

# CST National Survey 2024

## Governance Deep-Dive

edurio



Confederation  
of School Trusts

November 2024

edurio<sup>®</sup>



Confederation  
of School Trusts

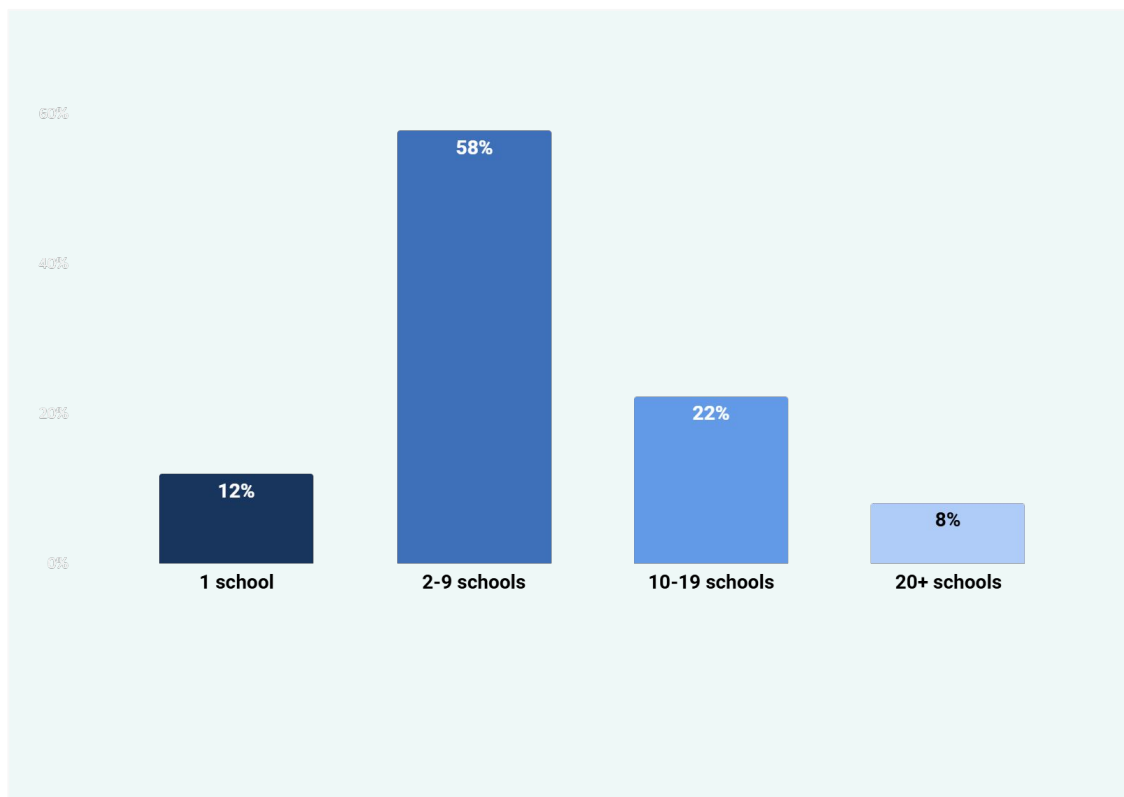
# Research methodology

## Feedback from 417 Trusts

In June-July of 2024, the survey was answered by 417 trust accounting officers (the senior leader directly responsible to Parliament for their trust, usually the CEO) across England.

The survey covered trusts of all sizes, from trusts with single academies to running dozens of schools, making it a representative sample of school trusts across the sector.

Feedback was focused on trust experience and priorities for the 2024/25 academic year.



## Survey designed around the CST's Strong trust framework

The design of the survey is informed by CST's Building Strong Trusts framework and explores accounting officers' priorities and challenges across the various elements of trust leadership.



