

Exploring the time it takes to chair a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)

Interim research report
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National Governance Association

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Foreword

As a membership organisation that takes care to listen to those governing England's state schools and to use evidence wherever available, the National Governance Association (NGA) has been hugely conscious of the expectations placed on volunteers, not just in terms of legal responsibilities, but also in terms of their time.

For many years NGA has suggested that governing a school – unless there are exceptional circumstances – should be possible within 10-20 days per year, a benchmark I adopted from charity trusteeship. However, our annual governance surveys have shown for some time that this is not in fact the case for many volunteers, particularly those that chair the governing board, and that recruiting and retaining governors and trustees is becoming harder. My preconception of the average time it takes to govern was being questioned and we needed to arm ourselves with some up-to-date and sector specific evidence.

In 2016, our first time to chair research report found that there was much variability in the hours chairs of single schools were giving, and I used those findings to improve the advice we give to chairs on making the role sustainable. Surely, it would not be healthy or sustainable if only those without the commitment of a paid job were able to volunteer to chair? Since then we have also been lobbying the Department for Education to take the issue of volunteer workload seriously. We are pleased that the topic of teacher workload has been recognised by the government, but we suggest a similar emphasis should be afforded to governance workload as well.

Last year we began our series of multi academy trust (MAT) governance case studies, which once again highlighted just how much time the chairs of those trusts were donating, and time to chair mark-two was conceived: the first analysis of the time it takes to chair a MAT. This interim report is only half way through the research, but the insights are worth sharing. In particular, the issues which struck me:

- 1 Chairing a MAT takes, on average, 30 hours a month or 50 days a year; significantly more than the 20 days a year maximum NGA has previously cited.
- 2 Chairs of MATs across the whole academy sector are giving time worth the equivalent of between £7 million and £9 million a year.
- 3 Almost three-quarters of chairs of MAT boards were also a member of the trust and spending not inconsiderable time on that function (17 hours a year): this is unlikely to be good practice.
- 4 Half of the trust board chairs also governed at academy level; this again is not necessarily good governance and also added a further considerable time commitment, an average of over 100 hours a year.
- 5 Chairs who were retired from their own employment were likely to spend more time governing, especially in terms of meeting with executives.
- 6 The size of the trust was not the most significant factor in determining the quantity of the time it takes to chair a MAT; yet there are some interesting differences in terms of the duties and responsibilities undertaken by chairs of larger and smaller MATs which will need exploring further.
- 7 Women are not equally represented as chairs of MAT boards; this confirms the results of our annual governance survey, which I reported in more detail

in a blog (<https://bit.ly/2G9940q>). NGA has also been running the *Everyone on Board* campaign to improve diversity, and this has the support of Academy Ambassadors which recruits volunteers to MAT boards.

- 8 Respondents were split on the question for the need for remuneration, with just under one third (31.2%) supporting the proposition that MAT chairs should be paid. This was despite the fact many (63.4%) felt it was not possible to work full-time while chairing a MAT.

This research confirms, more than ever, the significant contributions made by those governing our state schools for no monetary reward. This needs wider recognition, alongside a more frank conversation about trustee and governor workload.

This interim report raises as many questions as answers; Tom Fellows, NGA's Research Manager, will be carrying out further interviews with chairs of MATs to explore some of the findings in more detail, with the aim of first unravelling what is currently carried out by chairs of MATs and why, but with the ultimate goal of helping to make this important leadership role both more effective and sustainable.

As always, we salute those volunteers who are giving so much to support our pupils' education. Thank you so very much to those chairs who made the time to contribute to this research (we appreciate the irony) and for what you do on a week-by-week basis to support academy trusts across England.



Emma Knights
Chief Executive
National Governance Association

Introduction

This interim report covers the findings from part one of a study exploring the time it takes to chair a multi academy trust (MAT).

NGA has for some time suggested that those governing should spend between 10 to 20 days a year on governance (NGA, 2018a). This is based on the understanding that those spending less than 10 days a year on governance were unlikely to be fulfilling their functions, and those spending more than 20 hours on governance were likely to be in unsustainable positions and were possibly overstepping the governance role. However, as in previous years, the school governance in 2018 survey (NGA/Tes, 2018) found that, compared to others on the governing board, chairs were the most likely to report that they could not manage their responsibilities within this timeframe. Similarly, a 2014 study of 7,713 school governors, conducted in collaboration with NGA, highlighted that 65% of chairs spent more than 17 hours a month on governance responsibilities (James et al., 2014).

