

Meetings: remote attendance

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School types: All · School phases: All

There are a variety of reasons why you may wish to attend meetings remotely. In fact, you might be considering having fully virtual board meetings. Here we discuss applicable regulations, consider the pros and the cons and how technology might impact virtual governance.

Remote attendance is allowed

Maintained schools

You have the power to 'approve alternative arrangements for governors to participate or vote at meetings of the governing board including but not limited to by telephone or video conference'.

This is set out in regulation 14 of [The School Governance \(Roles, Procedures and Allowances\) \(England\) Regulations 2013](#).

This also applies to [committee meetings](#).

Academies

Any trustee can attend meetings remotely under the DfE's [model articles of association for academy trusts](#) (article 126), as long as:

- They've given notice of their intention to do so and provided the telephone number on which they can be reached and/or the videoconferencing platform they'll be using at least 48 hours before the meeting, **and**
- The trustees have access to the appropriate equipment

The model articles add that "if after all reasonable efforts it does not prove possible for the person to participate by telephone or video conference, the meeting may still proceed with its business provided it is otherwise quorate".

Refer to your own articles of association though in case they differ.

Governors attending remotely count towards the quorum

All governors present at a meeting, including those participating remotely, contribute to the quorum.

You should plan ahead when drafting a virtual attendance policy. For example, the Devonshire Hill Nursery & Primary School has published a [virtual governance policy](#) which addresses a common issue we're all too familiar with: dropped calls. Section 2 considers how such an event could affect the quorum:

"Governors attending the meeting virtually will contribute to the quorum for the meeting. If the technological link is lost they will cease to contribute to the quorum, but this will not prevent the meeting continuing in their absence unless it has become inquorate."

Moss Hey Primary School also has a [virtual governance policy](#), which states that governors attending virtually contribute to the quorum.

Governing board meetings can be entirely virtual

A governing board or committee meeting can be conducted entirely by telephone or video conference. This was confirmed by a representative of the [DfE](#).

You'll need to decide arrangements for any meeting that uses telephone/video conference, and these must be approved by the full governing board.

These providers have free versions of their systems:

- Google Hangouts Meet – Google is making its video-conferencing feature free (see [here](#))
- [CyberLink U Meeting](#)
- [Zoom Meetings](#)
- [Lifesize](#)
- [Skype](#)
- [BlueJeans](#)

Note: The products listed above aren't exhaustive. Inclusion here doesn't constitute an endorsement by The Key.

Make sure you check what's included in a free offer. Some providers put limits on the number of callers you can have, or the length of meetings, if you're using a free package.

Read our tips on running a virtual meeting below.

Pros and cons

Rosie Chapman, one of our governance experts, gave us some pros and cons of remote attendance.

Pros

- You can set up a meeting quickly
- You don't all need to travel to a certain place to meet

- Members of your board in different regions and countries can meet at short notice. This could be particularly helpful when you're meeting to approve something quickly, such as a tender

Cons

Teleconferencing can have its drawbacks, as anyone who has attended meetings remotely knows. You might find:

- Tone is harder to convey leading to poorer quality conversations between governors
- Chairs struggle to manage the flow of the conversation owing to time delays
- Your board could overlook someone if they're not physically in the room, leading to the remote attendee not having a say
- The remote attendee can unwittingly disrupt the meeting due to delays
- It could be hard to make sure the conversation is confidential

Mitigate the cons

- Have a clear process in place for what to do if and when these problems arise
- If you intend to embed teleconferencing into your processes, invest in reliable teleconferencing services or equipment
- Clarify that the governor attending remotely still needs to meet the expectations around confidentiality

Rosie added that meetings should be minuted in the same way as other governor meetings, with the addition of a note that the meeting was held wholly or partly through teleconference.

How to run a virtual meeting

You'll mostly run it in the same way as a normal meeting. Use these tips to make sure they run smoothly:

Getting started

- Make sure all governors have access to a decent internet connection. Most people's connections at home are good enough, but if you're in an area with poor connectivity you may need to make additional arrangements
- Encourage everyone to call in with their webcam/video switched on, if possible. It's much harder for everyone to participate, and for you to moderate the meeting, if you can't see everyone
- The chair or clerk should set up the call on whatever platform you choose, and circulate the link to everyone else
- If possible, test the platform or system you're using before the meeting

During the meeting

- Try to make meetings shorter – remote meetings are harder to manage, so shorter is better

- Time delays can happen, so make sure everyone has the opportunity to contribute and ask questions
- If you normally sign an attendance record at the start of a meeting, you'll need to manage this in a digital format instead. It's fine to have the clerk record who's present (and indicating that they're remote)
- If you'll be discussing confidential information, make sure everyone can be in an appropriate location (to avoid other people overhearing confidential details)
- Check in regularly with the clerk – time delays and variable sound quality can make it hard to take accurate minutes
- If you're in a location with lots of background noise, mute your microphone when you're not speaking – this improves call quality for everyone

Sources

Rosie Chapman is an independent charity adviser specialising in governance, regulation, policy development, strategic development and facilitation. She has extensive experience as a charity trustee.