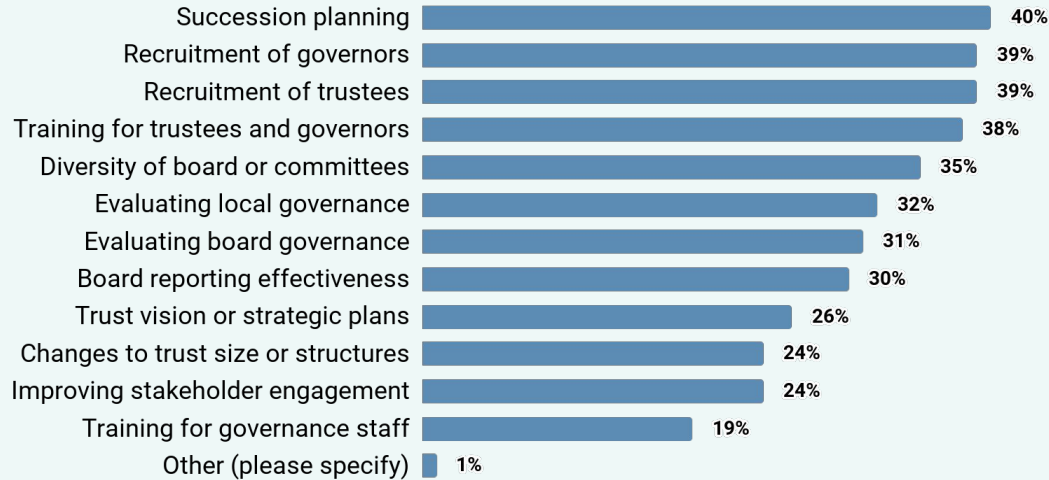
edurio<sup>®</sup>



Confederation  
of School Trusts

# Strategic governance priorities

## In which areas does your trust intend to focus its efforts regarding governance in the next academic year?

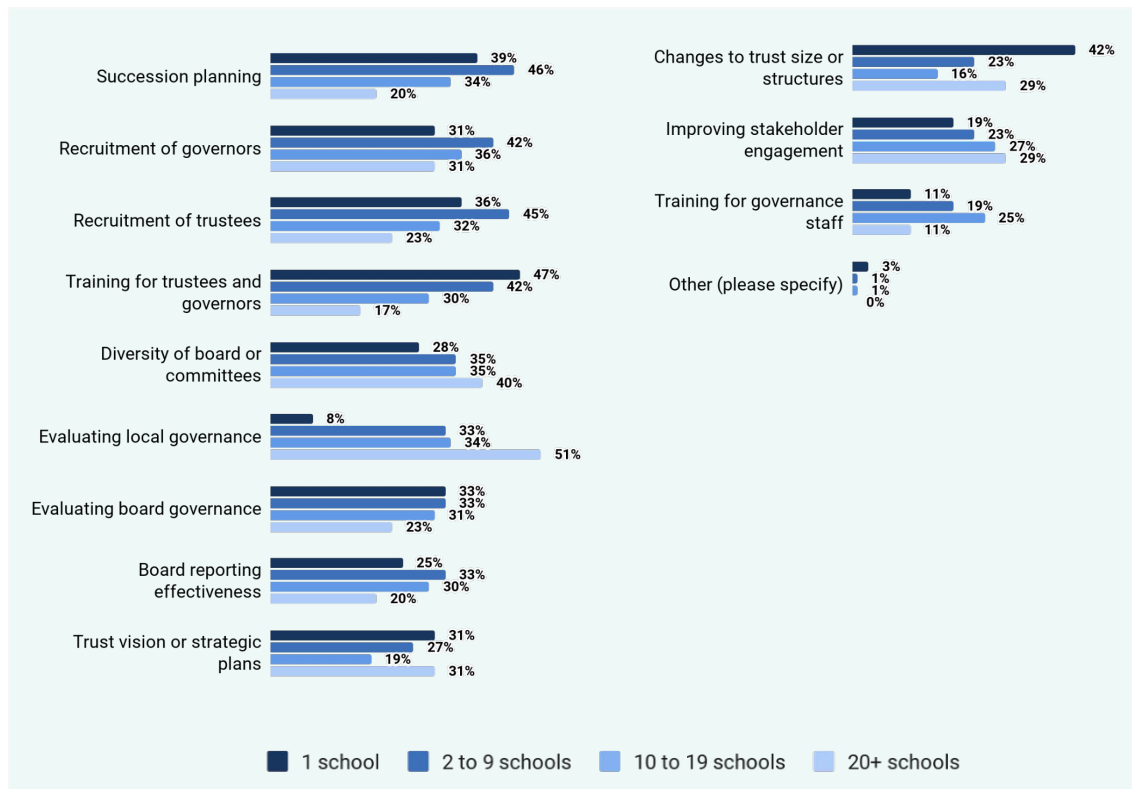


When looking at governance priorities across school trusts, there is no clear leader, but the three top selections all deal with succession planning and recruitment, indicating that many trusts are finding it challenging to retain and recruit the next generation of governance volunteers.

Training is also mentioned by almost 4 in 10 CEOs. Board diversity and evaluation follow with about a third of respondents selecting them as a priority.

# In which areas does your trust intend to focus its efforts regarding governance in the next academic year?

## By trust size



- The most frequent area of focus for the largest trusts is evaluating local governance with half of large trusts setting it as a priority.
- Small trusts of 2-9 schools are more likely to highlight recruitment and succession as a priority. Large trusts are the least likely to do so.
- Training for trustees is the most frequent priority area identified by single academy trusts, followed by changes to trust size or structures.

