

Board observations

Evaluation tool

Board observations

Contents

Introduction	3
Observation Sheet A	5
Observation Sheet B	6
Observation Sheet C	11
Observation Sheet D	12

If you have any feedback on the content of these resources, or additional questions that you'd like to discuss, please contact the ICSA information centre: **020 7612 7035** | informationcentre@icsa.org.uk

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Board observations

Introduction

A board (or committee) observation can be conducted by an individual or a small team. As with other board evaluation exercises, the observer could come from within the sports organisation, be entirely independent and external to the sports organisation or be someone trusted and respected from the organisation's operational environment.

This guidance tool provides a number of sample board observation sheets that sports organisation boards may wish to adapt as part of their board evaluation process. Not every example will suit every board, but within each there may be elements that could be built upon in order for an organisation to develop something that suits their needs.

When undertaking a board observation there are certain things that one should bear in mind.

In advance:

- The board should be informed of the fact that someone will be in attendance to observe proceedings ahead of the meeting in question (ideally, the board will have agreed to the exercise in earlier discussions, so the announcement should not be a surprise to board members).
- The board observer should meet the chair before the meeting to finalise any last-minute factors.
- The board observer should have received a set of papers at the same time as board members.
- Thought should be given as to the best place to position the board observer (at the meeting table, set back from the table but to the side, or opposite the chair). The observer needs to view a sufficient area of the board to be able to observe and note non-verbal communication, as well as being able to hear all contributors.

Board observations

During the meeting:

- The observer should be able to make notes of the physical environment in which the meeting is set, along with any seating arrangements (e.g. is there a table plan or are people allowed to choose their own position), especially for the chair, chief executive and governance lead.
- The observer should not participate in the meeting, so should refrain from making any contribution (either verbal or non-verbal) and the board should not seek to ask them questions.
- A clean observation sheet should be used to make contemporaneous notes by the observer. This may be one document for the entire meeting, or one for each agenda item.

After the meeting:

- The observer may or may not be happy to provide initial feedback immediately at the end of the meeting. This is something that depends on the observer's judgement. If feedback is provided it should not be contradicted by any formal feedback provided later.
- The feedback should be constructive in its approach.
- The chair may be given the first right of reply on any feedback, though the observer may choose only to change matters of fact in the final version.
- The final report should be discussed by the whole board, who may act upon the findings, or reject them.

The following are examples of observation sheets that you may adapt for your purposes:

Observation sheet A	record observations of single items during a meeting
Observation sheet B	nine categories of observation
Observation sheet C	observe each agenda item
Observation sheet D	question format observations

Board observations

Observation Sheet A

This sheet can be used to observe the board during a single item of the meeting.

Board _____ Date _____

Agenda item & no.	Item start:								Item finish:				
Activity	Chair	Vice chair/SID	Board member A	Board member B	Board member C	Board member D	Board member E	Board member F	Board member G	Board member H	Ch. Exec	Staff (other)	Governance lead
Agreeing													
Challenging													
Informing													
Clarifying/questioning													
Summarising													
Offering opinion/experience													
Suggesting action													
Listening													
Other (specify)													

Focus of item:

Agreeing Challenging Informing
 Clarifying/questioning Summarising Offering opinion/experience
 Suggesting action Listening Other (specify)

Focus of item:

Strategic Operational Governance
 Compliance Social/economic impact Monitoring
 Key people External parties Other (specify)

Board observations

Observation Sheet B

Name _____ Date _____ Observer _____

1. Quality of information presented	Score 1-5 (poor to high quality)
Examples: Presentation of papers (format, accessibility, readability) Clarity of purpose of paper (for decision, discussion, for information, to note) Value to overall agenda	
Further comments	

2. Understanding of context	Score 1-5 (poor to high quality)
Examples: Providing information Offering opinion/experience/insight Informed discussion Providing constructive challenge Moving understanding on Referencing sectoral/market issues	
Further comments	

Board observations

3. Focus on strategy and outcomes (not operational detail)	Score 1–5 (poor to high quality)
<p>Examples:</p> <p>Level of debate (strategic or operational detail)</p> <p>Broadness of approach (wider impact of the proposal on the organisation and its activities)</p> <p>Level of awareness between item and the organisation’s strategic goals</p> <p>Proposal helps deliver organisation’s objectives</p> <p>Proposal promotes the culture, vision and values of the organisation/sport</p>	
Further comments	

4. Awareness of governance responsibilities	Score 1–5 (poor to high quality)
<p>Examples:</p> <p>Degree to which participants are prepared (read documents, tabled questions)</p> <p>Links between agenda item and governance matters</p> <p>Role of the board in relation to agenda item (vision, culture, strategy, leadership, monitoring, holding to account)</p> <p>Respect for, and awareness of, governance and management areas</p> <p>Use of the governance lead to support the board</p>	
Further comments	

Board observations

5. Critical evaluation and decision making	Score 1–5 (poor to high quality)
<p>Examples:</p> <p>Ability to critically evaluate information presented (seeking help, clarification, testing assumptions)</p> <p>Ability to critically evaluate proposals and arguments presented in the meeting</p> <p>Triangulating information to support material presented and be assured of its accuracy, relevance etc.</p> <p>Logically evaluating information to arrive at evidence-based decisions</p> <p>Ability to find consensus and collective agreement (and closure)</p>	
Further comments	

