councils.
- Directors and council members will endeavour to gather information about the Academies at work by visiting them and talking with staff, pupils and parents. Clear protocols for visits will ensure that the purpose is understood by Academy staff and Directors / council members alike. Alongside the information they are given about the Academies, these protocols will help them to make informed decisions, ask searching questions and provide meaningful support.
- Academy leaders and Directors / council members will behave with integrity and are mutually supportive. SUAT's leaders do recognise that Directors / council members provide them with a different perspective which contributes to strengthening leadership. The questions they ask will challenge assumptions and support effective decision-making.
- Directors / council members will use the skills they bring, and the information they have about the Academies, to ask challenging questions, which are focused on improvement, and hold leaders to account for pupils' outcomes and wellbeing.

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- Time must be used efficiently by Directors / council members because there are clear procedures for delegating tasks, for example, to well organised committees. If an Academy has them, the committees will have clear terms of reference, provide high levels of challenge and use Directors and council members' expertise to best effect. Systems are in place for sharing information and reporting back to the full Trust Board. This will not merely reiterate what has already been discussed in detail by the Academy councils but will focus on the key points and decisions.
- The role of the clerk to the Trust Board, and to the LACs, is pivotal to ensuring that statutory duties are met, meetings are well organised and Directors receive the information they need in good time. Consequently, Directors and council members will come to meetings well prepared and with pertinent questions ready so that they are able to provide constructive challenge.
- A detailed timeline of activities, linked to SUAT's, and each individual Academy's, development plan will provide a clear structure for the work of Directors and council members and ensure that their time is used appropriately.
- Directors and council members will use their external networks and professional contacts to fill any identified gaps in the collective skills of the Trust Board and Academy Councils.
- There will be clear induction procedures for new Directors / council members which will help them to understand their roles and responsibilities and ensure that best use is made of their varied skills and expertise.
- The Trust Board and Academy Councils will constantly reflect on their own effectiveness and readily make changes to improve. They will annually consider their own training needs and the organisation of its work.

The work of the Director / Council Member

Knowing the Academies

1. Knowing the Academies well is fundamental to the success of the effectiveness of the Trust Board. The Directors of SUAT will expect good quality information through detailed, regular reports supported by data analysis. This will help to shape the direction for the MAT and hold leaders to account. Pupil progress data and information about the quality of learning will be presented consistently when considering proposals and making strategic decisions.
2. Each of the Academies will provide the Directors and council members with a detailed breakdown of information about progress and attainment, including examination results. Minutes of Trust Board and LAC meetings will always record how these were discussed in relation to gender, special educational needs, Pupil Premium and different groups of pupils and subjects.
3. The MAT Executive staff, the Principals and other relevant staff with particular areas of responsibility, will systematically provide information to Directors and council members in focused, detailed reports.
4. Relevant staff from the SUAT Academies will make presentations to Directors, who will be able to ask questions, seek clarification and identify what further information might be required for proposals to be more robust. In order to be kept fully up to date the Chair of the Trust

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Board will meet regularly with the Chief Executive Officer. These meetings will ensure that the Chair has a clear perspective of issues as they arise, the action taken, progress being made, and the impact and outcomes. The Chair will refer to some items from these meetings in Trust Board meetings. This will help to give all Directors a greater insight into the effectiveness of the academies in the Trust.

5. The Trust Board will not rely solely on what the Trust's leaders and members of staff tell them. They will seek information from external experts, when relevant, on issues such as the analysis of data, finance, personnel, special educational needs and Academy improvement. Directors will use this external support to gain new perspectives on information provided by the academies so that they can be confident that their understanding of the Trust's performance is accurate.
6. Directors will organise a programme of visits to the Academies to talk to staff and pupils and to see them in action. They will use a range of formal and informal visits, including attending Academy events and conducting 'learning walks' with senior staff. Effective practice will involve a shared understanding of the purpose of the visit, how it will be conducted and how it will be reported back to the Trust Board and the relevant Academy's senior staff. A report will be written for other Directors on the outcomes of any visit. In this way, all the Directors understand the progress being made and where there are barriers to overcome.
7. Directors may attend lessons to see the Academies at work. It will be possible to organise visits to lessons to talk to pupils in order to gain a better understanding of their experience of that Academy. Importantly, protocols need to be explicit and make it clear to staff and Directors alike; the visits will not be there to judge the quality of learning, because that is the role of the Principal and the senior staff. Rather, they will provide Directors with a broader understanding of the context for their work and help inform their strategic decisions.
8. The Trust Board will work to build even more productive relationships with parents. The views of parents, pupils and the wider community will be used as another source of information to shape questions and inform discussions.