edurio<sup>®</sup>

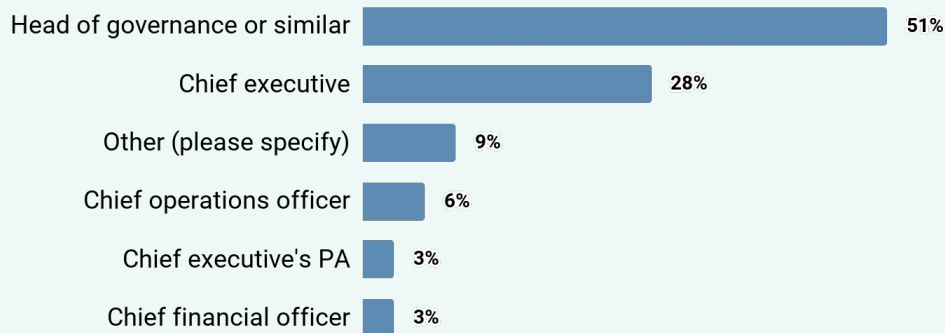


Confederation  
of School Trusts

# Governance responsibilities



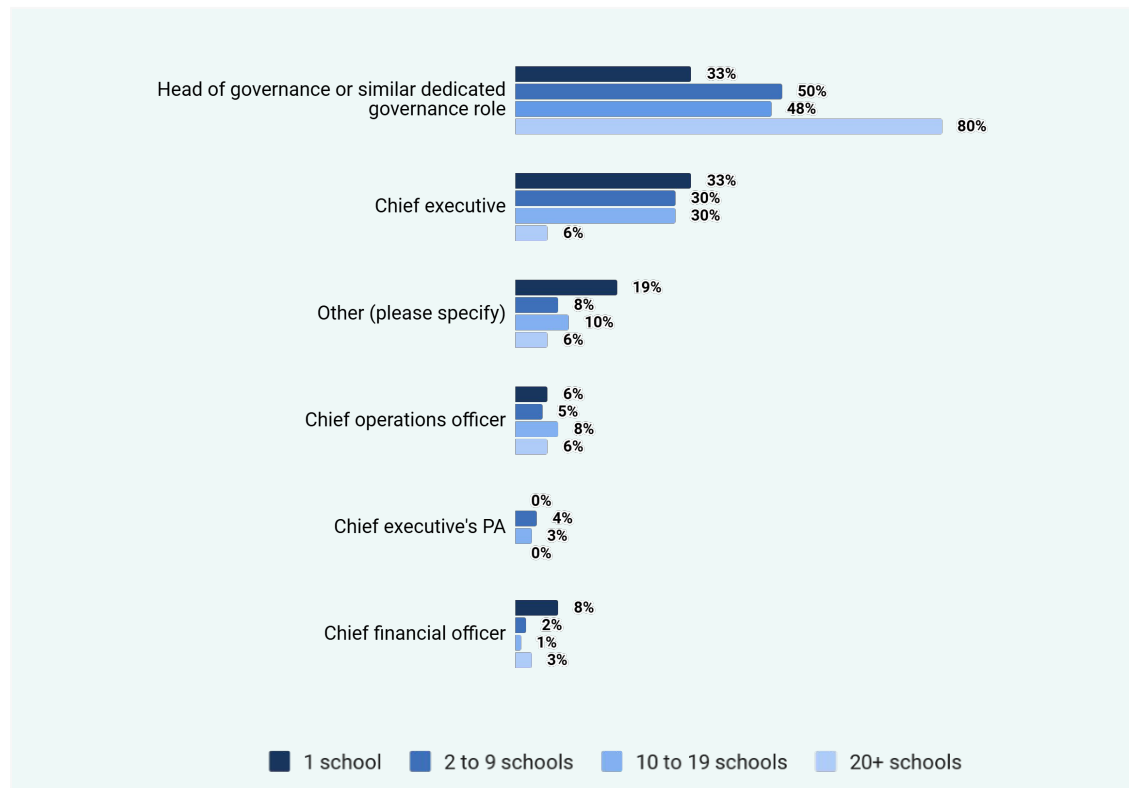
## Which staff member leads on governance within your trust?



- When asked who leads on governance within their trust, about half of the trusts (51%) reported having a head of governance or a similar dedicated governance role.
- 28% of CEOs report that they are the person who leads on governance within their trusts.
- There was a tail of about 20% where this responsibility sits with other roles.

## Which staff member leads on governance within your trust?

### By trust size

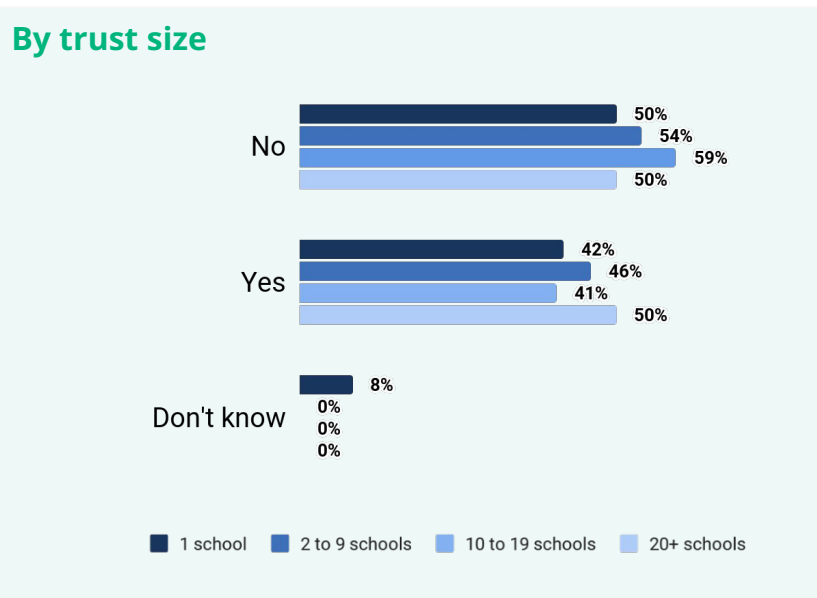
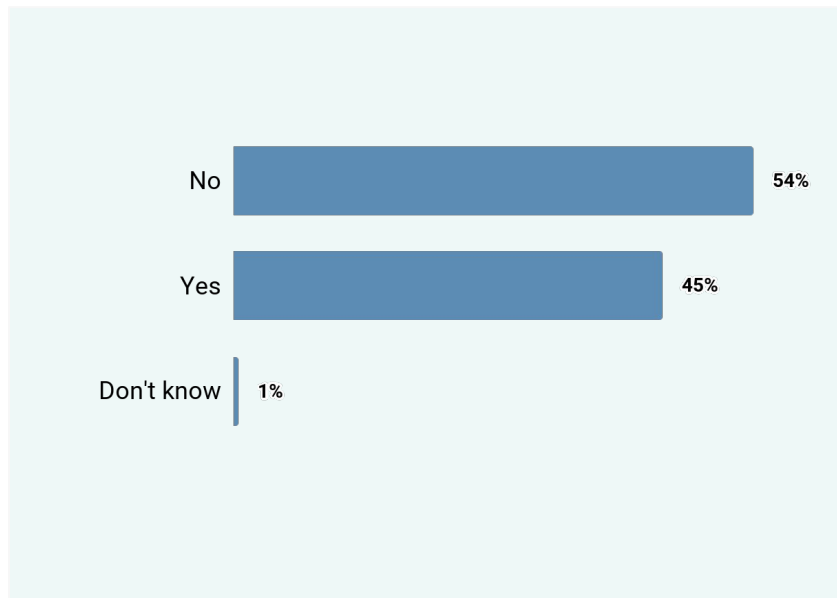


Large trusts of over 20 schools were far more likely than others to report having a head of governance or similar dedicated governance role with 4 out of 5 trusts (81%) responding they have such a role



