

Specimen board evaluation questions

Guidance note

Specimen board evaluation questions

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If you have any feedback on the content of these resources, or additional questions that you'd like to discuss, please contact the SGA: **020 7612 7029** | info@sportsgovernanceacademy.org.uk

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Specimen board evaluation questions

Introduction

Good governance is essential to a successful organisation. A board that is aware of its powers, duties and responsibilities and the impact it can have on the sustainability of an organisation is better placed to lead that organisation in achieving its stated objectives and making a positive impact.

A dedicated board will not only be keen to see staff, activities and services improve in their efforts to fulfil their objectives, it will also be willing to undertake regular reviews of its own performance to establish what the board members do well and what could be improved. One way of establishing a benchmark for improving board performance is to undertake a board evaluation. The Code for Sports Governance requires that an internal evaluation take place annually, with an externally facilitated review taking place at least every four years.

The SGA guidance note 'Board evaluation – things to consider' provides further detail on the types of methods available for undertaking a board evaluation, along with their benefits and drawbacks.

A simple approach to board evaluation is to construct a questionnaire for board members (and senior staff) to complete anonymously. The results can then be collated and presented to the board to discuss.

The specimen questions below represent a range of the questions that can be commonly found in board evaluation questionnaires. Not all will be relevant at every juncture in an organisation's evolution, but they provide some guidance as to what ought to be considered when constructing a questionnaire. Those conducting a review should select the questions which are appropriate for their needs. They can be used in a variety of forms, such as written questionnaires, one-on-one interview questions, or as part of the wider assessment by the evaluator.

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The following are a mixture of open and closed questions. While closed questions might be easier to collate and analyse and therefore provide a baseline to measure, open questions enable the respondent to offer a more comprehensive response that will provide context and nuance. This may make collation more difficult, but it does provide additional depth where a questionnaire is to be followed by one-to-one interviews with board members. Either approach can be valuable and appropriate, but it will depend on the range of evaluation techniques to be used.

A. Organisational purpose

1. Are all board members familiar with the benefits and limitations of the organisation's corporate status?
2. Does the organisation operate in accordance with legal and regulatory/funding requirements, byelaws/standing orders/rules, etc.?
3. How frequently does the board review its governing document? When was the last time the governing document was amended and why?
4. Are you clear about the organisation's objectives and do you focus decisions around fulfilling these? How is this demonstrated?
5. How does the board agree a vision and culture for the organisation that supports the achievement of its objectives and underpins all the organisation's activities?
6. In what ways are the stated values, vision and culture consistently applied throughout written documents and the behaviours of the organisation?

B. Leadership

1. Are the roles and responsibilities of the board clearly defined and communicated in role descriptions for all positions within the board?
2. Are board members and employees clear on how their roles and responsibilities differ?
3. Do board members understand their legal duties and the roles and responsibilities of directors/trustees, both individually and collectively?
4. Are the board's functions and responsibilities clearly documented?
5. Do board members carry out these functions and responsibilities in practice?
6. What is the organisation trying to achieve and how does the board help to achieve this?
7. How does the board work with the chief executive to fulfil their respective roles?
8. How would you define the relationship between the chair and chief executive? Is it suitably respectful of each other's role and duties, or unduly cosy?
9. Define the relationship between the board and the chief executive? Is it suitably respectful of their respective roles, with due regard for the difference between governance and management?

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10. Does the board understand its role as an employer (where applicable)?
11. Are you assured that the organisation has all the necessary tools in place to effectively manage staff and volunteers (policies, procedures, job and role descriptions, HR records, etc), where applicable?
12. In what ways do the board and senior staff understand and embody the purpose, vision, values and culture of the organisation?
13. How do you ensure that decisions of the board and the activities of the organisation are consistent with the objectives and strategy?
14. Does the board agree the values and culture that the organisation wishes to promote and ensure that these underpin all decisions and activities?
15. Where can the public ascertain information about the board members and senior management? Is it easily found and accessed?
16. Are appropriate arrangements in place for the supervision, support, remuneration and appraisal of the chief executive?
17. When was the chief executive last appraised and by whom? What was the broad thrust of matters reported to the board?
18. When was the last crisis the organisation faced? What was it? How did the board resolve it?
19. Is the organisation viable due to the contributions and leadership of many people rather than one, or a few?

