



Is Your Board Focusing on the Right Things?

Good governance is more than just meeting agendas and compliance checklists. The best boards actively shape the future of their organisations, ensuring decisions are strategic, risks are managed, and leadership is held to account. But how do you know if your board is focusing on the right things?

Too often, trustees and governors get bogged down in operational detail, reviewing reports rather than setting direction. The result? Boards that *feel* busy but fail to add real strategic value.

Common Governance Pitfalls

- **Getting lost in operational details** – Are you spending board meetings reviewing minor operational issues instead of shaping the strategic future?
- **Confusing oversight with management** – Trustees and governors provide direction, but they don't run the organisation. Are you staying in your lane?
- **Avoiding difficult discussions** – Strong boards ask tough questions about performance, impact, and risk. Is yours doing this?
- **Ticking compliance boxes but lacking vision** – Good governance is more than policies and procedures. Does your board actively steer long-term priorities?
- **Focusing on the wrong risks** – Are you spending more time discussing minor reputational risks while ignoring strategic and financial risks?

If these sound familiar, it's time to reset your board's focus.

Use this checklist to assess your board's current practice and identify areas for improvement:

☒ **Strategy First:** Do board discussions focus on long-term vision and impact, rather than just day-to-day operations?

- The board sets clear strategic priorities and reviews progress against them.
- Meetings dedicate time for forward-looking discussions.
- The CEO is held accountable for delivering strategic goals, not just operational tasks.

☒ **Clear Roles:** Are trustees/governors clear on their role as strategic leaders, distinct from operational management?

- The board trusts the leadership team to manage day-to-day operations.

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- Governors/trustees focus on oversight, not micromanagement.
- Decision-making frameworks clarify which matters require board input.

☒ **Effective Meetings:** Are meetings structured to allow time for strategic thinking, rather than just reviewing reports?

- Agendas prioritise key strategic discussions over operational detail.
- Papers are concise, insightful, and provided well in advance.
- The chair ensures discussions remain focused and purposeful.

☒ **Risk Awareness:** Does the board prioritise the most significant risks, ensuring operational risks are managed at the right level?

- Risk registers are reviewed regularly with a focus on major threats.
- The board balances financial, reputational, and strategic risks.
- Senior leaders manage day-to-day risks without unnecessary board intervention.

☒ **Challenge and Support:** Do board members ask tough but constructive questions, holding executives to account while offering support?

- The board acts as a critical friend, offering both challenge and encouragement.
- Executive reports include analysis, not just descriptions of activities.
- The chair ensures all trustees/governors contribute to discussions.

☒ **Performance Oversight:** Does the board have clear measures in place to assess the organisation's success?

- Trustees review key performance indicators aligned to strategic goals.
- Data is used to drive discussions, not just presented for information.
- Underperformance is identified early, with a clear action plan.

☒ **Stakeholder Engagement:** Does the board understand the needs of key stakeholders (students, beneficiaries, staff, regulators) and reflect these in decisions?

- Stakeholder feedback informs strategic decision-making.
- The board engages with the community, not just senior leaders.
- Regular reports highlight stakeholder impact and concerns.

☒ **Board Development:** Are trustees/governors engaging in training and self-evaluation to improve their effectiveness?

- Annual board reviews assess strengths and areas for improvement.
- New members receive structured inductions and mentoring.
- Ongoing training is provided on governance best practices.



What Next?

If your board scored well, great—keep going. If you identified gaps, take action. Strong governance doesn't happen by accident; it requires deliberate effort, training, and regular review.

If you'd like an external perspective on how your board can become more strategic and effective, Mastery | Clarity | Wisdom can help, get in touch. We can advise you

to explore governance coaching, board development, and independent governance reviews.

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