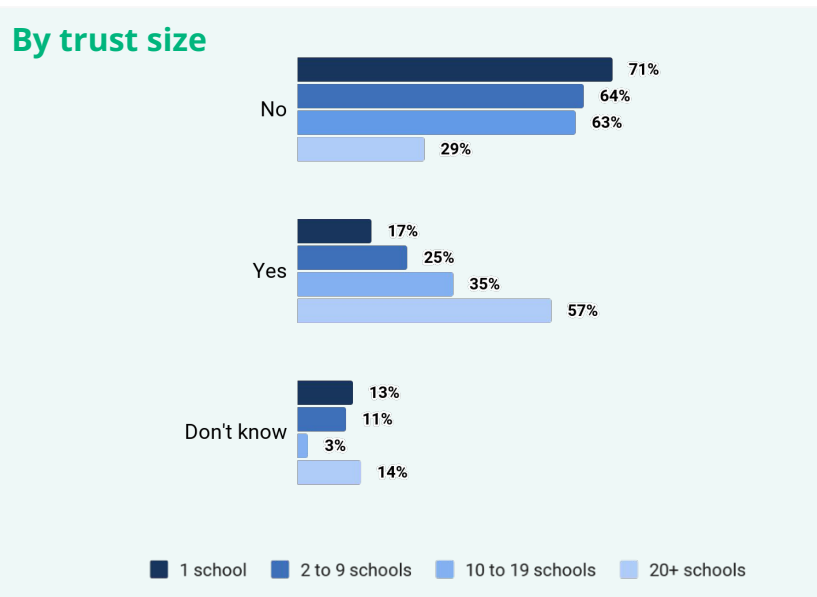
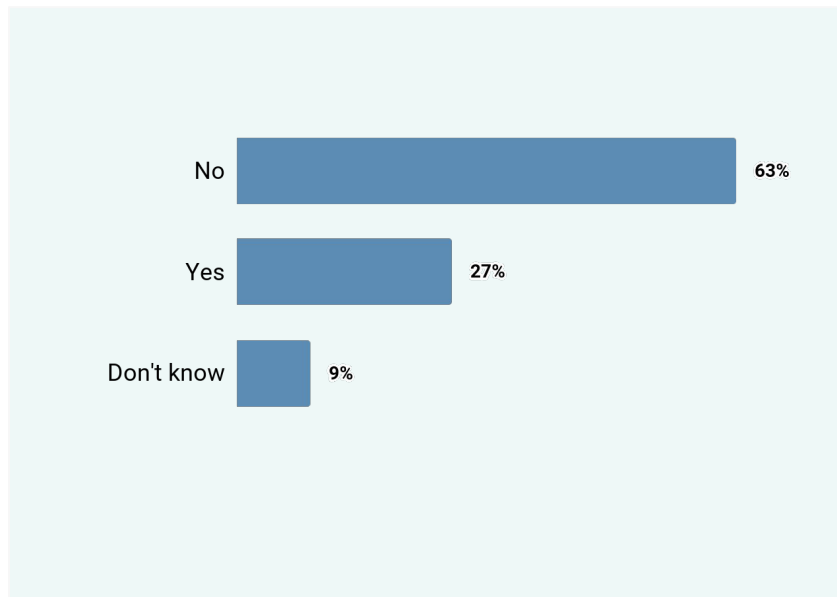
Very few large trusts report having the CEO lead on governance whereas for small and single school trusts the figure is almost a third.

## Is your governance lead part of the trust's executive leadership team?



- Of the CEOs who said that they have a head of governance or a similar dedicated governance role, almost half (45%) report that their governance lead is part of the trust's executive leadership team.
- Governance leads were slightly more likely to be part of the trusts executive leadership team at trusts with more than 20 schools compared to smaller trusts.

## Do you plan to create a dedicated staff role to lead on governance in the next academic year?



Out of the CEOs who said they do not have a head of governance or equivalent, about a quarter of the trusts (27%) said they intend to create a new role for this in the next academic year but 63% said they did not.

The likelihood of creating a dedicated role to lead on governance correlates directly with trust size with larger trusts being more likely than smaller trusts to create a dedicated role.

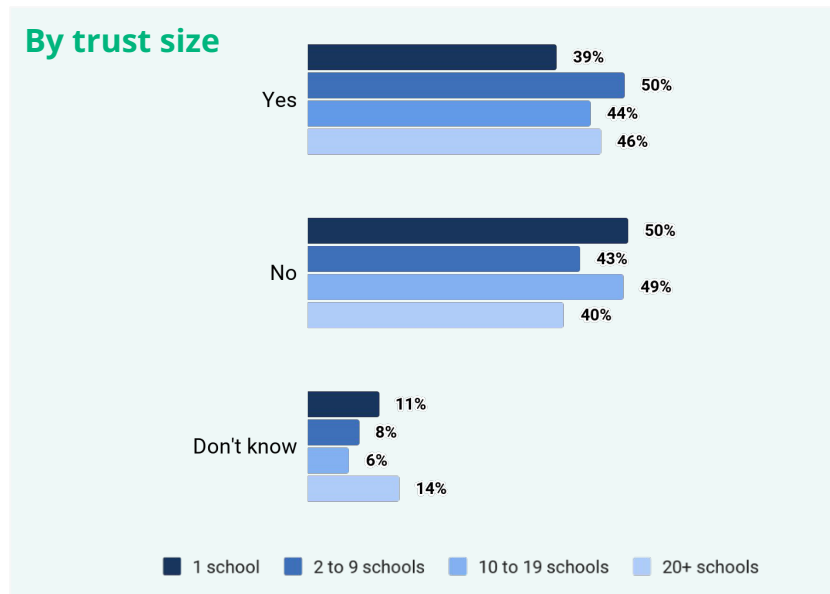
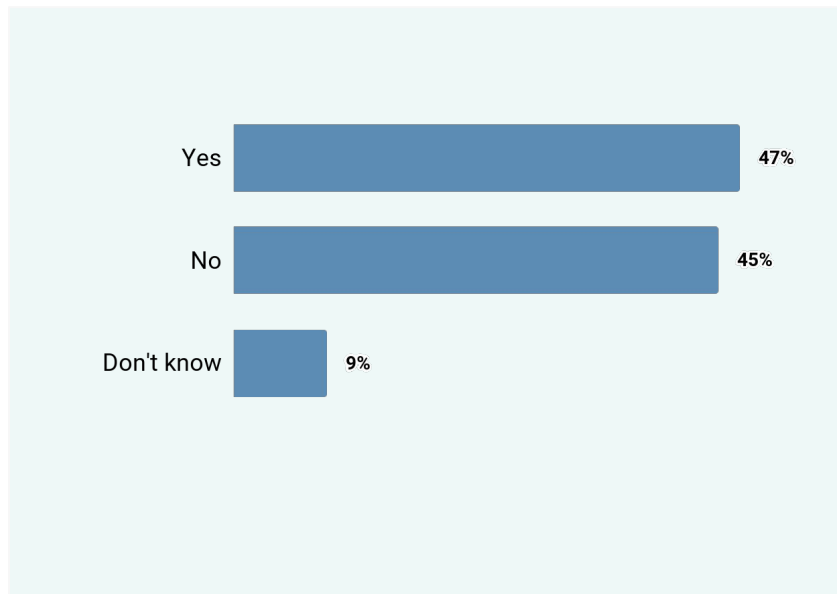
edurio<sup>®</sup>