C. Strategy

1. In what ways does the organisation's overall strategy support the achievement of its objectives?
2. What was the board's role in developing the agreed strategy?
3. How does the organisation's vision, values and culture influence the work of partner organisations?
4. Where can the public find the strategic plan, along with fair and true accounts of the success and failure of implementing that strategy?
5. Which of the organisation's key performance indicators (KPIs), agreed by the board, are both stretching and realistic?
6. How does the board link KPIs to the achievement of the agreed objectives?
7. How has the board tackled negative or unexpected consequences of KPIs?
8. How do the business and operational plans reflect the wider economic environment in which the organisation operates?
9. In what ways is the board kept up-to-date with the wider economic changes that may impact the organisation's ability to achieve its objectives and therefore is able to make decisions to adjust strategic and other plans?
10. How frequently does the board review the external environment to inform future changes to the work of the organisation?

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11. How effective are the strategic away-days? What has changed as a result of those sessions?

D. Risk

1. Does the board have an identifiable framework for determining critical risks and key issues facing the organisation?
2. What is the board's attitude to risk? How would you characterise the organisation's risk appetite both for specific and combined risk?
3. Does the board oversee the organisation's approach to risk management and understand the most important risks it faces as an organisation?
4. How and where do you record information presented to the board about the most important risks facing the organisation?
5. Do you take action to minimise and manage the risks to which the organisation is exposed?
6. Does the board consider risks explicitly when making major decisions, and does it act prudently to safeguard assets, property and reputation?
7. Has risk management been embedded in the organisation's culture and working practices?
8. Explain how each proposal presented to the board sets out the rationale for the favoured option in terms of impact on resources, participants, customers, stakeholders and the wider economy in which the organisation operates?
9. Describe the methods used by the board to appropriately identify and quantify the risks associated with each proposal presented to the board to support the organisation's objectives?
10. How does the board approach due diligence exercises and how are the findings recorded?
11. How does the board assess and mitigate risk once a proposal is being implemented?
12. In the last 5 years, how many changes to the organisation's planned strategy and business model have been made by the board as a result of unanticipated scenarios?
13. How frequently does the board stress test its strategic plan, business model and operating plans?

E. Board capability

1. Does the board work in accordance with clear standing orders, remits and delegated authorities?
2. Does the board have a regular cycle to consider and approve plans?
3. How well do board meetings work? What could be done to make them more productive and carry out the organisation's business more effectively?

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4. How does the board and senior management team view the quality of working relationships?
5. Are relationships between board members and senior managers based on trust, effective scrutiny and challenge and high quality communication?
6. Do delegations to senior managers enable the organisation to be managed effectively, while ensuring there is proper accountability to the board for decisions and performance?
7. Does the board have the purpose and objectives of the organisation at the front of its mind when it is developing plans and strategies and when it is making major decisions?
8. How well do the organisation's plans, structures, reports and meetings help the board to achieve this?
9. In what ways does the board have the capability, capacity, experience, diversity and skills to deliver the organisation's strategy?
10. What lessons have the board learned from mistakes and how does that feed into achieving continuous improvement?
11. How does the board make decisions? What evidence and other reliable data does it use to base its deliberations?
12. Please describe the quality of board papers.
13. How creative is the board in tackling difficult challenges to the organisation and its operations?
14. What is the balance between historical and forward looking data presented to the board?
15. What support does the governance lead provide to the board? Is it of sufficient strength and depth?

F. Board behaviours

1. Does the board work together effectively as a team?
2. Do all board members take collective responsibility for decisions?
3. Do all board members understand and meet their obligations to act in accordance with the best interests of the organisation, irrespective of how they were elected/appointed?
4. Are committees and the chair fully accountable to the board?
5. Are board members able to put aside personal positions when compromise is required?
6. Does each board member contribute their skills and perspectives to the work of the board and the organisation?
7. Is each board member willing to develop new skills to contribute to the effectiveness of the board and the organisation?
8. Is each board member willing to contribute additional time and energy when the organisation needs it?