6. Effective challenge	Score 1–5 (poor to high quality)
<p>Examples:</p> <p>Constructive challenge of assumptions, including the status quo</p> <p>Constructive challenge of interpretations of data and other information</p> <p>Connecting links and impacts across agenda items to strategic goals</p> <p>Seeking additional insight for clarity of information, approach or outcomes</p> <p>Ability to bring relevant external expertise, experience or perspectives to the discussion</p>	
Further comments	

Board observations

7. Risk management	Score 1–5 (poor to high quality)
<p>Examples:</p> <p>Good understanding of risk, risk appetite and risk management approaches adopted (organisation and sector wide)</p> <p>Identifying risks within individual agenda items and across the entire agenda (cumulative risks), including the risks occasioned by not agreeing a course of action</p> <p>Testing and assessing the effectiveness of control measures</p> <p>Triangulating risk measures to be assured of robustness and appropriateness</p> <p>Discussion of risk register and the movement of top five/ten risks to the organisation</p>	
Further comments	

8. Constructive and supportive behaviours	Score 1–5 (poor to high quality)
<p>Examples:</p> <p>Supportive and constructive comments and questioning Active listening</p> <p>Showing respect to others</p> <p>Assertive, not aggressive, disagreement Teamwork</p> <p>Collective decision making and responsibility Appropriate relationship with senior staff in attendance</p> <p>Constructive responses from staff and willingness to implement decisions</p> <p>Appetite to learn from mistakes to improve services and efficiency</p> <p>Willingness to challenge the status quo</p> <p>Ability to be creative when finding solutions to challenges</p>	
Further comments	

Board observations

9. Well chaired	Score 1-5 (poor to high quality)
<p>Examples:</p> <p>Framing the purpose of the meeting Managing the agenda effectively</p> <p>Summarising discussions (not leading them with own opinions), decisions and actions</p> <p>Handling distractions, absences and late papers appropriately</p> <p>Encouraging all participants to engage and contribute across all agenda items</p> <p>Seeking clarification from staff and governance lead where needed</p> <p>Reviewing the effectiveness of the meeting, papers etc. with a view to improvement</p>	
Further comments	

Board observations

Observation Sheet C

Meeting _____ Date _____ Observer _____

The observer should indicate for each agenda item its primary intention or purpose.

Agenda Item	Challenging	Deciding	Debating	Approving, accepting, receiving	Amending	Reviewing	Monitoring	Setting	Leading	Trouble shooting	Other (specify)
1.											
2.											
3.											
4.											
5.											
6.											
7.											
8.											
9.											

Board observations

Observation Sheet D

Organisation _____ Meeting type _____

Date _____ Name of observer (s) _____

Pre-meeting criteria	
Agenda	Answer
Were agenda and papers sent out five working days in advance?	
Were items clearly marked for info/decision/approval?	
What proportion of items were marked for decision?	
Were agenda items clearly linked to strategic objectives?	
Was at least 20% of the agenda given to quality/impact/service delivery issues?	
Was the agenda timed?	
Was declaration of interests a standing item?	
What was the total number of items on the agenda?	
Does the agenda include a request that questions relating to information only items are raised in advance of the meeting?	

Board observations

Evidence/comments – What examples can be provided to substantiate the impression of the meeting?	Discussion/report areas

Board observations

Board pack	Answer
How many pages are in the board pack?	
What is the average length of the papers?	
Is it clear as to what is being asked of the board?	
How many late papers were there?	
Are there executive summaries for each report?	
Are papers identified by different coloured paper, or another system?	
Are a range of methods used to impart information – text, graphs, etc?	

Board observations

Evidence/comments – What examples can be provided to substantiate the impression of the meeting?	Discussion/report areas

Board observations

Meeting criteria	Answer
Describe the meeting venue/environment	
Is the meeting an open or closed meeting?	
Do board members appear to be well prepared?	
Did the meeting start on time?	
Did the chair's opening comments clearly define the purpose of the meeting?	
Was the challenge and debate appropriate for each item discussed?	
How many board members were at the meeting?	
Did all board members speak?	
Were contributions to debate received from all board members or was the discussion dominated by certain individuals?	
To what extent is there evidence of an executive and non-executive director demarcation?	

Board observations

Evidence/comments – What examples can be provided to substantiate the impression of the meeting?	Discussion/report areas

Board observations

Meeting criteria (continued)	Answer
Did the chair facilitate discussion and encourage questioning?	
Did the chair summarise discussion before moving to a decision or agreeing an action?	
Did the chair handle interruptions efficiently and effectively?	
To what extent did the board use the organisation's mission, culture and values to drive decision making?	
Was there adequate time for board members to ask questions and explore issues regarding each item?	
To what degree does the board demonstrate strategic leadership (as opposed to compliance monitoring)?	
What was the total length of the meeting?	
What was the balance among agenda items and discussion between forward thinking and backward looking or reviewing?	

Board observations

Evidence/comments – What examples can be provided to substantiate the impression of the meeting?	Discussion/report areas

Board observations

Boardroom behaviours	Answer
Were all board members attentive and engaged throughout the meeting?	
To what extent did board members demonstrate mutual respect?	
Were directors happy to contribute to discussion without prompting?	
Did directors appear to be comfortable speaking about a range of issues relevant to the board?	
To what extent is the relationship between the chair and CEO friendly and challenging?	
Was questioning informed and sensible and did it add materially to the discussion and decision made?	

Use of committees	Answer
Were items appropriately delegated to board committees?	
Were committee reports presented to the board meeting (written or verbally)?	

Board observations

Evidence/comments – What examples can be provided to substantiate the impression of the meeting?	Discussion/report areas