Confederation  
of School Trusts

# Scheme of delegation

## Do you plan to change your scheme of delegation in the next academic year?



Around half of CEOs (47%) report that they plan to change their scheme of delegation in the next academic year.

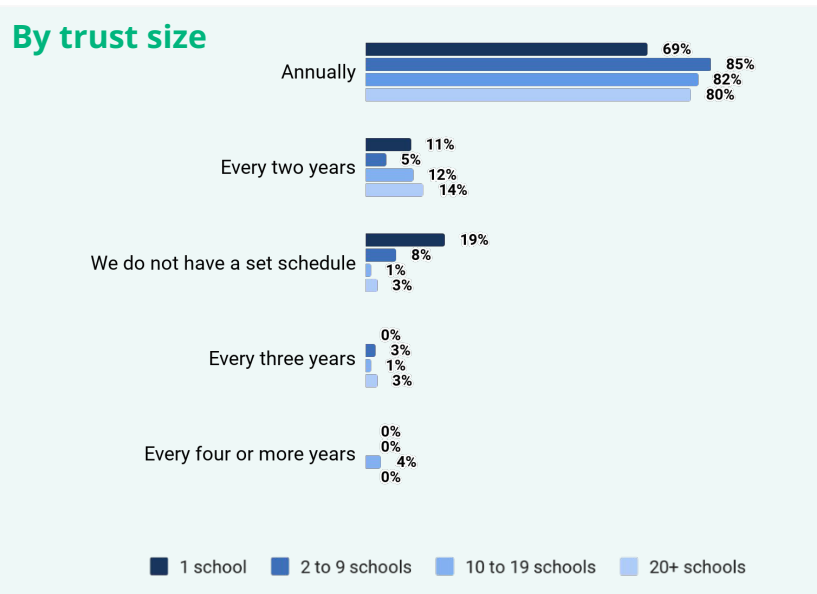
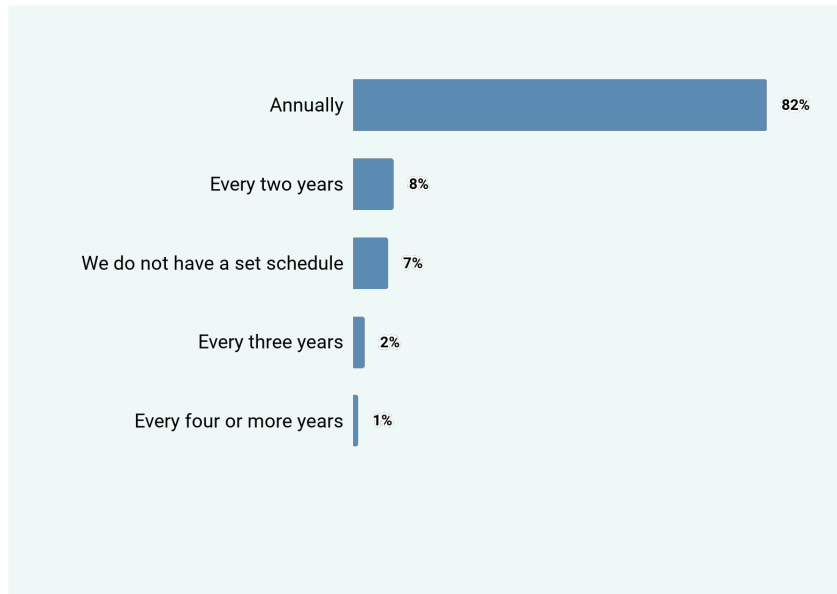
Single school trusts are least likely to be planning to change their scheme of delegation but there are no major differences between trusts of various sizes.

## What factors have contributed to your plan to change the scheme of delegation?



Of those that report planning to change their scheme of delegation in the next academic year, they cite change in trust size and changes to trust strategy as their main reasons for doing so.

## How frequently does your trust review its scheme of delegation?



83% of trust CEOs reported that they review their scheme of delegation annually. Other schedules are rare but 7% of trusts do not have a set schedule

Single School Trusts were most likely to not have a set schedule for reviewing their scheme of delegation compared to all other trust sizes.



