

Trustee Role Overview

Esher Sixth Form College is proud of its diverse and skilled Board of Trustees. Trustees play a vital role in shaping the College's future, and we want the experience to be both rewarding and enjoyable. This guide explains what the role involves and the kind of people who tend to thrive in it.

The Role of a Trustee

Being a Trustee is a strategic, non-executive role. You help guide the College's long-term direction, support its leadership, and ensure it continues to provide high-quality sixth form education.

Trustees contribute their professional and personal experience to:

- Setting the College's vision and strategic direction
- Approving and monitoring the College's quality strategy
- Overseeing financial management and value for money
- Ensuring the Principal and senior leaders are held to account
- Monitoring risk
- Ensuring statutory duties are met (equality, safeguarding, health & safety)

Trustees offer support and challenge to the College while avoiding involvement in day-to-day operations.

Governance Structure and Board Composition

Esher Sixth Form College is governed through a structure designed to provide strong strategic leadership, clear accountability and effective oversight. The Board of Trustees sits at the heart of this structure and brings together individuals from a wide range of professional backgrounds, lived experiences and community perspectives. The Board is shaped to ensure it has the breadth of skills, expertise and diversity needed to govern well. The Board includes the Principal, who serves as a Trustee for the duration of their role, as well as external Trustees appointed for their skills and commitment.

Governance operates through three interconnected layers: Members, Trustees and the Executive Leadership Team. Each plays a distinct role, and together they form a coherent and effective governance framework. Members sit at the top of the structure and act as the guardians of the Academy Trust's constitution. They ensure that the Trust remains true to its charitable purpose by appointing some Trustees, approving changes to the Articles of Association, receiving the annual accounts and holding the Board to account for the overall performance of the Trust. Members do not take part in day-to-day governance or operational decision-making; instead,

they provide high-level oversight and ensure the Board is properly constituted and performing effectively.

Trustees form the governing body of the College and collectively as well as individually hold responsibility for its strategic direction, educational performance, financial stewardship and compliance with statutory duties. They work together as a Board, supported by committees and Linked Trustee roles, to set the College's vision and long-term strategy, hold the Principal and senior leaders to account, oversee financial planning and risk management, and ensure the College meets its legal and regulatory obligations. Trustees act both collectively—sharing responsibility for decisions once made—and individually, by preparing thoroughly, contributing thoughtfully and upholding the highest standards of public life.

The Executive Leadership Team, led by the Principal, is responsible for the day-to-day leadership and management of the College. They implement the strategy set by the Board, lead teaching and learning, manage staff and resources and ensure the College operates safely and effectively. The relationship between Trustees and the Executive Leadership Team is one of strategic oversight and professional partnership. Trustees provide support, scrutiny and challenge, while respecting the operational autonomy of the executive. This balance—often described as acting as a “critical friend”—is central to effective governance.

Together, Members, Trustees and the Executive Leadership Team create a governance system that is robust, transparent and firmly focused on the best interests of students.

Term of Office

Trustees serve four-year terms of office. They are eligible to stand again at the end of their term of office, up to a maximum of two further consecutive terms, subject to the discretion of the Board of Trustees (the “Board”). The Principal remains a Trustee throughout their tenure.

Meetings and Time Commitment

Trustees are expected to commit to the core governance cycle of the College. At a minimum, this includes attending four Board meetings each year and participating in two regular committees—Audit, Finance & Estates, Quality & Standards, or Strategy & Policy—each of which normally meets three times per year. Attendance at Board and committee meetings is formally recorded, and the College is required to publish Trustee attendance on its website.

In addition to these core responsibilities, Trustees may also take on further governance roles. Trustees who volunteer to act as Linked Trustees are expected to complete at least three engagements across the academic year, such as meeting with curriculum areas, reviewing specific themes, or participating in assurance activities.

Other committees are convened as required. These include:

- Remuneration Committee, which typically meets once a year
- Recruitment Committee, which supports Trustee recruitment and senior staff appointments
- Special Committee, which is convened when needed to consider escalated matters such as complaints, exclusions or other formal processes

Trustees who volunteer for these committees are expected to participate fully in their work.

Board and committee meetings normally take place during term time in the afternoon. Board meetings are usually held in person at the College, while committee meetings typically take place virtually. An annual calendar of meeting dates is published ahead of each academic year.

The estimated time commitment for preparing for and attending Board and committee meetings is around five hours per month, including reading papers and participating in training. Trustees are also warmly invited—though never required—to take part in wider College life, such as attending College events, lesson visits, Self-Assessment Report reviews, productions, or the annual Trustee Day.

Training and Support

Esher Sixth Form College is committed to ensuring that every Trustee feels confident, informed and well supported in their role. Training is a central part of effective governance, and the College provides a programme of development from the moment a Trustee is appointed.

All new Trustees receive a comprehensive induction that includes formal external induction training delivered by recognised governance providers. This ensures that every Trustee begins with a strong understanding of their responsibilities, the regulatory framework for academy trusts and the principles of effective governance. Alongside this, new Trustees are introduced to the College's strategic priorities, culture and operations, meet with the Principal, Chair and Clerk, and receive access to key documents and previous Board papers. Experienced Trustees and Committee Chairs are also on hand to offer guidance and support as needed.

Trustees have ongoing access to a wide range of external training opportunities throughout the year. These cover current and emerging topics such as safeguarding, finance, risk, equality and diversity, curriculum developments and changes in the regulatory landscape. Internal development is also provided through presentations and briefings at Board and committee meetings, updates on sector developments and opportunities for mentoring and peer support. An annual skills audit helps identify areas for further development and ensures that training remains relevant and targeted.

