

Virtual Meeting Protocol

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Review Cycle	Triennial
Date Approved	March 2025
Approved By	Board of Directors
Next Review Date	March 2028

Governing boards should have approved their arrangements for participating and voting in virtual meetings using the provision within the academy articles of association and academy committee terms of reference.

The expectations for virtual meetings should be understood by all to ensure meetings are productive. You may wish to make clear the importance of:

- joining on time
- obtaining consent for the meeting to be recorded where necessary
- keeping to the agenda
- using your mute button to minimise background noise
- allowing additional time for participants to refer to documents
- everyone to using their webcams if possible – this helps keep everyone engaged
- using chat functions as agreed

1. Virtual meetings

1.1 Chairing virtual meetings

Chairs play a fundamental role in ensuring that virtual meetings are well run. They may need to adapt their approach in order to achieve positive dynamics that support good teamwork. The key messages for those chairing virtual meetings are:

- Make sure everyone has a chance to speak – directly invite questions where needed.
- Be clear about which agenda point is being covered as the meeting progresses.
- Work with your governance professional to make sure everyone can access virtual meetings.
- Make use of the professional advice and administrative support offered by your governance professional (such as distributing joining instructions) allowing you to focus on your leadership and strategic responsibilities.

1.2 Board dynamics

The dynamics change when governance is virtual. Interacting through a screen reduces opportunities for informal interaction and to use body language and non-verbal signals to communicate. Whilst this may lead to shorter, more focused meetings, it also has disadvantages e.g. not 'sensing the room' may undermine confidence in asking an important question or discussing a challenging issue.

Virtual meetings are more effective when those involved in running them give thought to how to create healthy team dynamic where individuals are both supported and challenged to contribute to the best of their ability. Ways of achieving this may include:

- Supporting members of the board who may struggle with the technology.
- Setting time aside at the beginning of meetings (probably without school staff) to replicate the moments normally spent having a coffee and a catch up.
- Deciding if and how chat and hand raising functions might be used to help make the meeting flow more easily and encourage participation.
- Allocating sufficient time on the agenda for discussion and questions.
- Maintaining informal contact e.g. through a governance portal, to stay connected with the business and improve the dynamic.

1.3 Hybrid meetings

Hybrid meetings (where attendance is split between those present in the room and those attending virtually) offer a degree of flexibility and can be a way of maximising attendance by providing governors/trustees (who may have otherwise missed the meeting) an

opportunity to attend virtually. This meeting format may work better for smaller groups and focused conversations, however, the previous experience, capabilities and dynamic of the group will also be a factor. When holding hybrid meetings, it is advisable to:

- Practice using the technology, equipment and physical meeting space in a hybrid scenario in advance of the meeting.
- Think about how you will move from one speaker or agenda item to another.
- Ask virtual participants to join the meeting early.
- Consider how those present in the room will interact with one another and with virtual attendees e.g. a large screen (rather than individual laptops) for those in the room may support effective interaction.
- Have a back-up in place e.g. dial-in alternative if virtual participants have a problem with their internet connection.

2. Protocol

2.1 Where the governing board decides that a meeting should take place using alternative arrangements (e.g. by telephone or video conference) that have been previously agreed the following will apply:

- the usual (statutory) notice and arrangements for issuing papers except where the chair has exercised their right to waive the usual notice;
- all participants to receive clear instructions regarding how to access the meeting including where they can access support if they experience difficulty;
- all participants will note and follow any instructions given on how to manage their participation at the meeting e.g. confirming attendance, speaking through the chair of the meeting, voting on matters etc;
- the governing board will abide by their normal rules, procedures and code of conduct adopted by the governing board and give regard to the duty to maintain confidentiality;
- governors/directors will contribute towards a safe and secure environment for the meeting by giving due regard to the school's policies relating to data protection and the appropriate use of ICT;
- the minutes of the meeting will be taken by the governance professional;
- the meeting should not be recorded without the approval of the governing board and the consent of those participating; and
- the use and deletion of an approved recording should be in accordance with data protection and records retention policies of the school/trust.

2.2 Where the governing board has approved and has in place alternative arrangements for governors/directors to participate and vote in meetings (e.g. by telephone or video conference) and a governor/director wishes to use these alternative arrangements they should:

- restrict themselves to using the arrangements agreed by the governing board;
- inform the governance professional that this is their intention as soon as possible but no later than 72 hours before the meeting is due to take place (subject to the meeting being convened giving the normal notice period);
- communicate and co-operate with the governance professional, school or trust as necessary to ensure that the alternative arrangements can be put in place and work well for all concerned; and
- abide by the normal rules, procedures and code of conduct adopted by the governing board and give regard to the duty to maintain confidentiality.