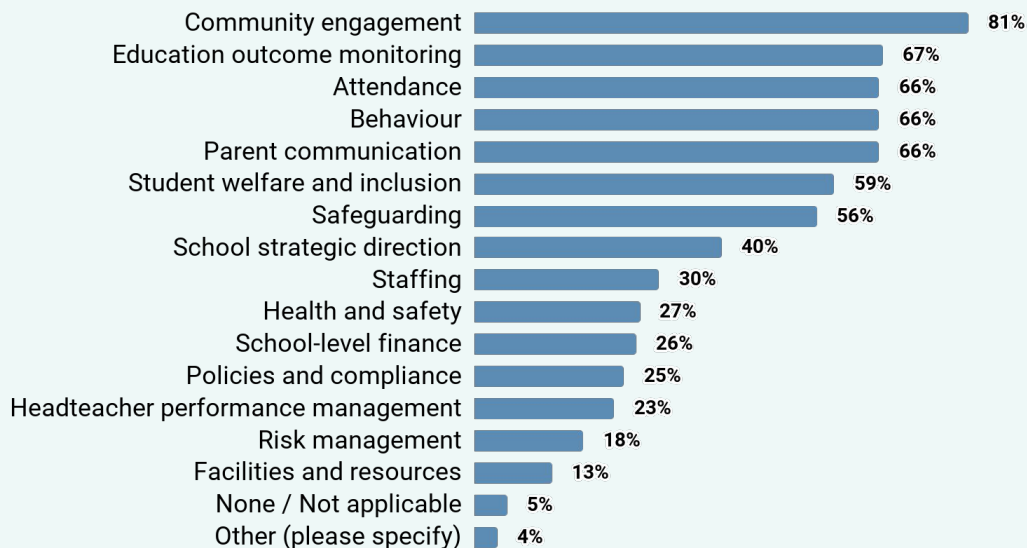
edurio



Confederation  
of School Trusts

# Local governance responsibilities

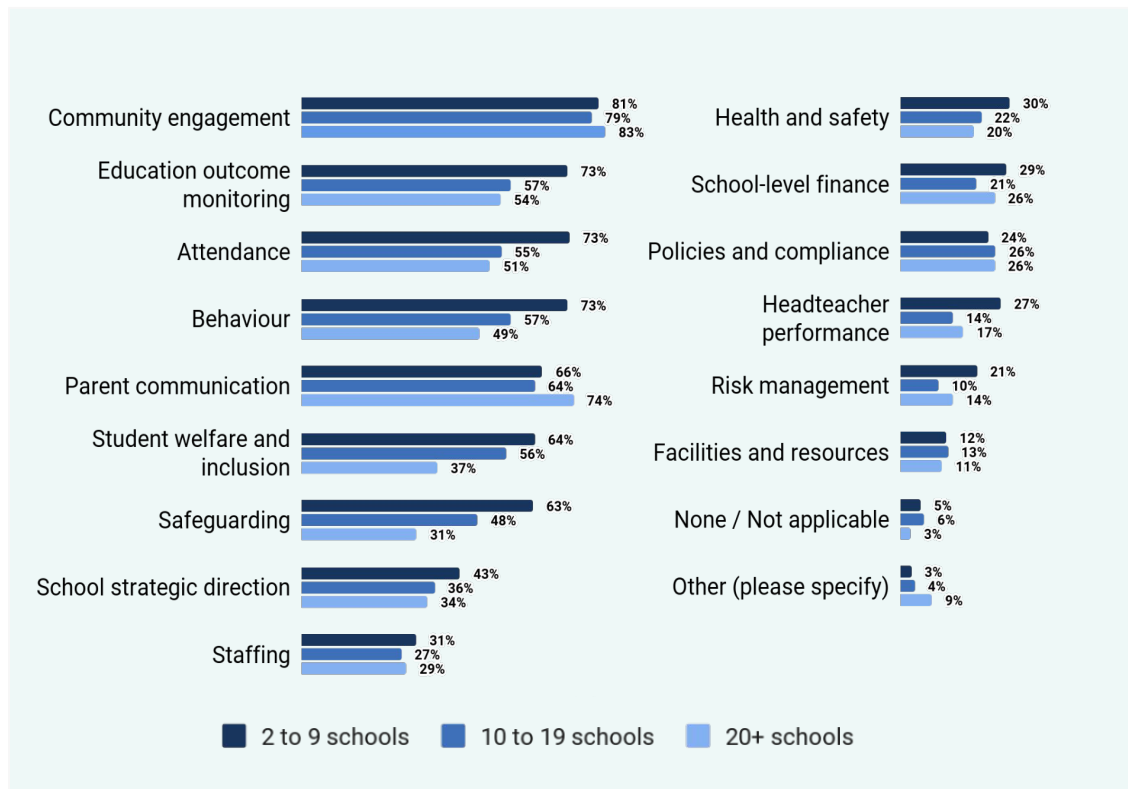
## Which of these responsibilities does your local tier of governance hold?



- Trusts appear to be delegating responsibilities to the local tier that benefit from being 'on the ground' and having local expertise and knowledge.
- Four fifths of trusts delegate community engagement, two thirds delegate monitoring of educational outcomes, attendance, behaviour and parental communication.
- There is still considerable diversity in the sector with a quarter delegating topics like staffing and school finance.

# Which of these responsibilities does your local tier of governance hold?

## By trust size



Community engagement was identified as a responsibility of local governance teams irrespective of trust size



Pupil matters like education outcome monitoring, attendance and behaviour were most likely to be the responsibility of the local governance teams for the smaller trusts of 2-9 schools



Large trusts (20+ schools) are most likely to delegate parent communication to the local tier.