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9. Are functional policies and procedures in place to deal with ethical issues such as conflicts of interest and confidentiality?
10. Do meetings serve a useful purpose and are they evaluated for efficiency and effectiveness on a regular basis?
11. Is adequate time and energy given for discussion and decision making at meetings?
12. Do board members arrive prepared for meetings, having read the agenda, minutes, and reports?
13. Are board members clear before a meeting starts what decisions and actions are required from them in that meeting?
14. Do board members leave meetings with a clear sense of what was decided and what their responsibilities are?
15. As a board member, are you comfortable with changing established ways of doing business?
16. As a board member, do you understand your own leadership style, including how you react and relate to others when change is presented?
17. Does the composition of the organisation's membership and the board ensure that no other organisation has undue influence on its decision making? How are these values transmitted and embedded?
18. Do you have clear values that you expect board members, employees and volunteers to demonstrate in their behaviour and actions? How are these values transmitted and embedded?
19. Do these values guide your approach to decision making and the actions of staff and volunteers?
20. Are board members, staff and volunteers bound by high standards of personal conduct?
21. How well are you achieving these standards in practice? Do you fully investigate any alleged breaches of standards and take action where they have not been met?
22. Explain how the board is assured that its decisions are made in line with legal requirements, the governing document and the organisation's culture and values?
23. What is the balance of board information for decision, discussion, action, review, approve, for information and to note?
24. What is the board process for discussing proposals that are new, contentious or on the edge of the agreed risk appetite?
25. Are there any domineering personalities on the board? If so, how do they impact on the dynamics of the board and its decision making?
26. How effective is the chair at handling board meetings and managing the personalities around the table?
27. Describe the best behaviours of the board, and the worst?
28. Did all board members attend at least 75% of all board and committee meetings in the past 12 months?
29. How is board etiquette agreed and respected by board members?

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30. Do board members and staff understand what restrictions apply to payments and benefits in relation to their personal position and the activities of the organisation?
31. Do you comply with the law and regulatory guidance on payments and benefits?
32. Is information about payments and benefits subject to statutory controls and/or regulatory guidance available to the public?
33. Do board members and staff understand what might represent a conflict of interest, based on what your organisation does and their individual role?
34. Are declarations of interests made by board members and the senior management team publicly available?
35. Do you have an open and effective approach to dealing with gifts and hospitality?

G. Board development and support

1. Does the board have the right blend of skills and experience, based on the purpose, characteristics and complexity of the organisation and the challenges it faces?
2. Has the board decided what range of skills, experience and interests board members should collectively possess?
3. Are the governing document, recruitment and election processes geared to meeting these needs? Do you need to consider changing the governing document or procedures?
4. Are you proactive in trying to attract people from different parts of society and people who can bring different experiences and perspectives to the board?
5. Where new board members do not have the skills required, does the organisation use induction and ongoing training to build capacity and ensure the board can perform effectively?
6. Where board positions are subject to nomination by a third party, is there a conversation about the skills and experience of prospective board members?
7. Does the organisation identify individuals that have the characteristics that are lacking on the board and has it developed a succession strategy?
8. Does the organisation ensure that there is a formal succession planning process to review current board profiles and identify future needs?
9. Does the board have a nominations process that ensures that it remains appropriately diverse with respect to gender, ethnicity, culture, disabilities, age, skills, background, perspectives, competencies and previous experience of board work?
10. Does the board reflect the diversity of the community/communities the organisation seeks to serve or reach?
11. Are new board members given a sufficient induction to the organisation and a handbook that includes information on the organisation's history, objectives, governing document, policies, practices, projects, governance structure, roles and responsibilities?
12. Do board members feel appreciated and recognised for their contributions and accomplishments?

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13. Do individual board members have a strong belief in the mission, values and objectives of the organisation?
14. How effective is the organisation at supporting the board members and developing their skills and knowledge?
15. Is the board reviewed collectively and individually?
16. Does the board act on those areas that need improving?
17. Explain the board's approach to succession planning? Is there a balanced approach to continuity and renewal?
18. How competitive are elections to the board when board members are elected?
19. Are those who elect board members given adequate information about the skills needed on the board and those which candidates will bring to the role?
20. Have problems been identified in ensuring that board members elected in this way provide the skills needed by organisation and also reflect the diversity of background and experience that the organisation wants to draw upon? If not, how can this be remedied?
21. Describe the induction you underwent. Was it satisfactory?
22. What are the key aspects of the role description for board members?
23. What were the key findings and action points arising from the previous board evaluation? What was changed as a result and when?
24. Does the board regularly review the effectiveness of governance arrangements and performance, and take action to make necessary improvements?
25. Describe how board development is embedded within the corporate calendar.
26. When was the committee structure last reviewed? What changed as a consequence?
27. Has any board member been in place for more than the term limits specified in the Code for Sports Governance? If so, what are the reasons for that?