Exploring these themes in more detail, NGA (Cotgrave, 2016) carried out a research project exploring the time it takes to chair in a school setting. This research consisted of 19 telephone interviews and an analysis of 31 dairies kept by chairs over a four week period. The results revealed that chairs were undertaking a considerable and time exhaustive number of necessary activities. This included reviewing the school strategy, discussing strategic issues with the headteacher, considering joining or forming a group of schools, monitoring educational performance, analysing school performance data and reviewing financial information. Chairs involved in NGA's study also reported spending a significant amount of time preparing for meetings, communicating with others on the trust board, and keeping up-to-date with education policy.

While NGA's (Cotgrave, 2016) study found that governing in a school setting is a big time commitment, this previous research focused almost exclusively on the time it takes to chair a standalone school; with a large amount of variability between respondents. NGA (Cotgrave, 2016) found that the lowest amount of time spent on governance reported by a chair was 7 hours and 10 minutes over a four week period, whereas the highest amount of time spent on governance was 59 hours and 20 minutes over four weeks. Part of this was due to some chairs at the top end of the time spectrum undertaking "exceptional tasks", however there was also considerable variability in the amount of time spent chairing depending on whether respondents reported undertaking some form of paid employment.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that those governing in MATs are being asked to do more than those governing in schools operating under other structures (NGA, 2018a). While MAT trustees still carry out the same core functions of governance as those in other settings (NCTL, 2015: 4), a MAT board is responsible for strategic oversight of between two and sixty-plus schools. This means that the trust board is responsible for overseeing larger budgets and more pupils than those governing in other school settings. MAT boards also have more complicated decisions to make in terms of what is delegated to academy level as well as understanding the organisation they govern. In many cases, trustees must fulfill their core functions without first-hand experience of the schools they oversee and their communities.

In the Chair's Handbook (NGA, 2018a), NGA has published tips for how to make the role of chairing more manageable. This includes putting into place mechanisms to split up responsibilities amongst other trustees and/or adopting a co-chair model. Furthermore, MAT trustees can and usually do delegate responsibilities to those governing at a local

level (NGA/Tes, 2018; NCTL, 2015). Indeed, over half of all MATs who responded to the school governance in 2018 survey (NGA/Tes, 2018) delegated responsibility to those at a local level for: overseeing progress and attainment (91% of respondents), monitoring key strategic priorities (71% of respondents), engaging with stakeholders (66% of respondents), determining policies at a school level (63% of respondents), managing budgets (60% of respondents), and appraising the head of school (57% of respondents). This aside, the evidence emerging from NGA's MAT case-study series, as well as evidence from NGA's extensive consultancy work, suggests that chairing a MAT trust board is still a significantly bigger commitment than other governance roles across the school sector (NGA, 2018b).

In this context, NGA, and many in the wider sector (Pain, 2017), agree that further research is needed to ensure that the education sector is clear and transparent about the time commitment associated with chairing a MAT and to provide clarity for those thinking about chairing a MAT board in the future. Furthermore, only 36% of respondents to the school governance in 2018 survey who were not currently chairing would consider doing so in the future (NGA/Tes, 2018). For some of these respondents, the time commitment was a factor which made the role seem impossible. As a result, there is a legitimate concern that chairing a MAT may be seen as an unmanageable role and this will have an impact on future succession (NGA, 2019).

Methodology

NGA put together a research project to answer the following research questions:

- 1 What are the time commitments and responsibilities associated with chairing a MAT?
- 2 What practical steps can chairs of MAT boards put in place to make their role more manageable?

A mixed-method approach was used to answer these questions, with the research being carried out sequentially, combining a survey of chairs of trustees (phase one) with in-depth follow-up interviews (phase two).

Phase one of the study, which is reported here, was a survey of 93 chairs of MATs in England. The original aim was to use the *Open academies and academy projects in development* (DfE, 2018) data as a sampling frame and source a stratified-random sample in order to generalise to the whole population of MAT chairs (Bryman, 2012). However, following the pilot phase, the initial response rate was below expected levels, partly due to the fact that much of the contact information available for MATs relied upon non-specific email addresses. As such, rather than taking a sample of the population, all MATs in England (defined as a formal group of academies with two or more schools) were contacted via email. Mailchimp, an online platform for sending out bulk email, was used to distribute the email to the target population.

Following an initial pilot (involving a small selection of chairs), the questionnaire was administered via an online survey tool, SmartSurvey, and covered respondents work and social commitments, the time it took them to chair their MAT (focusing on the last twelve months in particular), and the steps respondents have taken to make the time commitment more manageable. All respondents were required to give informed consent, no incentives were offered or coercion used to recruit participants, and answers provided were anonymised so as not to reveal respondents' identity.

