Model code of conduct

For governing boards

Governing boards should use a code of conduct alongside individual role descriptions to ensure all members understand what is expected of them.

The NGA model code of conduct is anchored in the Seven Nolan Principles of Public Life. The code is also aligned with the Framework for Ethical Leadership in Education which outlines principles that support ethical decision-making and challenge unethical behaviour in schools and trusts.

The model code has been updated for 2021. The content of the code is largely unchanged; however, the Nolan Principles are now included. Three new statements have also been added to the code. These are marked (*) to help you review the updated code.

How to use the model code

The NGA model code of conduct is suitable for boards in all types of school or trust. However, it is designed to act as a template and should be adapted to reflect:

- your specific governing board and organisation
- your board's delegated responsibilities
- specific policies that you must follow (such as your policy for school monitoring visits)
- constitutional documents (such as your articles of association or instrument of government)

Reviewing your code of conduct

Boards should review and approve their code of conduct annually, ideally at the first meeting of the autumn term. When reviewing your code, reflect on the events of the previous year and consider if any changes are required as a result.

Boards should also review their code of conduct upon any significant changes to the law or school/trust policy. NGA recommends that boards publish their code of conduct on their school/trust website.

Using your code to support induction and development

When recruiting new volunteers, we recommend that boards refer candidates to their code of conduct (and role description). This will help ensure new members have a good understanding of expectations before being appointed. New members should agree to the board's code of conduct on being appointed as part of their induction programme.

© National Governance Association 2021

Chairs may also use their code of conduct to support discussions such as annual governor performance reviews. In doing so, the code of conduct becomes a tool to help boards and individuals develop their governance practice.

Using your code of conduct to support effective teamwork

Effective governance requires effective teamwork: working collaboratively as colleagues with a solid understanding and respect for each other's roles.

NGA's Effective teamwork guidance sets out an approach to dealing with conflict or tension using a measured and conciliatory approach. The guidance advises that the most direct way to clarify the expectations of those governing is through a code of conduct.

Further reading

- What governing boards and school leaders should expect from each other
- Governing board skills audit
- Model role descriptions for chairs, governors, trustees and governance professionals
- Effective teamwork: a guide for governing boards

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

© National Governance Association 2021

NGA model code of conduct

Once this code has been adopted by the governing board, all members agree to faithfully abide by it.

We agree to abide by the Seven Nolan Principles of Public Life:

Selflessness

We will act solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity

We will avoid placing ourselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence us in our work. We will not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for ourselves, our family, or our friends. We will declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

Objectivity

We will act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability

We are accountable to the public for our decisions and actions and will submit ourselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness

We will act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information will not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

Honesty

We will be truthful.

Leadership

We will exhibit these principles in our own behaviour. We will actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

We will focus on our core governance functions:

1. ensuring there is clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
2. holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils and the performance management of staff
3. overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent
   NGA recognises the following as the fourth core function of governance:
4. ensuring the voices of stakeholders are heard

As individual board members, we agree to:

Fulfil our role & responsibilities

1. We accept that our role is strategic and so will focus on our core functions rather than involve ourselves in day-to-day management.

© National Governance Association 2021

2. **For those working within a multi academy trust:* We will fulfil our role and responsibilities as set out in our scheme of delegation.
3. We will develop, share and live the ethos and values of our school/s.
4. We agree to adhere to school/trust policies and procedures as set out by the relevant governing documents and law.
5. We will work collectively for the benefit of the school/s.
6. We will be candid but constructive and respectful when holding senior leaders to account.
7. We will consider how our decisions may affect the school/s and local community.
8. We will stand by the decisions that we make as a collective.
9. Where decisions and actions conflict with the Seven Principles of Public Life or may place pupils at risk, we will speak up and bring this to the attention of the relevant authorities.
10. We will only speak or act on behalf of the board if we have the authority to do so.
11. We will fulfil our responsibilities as a good employer, acting fairly and without prejudice.
12. When making or responding to complaints we will follow the established procedures.
13. We will strive to uphold the school's / trust's reputation in our private communications (including on social media).
14. *We will not discriminate against anyone and will work to advance equality of opportunity for all.

Demonstrate our commitment to the role

1. We will involve ourselves actively in the work of the board, and accept our fair share of responsibilities, serving on committees or working groups where required.
2. We will make every effort to attend all meetings and where we cannot attend explain in advance why we are unable to.
3. We will arrive at meetings prepared, having read all papers in advance, ready to make a positive contribution and observe protocol.
4. We will get to know the school/s well and respond to opportunities to involve ourselves in school activities.
5. We will visit the school/s and when doing so will make arrangements with relevant staff in advance and observe school and board protocol.
6. When visiting the school in a personal capacity (for example, as a parent or carer), we will continue to honour the commitments made in this code.
7. We will participate in induction training and take responsibility for developing our individual and collective skills and knowledge on an ongoing basis.

Build and maintain relationships

1. We will develop effective working relationships with school leaders, staff, parents and other relevant stakeholders from our local community/communities.
2. We will express views openly, courteously and respectfully in all our communications with board members and staff both inside and outside of meetings.
3. *We will work to create an inclusive environment where each board member's contributions are valued equally.
4. We will support the chair in their role of leading the board and ensuring appropriate conduct.

© National Governance Association 2021

Respect confidentiality

1. We will observe complete confidentiality both inside and outside of school when matters are deemed confidential or where they concern individual staff, pupils or families.
2. We will not reveal the details of any governing board vote.
3. We will ensure all confidential papers are held and disposed of appropriately.
4. We will maintain confidentiality even after we leave office.

Declare conflicts of interest and be transparent

1. We will declare any business, personal or other interest that we have in connection with the board's business, and these will be recorded in the register of business interests.
2. We will also declare any conflict of loyalty at the start of any meeting should the need arise.
3. If a conflicted matter arises in a meeting, we will offer to leave the meeting for the duration of the discussion and any subsequent vote.
4. We accept that the Register of Business Interests will be published on the school/trust's website.
5. We will act in the best interests of the school/trust as a whole and not as a representative of any group.
6. We accept that in the interests of open governance, our full names, date of appointment, terms of office, roles on the governing board, attendance records, relevant business and pecuniary interests, category of governor/trustee and the body responsible for appointing us will be published on the school/trust website.
7. We accept that information relating to board members will be collected and recorded on the DfE's national database (Get information about schools), some of which will be publicly available.

**New statement added in 2021*

We understand that potential or perceived breaches of this code will be taken seriously and that a breach could lead to formal sanctions.

Adopted by: [Name of governing board] on [date]

Signed: [chair of board]

The [governing board] agree that this code of conduct will be reviewed annually, upon significant changes to the law and policy or as needed and it will be endorsed by the full governing board.

© National Governance Association 2021