In this way SUAT's Trust Board will seek a range of good quality, regular information from a variety of sources to ensure that they have an accurate understanding of each academies strengths and areas for development. This information will include:

- concise, focused reports from the Principal, senior staff and subject leaders
- external reports,
- presentations from staff, pupils and external experts
- internal performance monitoring information
- internal and external analyses of national tests using both benchmarking and comparative information
- internal self-evaluation reports
- formal and informal visits to the Academies
- questionnaires
- discussions with parents, pupils and all categories of staff.

9. The Directors will use the wide range of information that they have to help shape the direction of the Trust's Academies by ensuring that the development plan/s reflect the right priorities and are monitored systematically and effectively.
10. The Trust Board will ask four key questions when considering new initiatives and evaluating their impact:

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- What will be different for pupils?
- What will be different for parents?
- What will be different for staff?
- What will be different for partners?

Providing challenge

- The Trust Board will seek to strike the right balance between supporting leaders and providing constructive challenge; they will hold senior staff to account for the quality of the Academies' provision and its impact on outcomes for pupils. There are three key elements to getting the balance right:
 - understanding their role and how it complements but differs from that of the Principals
 - using the knowledge and experience they bring to enhance leadership
 - asking pertinent questions based on the information and knowledge they have about the Academies
- The Directors will ensure that a high level of challenge is particularly evident at committee level. Directors will tend to serve on committees where their knowledge and expertise could be used to best effect but it is recognised also that it is good practice for all Directors to become familiar with all aspects of the running of the Trust. Their expertise, understanding of the each Academy's context, and the pupil performance information that they received will enable them to ask pertinent and insightful questions.
- The Trust Board will systematically monitor the Trust's progress towards meeting the agreed targets in the SUAT Strategic Development Plan.
- The Directors will also challenge each other. For example, if discussions stray into operational matters then Directors, often the Chair of Directors, chairs of committees or Trust members, will step in to steer the conversation back to a strategic focus.

Working efficiently

- The Directors of SUAT believe that two factors are key to ensuring that they work systematically and effectively to meet their statutory duties. These are the role of the clerk to the Trust Board and the delegation of work, for example, to a number of core committees – Education, Resources and Audit.
- The role of the clerk to the Trust Board and its committees is pivotal to the smooth operation of the Trust Board. As well as fulfilling administrative duties, the clerk is a source of guidance and advice for the full Trust Board.
- A clear job description for the clerk supports their effectiveness. It ensures that the role, responsibilities and lines of accountability are understood. It is the intention of SUAT's Trust Board that the clerk will receive regular training and briefings from relevant sources.
- The Directors believe that strong teamwork between the Chief Executive, the Chief Operating Officer, the Principals, the Chair of the Trust Board and the clerk are crucial to efficient working. In addition, the delegation of work to committees, with clear terms of reference and clarity of purpose, is crucial to ensuring that the work of the Trust Board is managed well, matched to the needs of the Trust and distributed to involve all Directors appropriately.

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19. The SUAT Trust Board's committees are the 'engine room of governance' where in-depth discussions, challenging questions and thorough debate of proposals take place. The skills and knowledge of the Chair of a committee are crucial to their success.
20. It is the clearly stated intention of the Trust Board of SUAT to have a systematic approach to monitoring and evaluating the progress being made towards meeting targets. The review of the Trust's Strategic Development Plan is a standing agenda item either for committees, the full Trust Board or both. The Principals' and senior staff reports will include information about progress with the individual Academy Development Plans. The information will be concise and made readily accessible to Directors, for example through a traffic light system of coding. Directors will not only be provided with graphs, charts and commentary but will also be given an analysis of what the information means and what questions it raises, and proposals about the next steps to ensure that progress is maintained.
21. Effective reporting by committees to the full Trust Board means that time will not be spent unnecessarily reiterating what has already been discussed.