The College's annual Trustee Day provides an important opportunity for the full Board to come together for strategic reflection, forward planning and shared learning. The day normally includes a dedicated training element and helps Trustees deepen their understanding of the College's work while strengthening collaborative working across the Board.

Throughout the year, the Clerk provides professional governance support, including procedural advice, meeting preparation, compliance guidance and access to training resources. Trustees are encouraged to seek advice whenever needed to help them carry out their role effectively.

Expenses and Time Off Work

Trustees at Esher Sixth Form College serve on a voluntary basis and are not paid for their role. However, the College will reimburse reasonable expenses incurred while carrying out Trustee duties, such as travel to external training or events.

If you are employed, you may be entitled to take reasonable time off work to perform public duties, which can include your responsibilities as a Trustee. Any time off must be agreed with your employer in advance, and employers are not legally required to pay you for this time—although many choose to do so. Your employment contract will normally explain whether paid or unpaid leave is offered for public duties

Meeting Structure

Each Committee has its own Terms of Reference, which are reviewed every year. Each meeting follows an agenda and is supported by discussion papers and regular reports provided by the executive leadership. Material for meetings is shared in advance. Each committee has a Chair who leads the meeting through the agenda with all trustees expected to contribute to the meeting and discussions. Every Trustee is expected to contribute. The Clerk takes minutes and offers advice on procedural matters where required.

Leadership Roles and Appointments

There are many opportunities for Trustees to contribute to the leadership and governance of the College. Each year, at the start of the academic cycle, the Board reviews and agrees all Trustee roles across the Board, its committees and the Linked Trustee structure. This ensures that responsibilities are allocated in a transparent, fair and well-planned way.

The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Board are formally elected by Trustees through a vote. These positions are open to Trustees who are not employed by or studying at the College. They normally serve for one year and may be re-appointed, typically for up to three consecutive terms unless the Board agrees otherwise.

Other Trustee roles—including Committee Chairs, committee memberships and Linked Trustee assignments—are also confirmed at the beginning of the academic year. These roles are usually appointed by agreement, with a vote only required if more than one Trustee wishes to take on the same position or if the Board considers a vote necessary.

When allocating roles, the Board takes into account a range of factors:

- Trustees' skills, experience and professional backgrounds
- The need to ensure all committees and Linked Trustee areas are appropriately covered
- The importance of matching specific skills to particular responsibilities
- Trustees' interests and preferences, so far as they align with governance needs

This approach ensures that the Board is well-balanced, that all statutory and strategic responsibilities are met, and that Trustees have opportunities to contribute in areas where they can be most effective.

What Type of Person Makes a Good Trustee?

Esher Sixth Form College welcomes Trustees from all backgrounds, professions and communities. Effective governance is strengthened by diversity of thought, experience and perspective, and we particularly encourage interest from individuals who may be under-represented in governance, including those with lived experience of minority or marginalised communities. If you bring skills, insight or experience from your professional life or community involvement, we would be delighted to hear from you.

While no Trustee is expected to possess every attribute, the following qualities are consistently associated with effective governance:

- Commitment to education and young people – a genuine interest in supporting students’ success and understanding the role of a sixth form college in shaping their futures.
- Strategic thinking – the ability to look beyond the immediate, consider long-term implications and contribute to setting the College’s direction.
- Constructive challenge – acting as a “critical friend”: supportive, curious and willing to ask thoughtful questions that strengthen decision-making.
- Sound judgement – the ability to weigh evidence, consider risk and make balanced decisions in the best interests of students.
- Teamwork and collaboration – Trustees work collectively, valuing different viewpoints and contributing to a culture of respect, openness and shared responsibility.
- Communication and listening – expressing ideas clearly, listening actively and engaging in constructive debate.
- Commitment to continuous learning – being willing to develop knowledge of governance, education policy, finance, safeguarding and other key areas.
- Integrity and accountability – upholding the Seven Principles of Public Life and acting in the best interests of the College at all times.

In filling vacancies, the Board seeks to maintain a balanced mix of skills and experience across its membership. Professional expertise in areas such as finance, digital, education, HR, estates, law or community leadership is valuable, but enthusiasm, commitment and alignment with the College’s values are equally important. Trustees contribute both individually and collectively, and the strength of the Board lies in the combination of their diverse backgrounds, perspectives and strengths.

Appendix: Standards in Public Life

The detailed duties of the Board, Committees, senior postholders and Members are specified in the Academy Trust Handbook and Articles of Association, enshrined in statute law.

The key structures and business processes are summarised in the Standing Orders for the use of the Board of Trustees, which are reviewed periodically.

All members are expected to sign up to the Academy Trust's Code of Conduct, which requires Trustees to place the interests of the College and its students ahead of their own interests or those of any other group with which they are involved. The Code provides a framework for Trustees to work together co-operatively and share accountability for decisions made.

You are required to declare any general personal interests and record them annually in a Register of Interests, updating them through the Clerk. At the beginning of each meeting, you will be asked to declare if you have an interest in any items on the agenda and may take no part in those proceedings.

Being a Trustee is a highly valued and responsible position within the community; with it comes an expectation of personal integrity and accountability expected of all those taking roles in public life. Underpinning all activities are the Seven Principles of Public Life.

Public concern about the financial probity of members of parliament and other holders of public office led to the setting up in 1994 of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (chaired by Lord Nolan and later Lord Neill). The Committee drew up Seven Principles of Public Life as a yardstick against which public service is measured:

- Selflessness – Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.
- Integrity – Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.
- Objectivity – Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
- Accountability – Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.
- Openness – Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.
- Honesty – Holders of public office should be truthful.
- Leadership – Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.