Once the survey closed, quantitative analysis tool SPSS was used to clean and analyse the data. This involved: removing duplicate entries (i.e. where a respondent had listed attendance at academy committees under two different sections of the survey); recoding variables to a standard metric (this was the time it took to chair over a one year period); and using box-plots and histograms to spot outliers and errors. Once cleaned, descriptive statistics were generated, and both parametric and non-parametric testing performed on the dataset, as reported on the following pages.

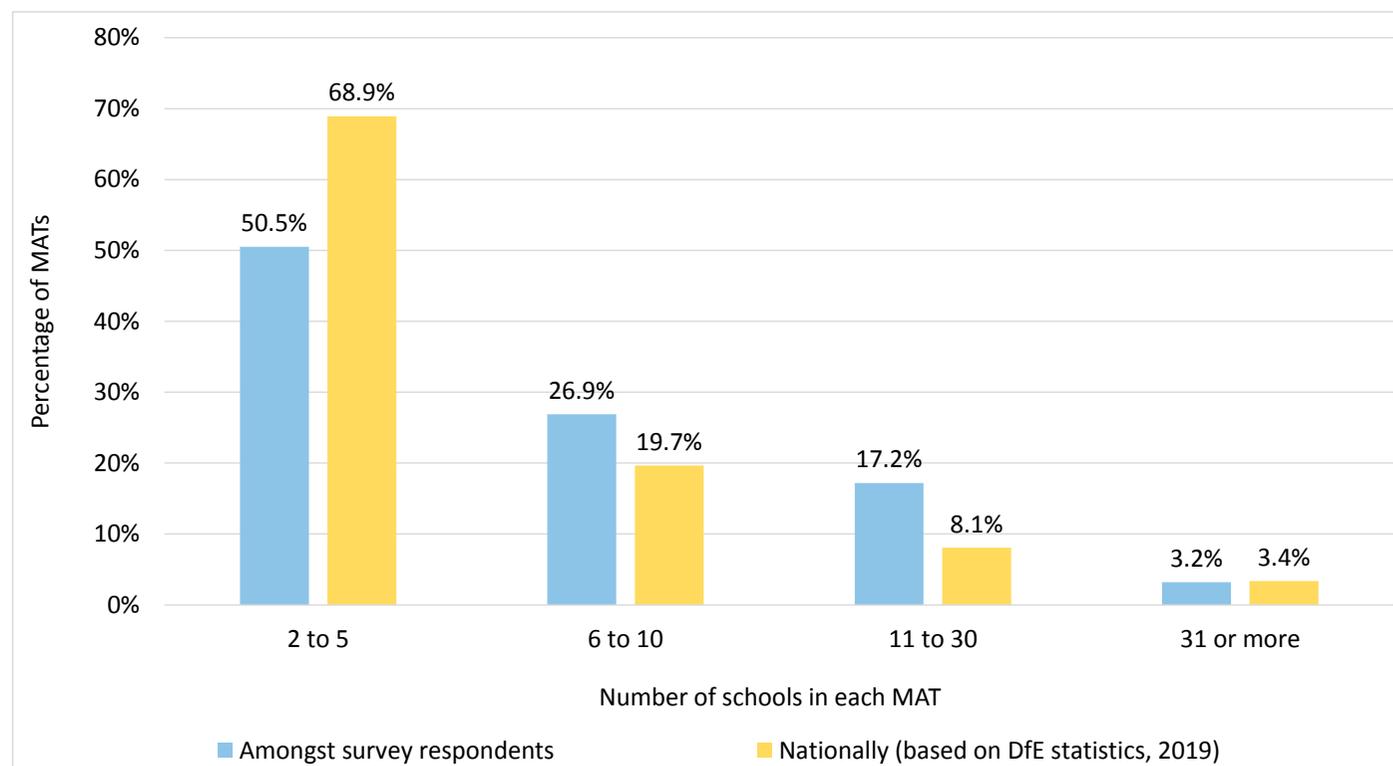


Demographics of survey respondents

In total, 93 chairs of MATs completed the survey. The data shows a good spread of respondents across all sizes of MAT. However, as shown in [figure one](#), compared to the national average (DfE, 2019), medium to large MATs were slightly over-represented in the sample.

Looking at the demographics of survey respondents, the mean age was 60.7 years old, with the youngest chair being 37 and the oldest being 78. The majority of respondents (66.7%) identified as male, with only 33.3% reporting as female. Furthermore, all but one respondent identified as white and only one individual reported having a disability.

Figure one: Comparing the size of MATs that took part in this research with the size of MATs across England.