Engaging others

22. The Trust Board will seek to engage extensively with parents and the wider community to promote the Trust's work.
23. Directors communicate with parents in a variety of ways, both formally and informally, so that they can gather their views about the effectiveness of both the Trust and the Academies. Directors will then use this as one of the many sources of information through which they will provide leaders with challenge and support.
24. Typically, Directors would meet parents at the start and end of the Academy day and when they attend Academy events such as assemblies, parents' evenings and award ceremonies. These informal opportunities to talk help our parents to know who Directors are and something about their role. Directors can gain a first-hand understanding of what parents feel that the Academies do well and what they feel can be improved.
25. Questionnaires are commonly used to gather parents' views. The Trust Board are provided with an analysis of questionnaires.
26. All Directors share information with Academy leaders from the wider community.
27. Directors use their business and wider community links to support the learning experiences of staff and pupils, which may include securing additional resources and arranging visits for pupils. Directors also promote the work of the Trust by encouraging links with different organisations.

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Making a difference

28. The Trust Board of SUAT strengthens leadership by:
- providing an external view and asking questions which challenge Academy leaders and by encouraging alternative solutions to be found or tested proposals before they were adopted
 - having high aspirations for pupils, staff and the wider community
 - approving and monitoring priorities, ensuring policies are focused on the key priorities of teaching and learning, and increasing the pace of improvement
 - supporting the development of leadership potential within the Trust through effective training and development opportunities
 - using their skills, expertise and external networks to complement those of the senior staff in improving provision and outcomes for pupils
 - supporting the appointment and retention of the best staff and actions to address underperformance

Recruitment, induction and training

29. The Trust Board, at all times, seeks to have a full complement of Directors.
30. The size and composition of the Trust Board is constantly reviewed, as is the number and function of its committees.
31. Directors use their external contacts and networks to encourage others to put themselves forward to be Directors.
32. All new Directors receive an induction pack which provides information about the Trust and explains the roles and responsibilities of Directors.
33. Attendance at training for new Directors is encouraged.
34. The Trust holds a formal meeting for new Directors with the Chief Executive and the Chief Operating Officer to support their induction. Typically these meetings take place before the new Director attends a Trust Board meeting. This helps to ensure that the new Director understands the protocols and procedures and has an opportunity to ask any questions.
35. SUAT Directors commit to undertake relevant training, depending on their other commitments as well as the timing and location of training events, to update their knowledge and skills.
36. The Trust Board challenges its own performance in addition to that of the Academies.
37. The effectiveness of the Trust Board structures and committee membership is reviewed routinely.
38. The effectiveness of the Trust Board is reviewed regularly and includes a clear evaluation of the effect of its decisions on the outcomes for pupils. There are strong links with other Trusts to compare and benchmark our practice.
39. The expertise and skills, brought by the staff, of tackling underperformance in other Academies provides the Trust Board with a clear structure and framework for improvement.

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This framework helps the Trust Board to manage its work efficiently by keeping it focused on its core business and not straying into operational and peripheral issues. Experienced Directors model effective questioning which helps to build other Directors' skills and confidence. Directors review the terms of reference and purpose of each of the committees annually, and make changes if appropriate. At each meeting the Chair of the Trust Board and Chairs of the committees always ask two questions: 'Why are we doing this?' and 'What are we trying to achieve?'

Questions that Directors might want to consider

40. The Directors make a very strong contribution to the Trust and give willingly of their time. They strive for the very best for the pupils and communities that they serve. In reflecting on their own effectiveness, the Trust Board of SUAT considers the following key questions:
- a. How do we understand our roles and responsibilities and how they differ from those of SUAT Executive staff, the Clerk, the Principals and their senior staff?
 - b. What do we know about the outcomes for pupils and the quality of learning in the SUAT Academies?
 - c. How do we know that the information we have about the Academies is robust and accurate?
 - d. How do we provide the right balance of professional support and challenge for the SUAT Executive staff, the Principals and their senior staff to help them improve the Academies' effectiveness?
 - e. How do we use our time efficiently?
 - f. How do we make best use of the skills and expertise of all members of the Trust Board?
 - g. How do we know that the Trust Board is as effective as possible and could we do things better?
 - h. How do we review our own performance regularly?
 - i. How do we plan our training and development?
 - j. Do we consider what might be needed when Directors leave? How do we ensure we still continue to have the necessary skills and knowledge?
 - k. How do we ensure that members of our Trust Board are prepared to step into important roles such as the Chair of the Trust Board and Chairs of committees?