H. Delivery

1. Are the organisation's insurance schemes regularly reviewed and updated accordingly?
2. Does the organisation have a systematic planning process?
3. Does the board maintain the right balance between long-term vision and immediate needs?
4. Is the organisation flexible when responding to new opportunities and challenges?
5. Does the whole organisation continuously challenge itself to improve?
6. Does the board have clear financial policies and procedures in place?
7. Does the board fulfil its responsibility to ensure that there are sufficient financial resources for the organisation as part of their strategic plan?
8. Where the organisation undertakes fundraising activities, does the board ensure that these – including those undertaken by third parties – protect vulnerable persons and the public more generally from unreasonable practices? Where appropriate, is this information included in the annual report?

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9. Does the board take a leadership role in financial management?
10. Does the board ensure adequate financial tools are in place (policies, procedures, internal controls, regular audits, frequent financial reports)?
11. Does the organisation have an investment strategy? What is it?
12. Do board members understand and contribute to the discussion of the organisation's financial status?
13. Does the board approve the annual budget?
14. Does the board review monthly financial statements of income and expenditure against the approved budget?
15. Does the board have a mechanism to approve all adjustments/revisions to the budget dependent on the governance structure?
16. Within a group structure, are identities, relationships and responsibilities within the group explicit?
17. Within a group structure, does your governance practice strike an appropriate balance between the rights of the parent organisation, and the ability of subsidiaries to act independently? Do board members within the group understand and manage conflicts of interest appropriately?
18. Within a group structure, do you regularly review and act upon the effectiveness of governance and control relationships within the group?
19. Does the board receive the information it needs to carry out its governance responsibilities to a high standard?
20. How good are the reports and other information the board receives?
21. Does the board and senior management team periodically take time to discuss the quality of reports and other information?
22. Do reports to the board allow it to focus effectively on its key roles of providing strategic direction and holding the chief executive/senior management team to account for the organisation's performance?
23. Where necessary, do board members take action to improve the quality of information the board receives if this will help improve scrutiny and decision making?
24. Do board members take professional advice to inform decision making when it is sensible and appropriate to do so?
25. Is decision making transparent?
26. Has the board decided to publish the minutes of board meetings, or make them freely available on request? What were the reasons for the decision taken?
27. Has the board decided to make reports and other information freely available on request, to show how it arrived at major decisions?
28. Does the board apply clear and reasonable criteria if there are circumstances in which it is not possible to make minutes, reports and other information available?
29. Does the board have an up-to-date strategic plan, operating plan, risk management plan, development plan, business continuity and disaster recovery plans and budget?

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30. How effective is your approach to planning and performance management in helping the board set targets and monitor performance in achieving them?
31. As a board member, do you have sufficient information about what participants and customers think about the quality of the services and activities the organisation provides? How do you use this information in your planning and in your decisions about how to improve quality?
32. What range of information do you have about the organisation's performance and costs? How well does the board use this information when planning and making decisions?
33. How well does the board understand performance and costs compared with similar organisations?
34. What was the board's main focus in the last 12 months? Has that changed?
35. How are decisions implemented and monitored?
36. How does the organisation identify improvements required to better achieve its objectives?
37. How is impact measured, monitored and reported?
38. How does the board seek to verify information presented to it?
39. How fully integrated are performance reports to reflect progress against legal and regulatory/funder, financial, strategic and other requirements?
40. Does the organisation attract and retain competent and motivated people?
41. Are training and development opportunities for staff and volunteers budgeted for?
42. Do staff and volunteers work together effectively?
43. Does the board look at trends over time and take action to improve poor performance?
44. Does the board benchmark performance against its peers? Are the organisation's services and activities regularly evaluated?
45. Does the board monitor quarterly:
 - financial performance against budget;
 - operational and service standards against target;
 - development and capital expenditure against budget;
 - forecast cash flow?