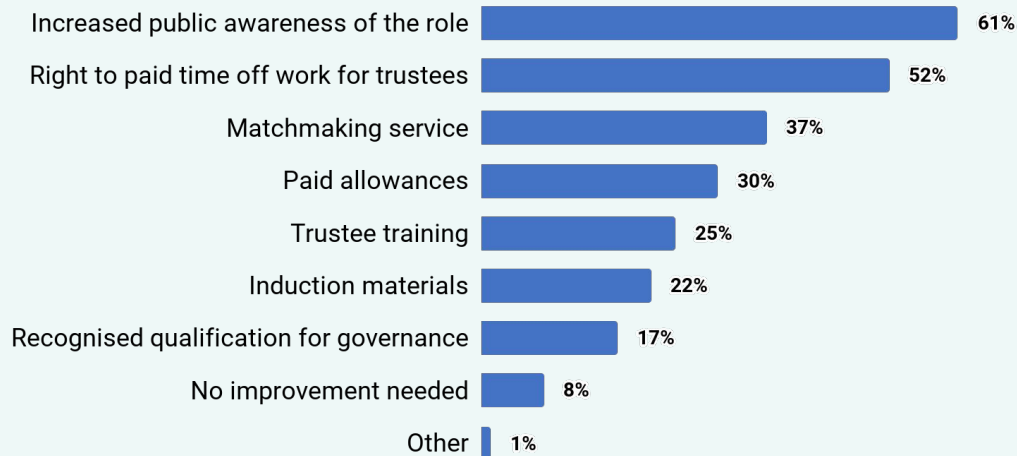
edurio<sup>®</sup>



Confederation  
of School Trusts

# Trustee recruitment and retention

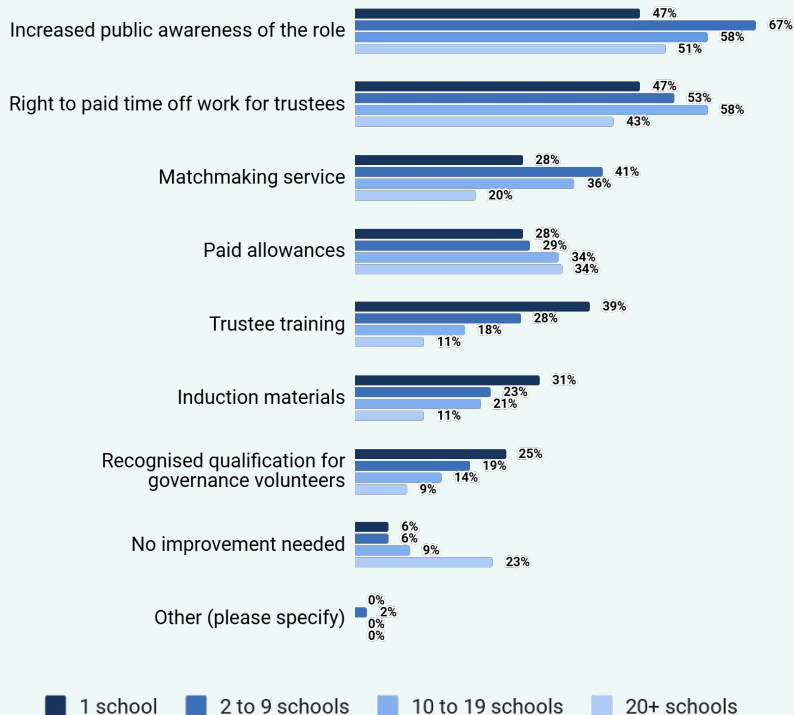
## What would most help you better recruit and retain trustees?



- 61% of Trust CEOs feel that increased public awareness of the role of trustees would help better recruit and retain trustees.
- 51% believe that right to paid time off for trustees would have a positive impact on trustee recruitment and retention.
- Paid allowances are considered as a path to improved trustee recruitment and retention by 30% of CEOs.

# What would most help you better recruit and retain trustees?

## By trust size



Trust CEOs from trusts with more than 20 schools were most like to report that no improvements are needed when it comes to the recruitment and retention of trustees.



CEOs of medium sized trusts with 10-19 schools were most likely to believe that the right to paid time off work for trustees would help them better recruit and retain trustees.

