

# DfE publications 2025

## Summary of changes and guidance for academy trust boards

June 2025

The Department for Education (DfE) has published and updated several key documents for academy trusts:

- [Academy Trust Handbook](#)
- [Academy Trust Governance Guide](#)
- [Financial Support and Oversight for Academy Trusts](#)

## Who should read these documents?

All those governing in trusts – both trustees and local governors – should be made aware of these publications during their [induction](#) and refer to them when needed. The trust's governance professional should inform relevant parties about updates to all relevant DfE guidance.

Trusts should ensure trustees, local governors, executives and governance professionals stay informed, while being mindful of the workload involved in reading guidance documents in full.

We expect that, as a minimum, these documents are read in full by the:

- Trust board [chair](#) and [vice chair](#)
- [Governance Professional](#)
- [Accounting Officer \(CEO\)](#)
- Chief Financial Officer

The following guidance explains more about who needs to read each document.

## Academy Trust Handbook

The [Academy Trust Handbook](#) sets out core governance and financial management obligations, as well as action that may be taken when obligations are not met. It is updated annually by the DfE and all trusts must comply with the handbook as a condition of their funding agreement.

**All trustees should read part 1 of the Academy Trust Handbook** as this sets out the core governance requirements. Any trustees on the [finance and/or audit and risk committee](#) should also read parts 2 to 5 of the handbook.

## What's in the Academy Trust Handbook?

The Academy Trust Handbook is divided into six sections which cover:

1. the roles and responsibilities of key people running the trust
2. financial management requirements
3. the requirement for internal scrutiny
4. financial reporting and external auditing
5. financial freedoms and limits
6. the DfE's oversight as regulator

The handbook is accompanied by a **schedule of 'musts'** which is presented in an Excel spreadsheet to help trusts monitor compliance and detail actions required.

## What's new for 2025?

The 2025 Academy Trust Handbook takes effect on 1 September. This year's update includes minimal changes that will affect how trusts operate day-to-day. Notable changes include:

- **Environmental sustainability** – guidance on [sustainability leadership and climate action plans in education](#) refers to DfE's strategy which sets an expectation for all education settings to have nominated a sustainability lead and a climate action plan by 2025.
- **Digital and technology standards** – trusts should now be working towards meeting the six core digital and technology standards by 2030 (1.16). These are: broadband internet, network switching, wireless network, cyber security, filtering and monitoring, and digital leadership and governance.
- **Managing Public Money (MPM)** – further guidance on the accounting officer's duties and the underlying principles of MPM to better support trusts to secure high standards of financial probity (see 1.32 and 1.38).
- **Executive pay** – there is a new requirement for trusts to have an agreed pay policy that sets out the process for determining executive pay. This must ensure that the approach to, and levels of, executive pay and benefits are transparent, proportionate and defensible (see 2.28 and 2.29). Also see our [executive pay guidance](#).
- **Cyber Ransomware** – the handbook confirms that trusts must not pay any cyber ransom demands (6.15). NGA has a [cyber security monitoring tool](#).
- **Intervention powers** – educational performance has been removed from the examples provided in 6.17 as an area in which a Notice to Improve (NtI) may be issued on governance grounds
- **Recovery of funds** – the DfE has added a section on when it may recover funds (6.21). Circumstances include where there is evidence of irregular payments or fraud.
- **Related party transactions** – the ATH links to new [guidance](#) on managing conflicts of interest and related party transactions.

# Academy Trust Governance Guide

The [Academy Trust Governance Guide](#) brings together information from a range of sources on the trust board's role in relation to legislative and contractual requirements as well as governance best practice in trusts.

**We expect the Academy Trust Governance Guide to be read in full by:**

- Local tier chairs
- Local tier clerks
- Academy headteachers

## What's in the Governance Guide?

The Governance Guide is divided into seven sections which cover:

1. Culture and engagement
2. Governance of the trust
3. Strategy
4. Non-executive leadership
5. Executive leadership
6. Accountability
7. Compliance

It also includes a list of statutory guidance and additional resources for trusts, with recommendations on the review cycle for respective policies.

## What's new for 2025?

The updates this year have been minimal with no substantial policy changes. Notable changes include:

- The need to remain compliant with statutory and contractual requirements relating to **procurement**, along with links to relevant guidance and services including NGA's recently updated [guidance on procurement](#) (produced in collaboration with the DfE).
- The recommendation for trusts to undertake **external reviews of governance** (ERGs) every three years. NGA's consultancy provides [ERGs](#).
- **School funding information** – addition of the teachers' pension employer contribution grant, core schools budget grant, and the national insurance contributions grant; and removal of the mainstream schools additional grant and the recovery premium after they finished at the end of the 2023/2024 academic year.
- A requirement for the chair to sign off the school's digital reporting form return, detailing how the school has used its **PE and sport premium** allocation, as explained in NGA's [PE and sport premium monitoring tool](#).
- Update to the legal basis for keeping **admission and attendance registers** under The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 and for providing information requested by the Secretary of State on attendance under The Education (Information About Individual Pupils) (England) Regulations 2013.

- Suggested guidance to support the promotion of good **behaviour** of pupils, including the use of [mobile phones](#) and [searching, screening and confiscation in schools](#).
- A greater emphasis on the requirement for the **school premises and facilities** to be kept up to a standard where, as much as is reasonably possible, the health, safety and welfare of pupils is guaranteed.
- A new section on nutrition under pupil mental health and wellbeing to cover the board's role in **school food**. In line with the [DfE's school food guidance for governors](#), trusts are expected to have a policy on school food. View our [guidance](#) and [e-learning module](#) on this topic.

## Financial Support and Oversight for Academy Trusts

The DfE [financial support and oversight for academy trusts guidance](#) was published in June 2025. It sets out how the Regions Group will be replacing the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) in providing financial support and oversight for trusts, and what this will look like. The guidance supplements the Academy Trust Handbook and does not include any new requirements or expectations.

**The financial support and oversight guidance should be read in full by finance and/or audit and risk committee members.**

### What's in the guidance?

The guidance sets out the role of the Regions Group in three key areas:

#### Enabling financial sustainability

- School resource management resources to help academy trusts get the best value from resources and maximise impact on pupil outcomes.
- Budget forecasting and planning support.
- The training and development offer for school business professionals.

#### Supporting trusts in financial difficulty

- Identifying vulnerable trusts – the DfE will use the latest budget forecast return (BFR) information to identify academy trusts at risk of deteriorating financial health and encourages trustees who are concerned about the financial health of their academy trust to contact their Regions Group.
- Trusts that are struggling financially – the DfE will support trusts in devising a financial plan to return to financial stability. This will be agreed with and monitored by the Regions Group.
- Financial support – Regions Group will provide financial support on a case-by-case basis, with an agreed payment profile and repayment plan.

#### Dealing with financially non-compliant trusts

- Where breaches of the ATH and the trust's funding agreement occur, the DfE expects academy trusts to rectify the issue and prevent it happening again. The DfE may seek assurance from the trust on the issue and in some cases may ask for an action plan which it can monitor more closely.
- Where the DfE has sufficient concerns about the financial management or governance of an academy trust, it may issue an NTI.
- If an academy trust fails to comply with the terms of an NTI, Regions Group will consider issuing a termination warning notice (TWN).