I. Sustainability

1. What process does the board use to agree operational plans that are both effective and sustainable?
2. How long ago was the reserves policy reviewed and/or revised by the board to ensure it still fits with the organisation's aims and plans?
3. How much pressure can the organisation's cash flow take before further decisions will need to be taken regarding activities and the business model?
4. How does the board ensure that agreed plans are still effective when the operating environment changes?

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5. What circumstances must be in place to trigger a review of the business model?
6. Has the organisation had to cope with a sudden loss of a major income stream? How was this handled?

J. Reporting

1. How involved is the board in producing and agreeing the annual report?
2. What is the form of the relationship between the board and the external auditor or independent examiner?
3. How would an interested stakeholder find the annual report, and other reports about the success and failures of the organisation?
4. Where appropriate, does the organisation make its remuneration arrangements available to stakeholders in a clear and transparent manner?

K. Internal control

1. Do you have systems for internal control that are tailored to the risks the organisation faces?
2. Is internal audit carried out effectively? Do you have, or need, an audit committee?
3. Does the board review the effectiveness of internal controls and monitor what action is taken to make any improvements needed?
4. Do you publish a statement by the board in your annual accounts about the effectiveness of internal controls?
5. What aspects of the organisation's activities are subject to formal and agreed internal control policies and activities?
6. When was the last time control and assurance systems identified anomalies in the organisation's activities? How were they corrected?
7. What impact does analysis of income streams have on the organisation's risk register?

L. Stakeholder relations

1. Is the role of the membership understood and their involvement regularly obtained?
2. How would you characterise the relationship between the board and the organisation's members?
3. Is the organisation open to people with diverse views, opinions and experiences? Does the organisation as a whole reflect the communities it seeks to serve?
4. When conflicts arise, are they generally acknowledged and dealt with in an open, positive manner?
5. Is there a protocol for members, staff, volunteers and participants to influence decision making in an appropriate manner?

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6. Are relationships among board members, staff, volunteers and participants/customers characterised by openness, trust and mutual respect?
7. Has the board approved policies/strategies for dealing with media, government, and other stakeholders?
8. How effective is your approach to consulting and informing members, participants and customers about major decisions that affect them? What do these groups think about that approach?
9. How do you involve the membership in your planning process? Are members clear about what your objectives and priorities mean for their areas of work?
10. Do you know what issues are of greatest interest to stakeholders and their preferred ways of working with the organisation? How do you reflect those views and preferences in your approach to managing services or activities and making improvements?
11. How do you involve employees in your planning process? Are employees clear about what your objectives and priorities mean for their areas of work? How well do you manage and support the performance of employees, based on organisational goals and priorities?
12. How do you involve participants/athletes in your planning process? Are they clear about what your objectives and priorities mean for them?
13. What impact has stakeholder involvement had on the governance of the organisation? What changes has it effected?
14. Does the organisation meet all legal and contractual obligations to provide information to a range of stakeholders?
15. Is the annual report published and widely available to stakeholders?
16. Is information about board meetings publicly available?
17. Are requests for information met positively, with any reasons for not disclosing information detailed in accordance with a written policy?
18. What are the biggest interests of your key stakeholders (top 3)?
19. Which are the key relationships and behaviours (internal and external) that are required for the organisation to achieve its objectives?
20. When was the stakeholder engagement policy reviewed? What happened as a result of that review?
21. How frequently does the board, or individual board members, formally engage with members and/or stakeholders about the organisation's success, challenges and future?
22. Does the board receive regular reports on both positive and negative feedback from all stakeholders? How is this feedback incorporated into decision making?
23. What were the broad findings of the most recent participant/customer and/or staff/volunteer feedback survey? What changed as a consequence?
24. Are there effective systems in place for protecting anyone raising issues of concern under the whistleblowing procedure?

Specimen board evaluation questions

Of the areas covered in the evaluation questions which, in your opinion, require the most attention? Please rank from 1–12, with 1 being the highest priority.

Issue	Ranking
Organisational purpose	
Leadership	
Strategy	
Risk	
Board capability	
Board behaviours	
Board development and support	
Delivery	
Sustainability	
Reporting	
Internal control	
Stakeholder relations	