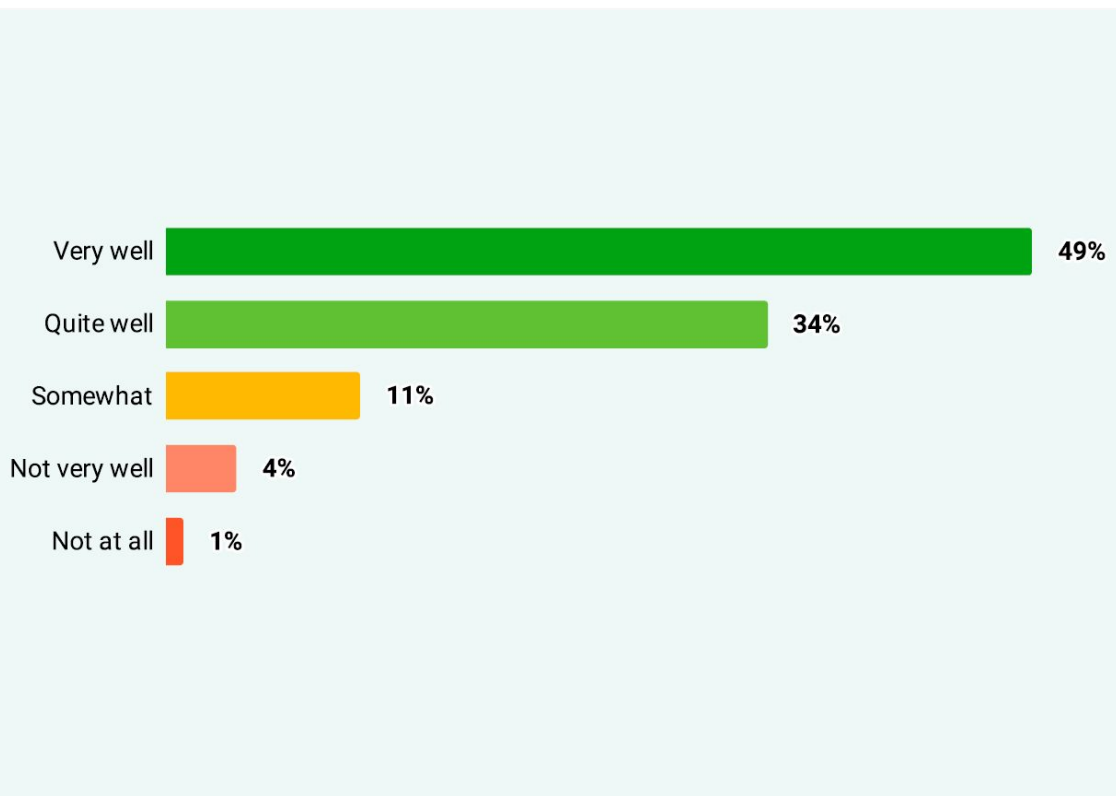
edurio



Confederation  
of School Trusts

# Trust board support to the CEO

## How well supported do you feel as a chief executive by your trust board?

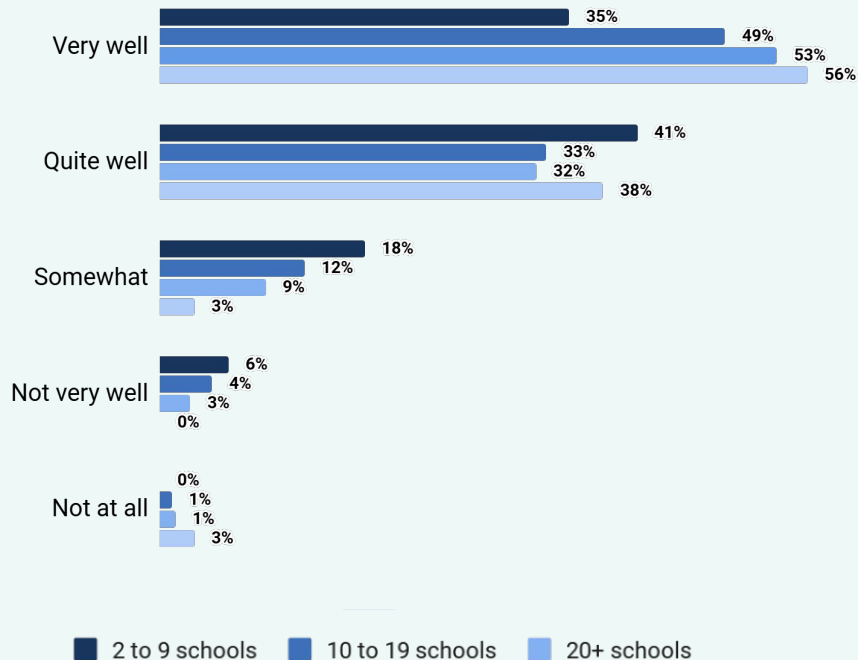


Overall we see that the relationship between the CEO and the trust's board is strong across the sector with 83% of CEOs saying that they are very well or quite well supported by their board and only 5% saying that they don't feel supported.



## How well supported do you feel as a chief executive by your trust board?

### By trust size



The larger the trust, the more likely CEOs were to report feeling very well supported by their trust board, as a chief executive.



CEOs from single school trusts were most likely to report feeling not supported very or quite well by their trust board.

edurio<sup>®</sup>



Confederation  
of School Trusts

# Conclusion

## Samira Sadeghi, Director of trust governance, CST

---



It is heartening to see how most chief executives feel well supported by their boards. We have also seen significant interest from trusts in the sector-led Academy Trust Governance Code, which sets out the highest governance standards. This is a recognition that good governance leads to better outcomes for everyone.

Strong, effective and strategic governance starts with a trust board and governance processes that are independent of the executive and supported by the expert advice of a governance professional, a role now required in trusts. It is, therefore, concerning that in many trusts the chief executive – whose performance trustees scrutinise and hold to account – is also the lead on governance. Our external reviews of governance suggest a strong correlation between high quality trust governance and an independent, skilled governance professional leading the way.

Local governance responsibilities continue to vary across trusts, but there seems to be broad agreement that the local tier of governance is best placed to take responsibility for stakeholder and community engagement. The local tier can also add value by serving as ‘eyes on the ground’ around issues such as attendance and behaviour, as well as providing local expertise and knowledge of the school’s context.

## Samira Sadeghi, Director of trust governance, CST

---



Having encouraged trusts to 'reimagine governance' at their trusts last year, we are pleased to see many trusts re-evaluating their structures to intentionally design a governance community that works in the 'now', rather than simply retaining legacy structures.

Unsurprisingly, given the rate of growth and mergers in the sector, many trusts have plans to evolve their schemes of delegation. It is also encouraging to see how many trusts review their schemes of delegation annually. Delegations that are out of date, inappropriate, unclear and poorly communicated can lead to duplication of effort, confusion about responsibilities and what we call 'fluffload'.

And finally, it is a positive development that 35% of respondents cited board diversity as a focus. As we know, diversity of thought, perspective and background has been scientifically proven to lead to better decision-making, as well as helping the board better reflect the communities it serves.

We are so grateful to our platinum partners Edurio for producing this bespoke deep dive report for the benefit of our Governance and Trustee professional community.

# CST National Survey 2024

## Deep Dive Governance

hello@edurio.com  
home.edurio.com

edurio<sup>o</sup>



Confederation  
of School Trusts

**Benjamin Haslewood**  
**Ernest Jenavs**