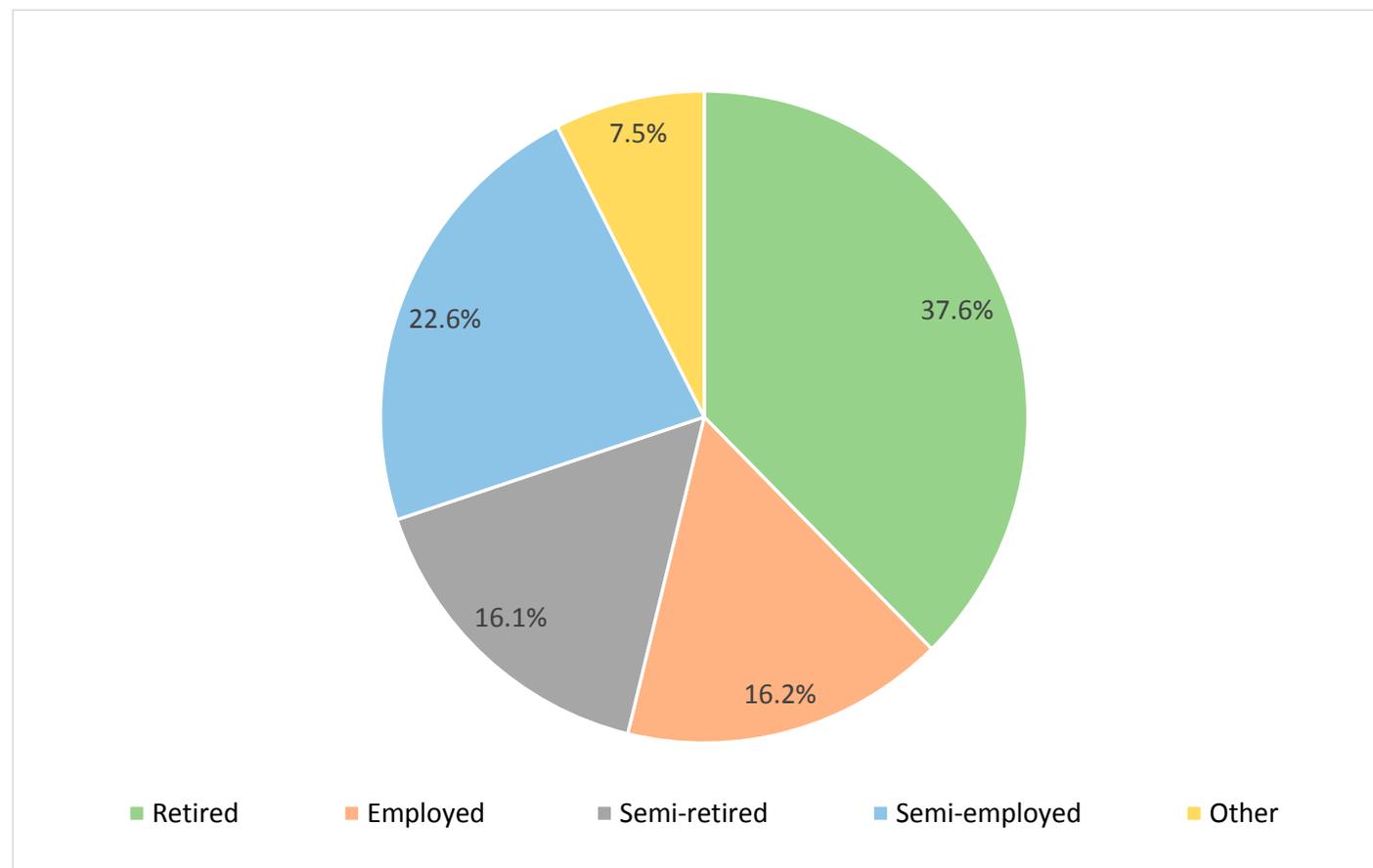


Respondents' working arrangements

Working arrangements of respondents are summarised in [figure two a and b](#).¹ While 53.8% chose not to, or did not have, a salary to report, 10.8% reported earning between zero and £30,000, 18.3% reported earning between £30,001 and £60,000, 4.4% reported earning between £60,001 and £90,000, and 12.9% reported earning over £90,000.

Of those that reported being currently employed, 15.0% outlined that their employer gave them paid time off for governance duties, 5.7% outlined that their employer gave them unpaid time off, 11.3% had not asked for time off and 7.5% had not needed to ask for time off. However, of those that worked, 92.5% agreed or strongly agreed that they had a flexible working pattern which allowed them to work around their governance duties.

Figure two a: Breakdown of respondents working arrangements based on their employment status.



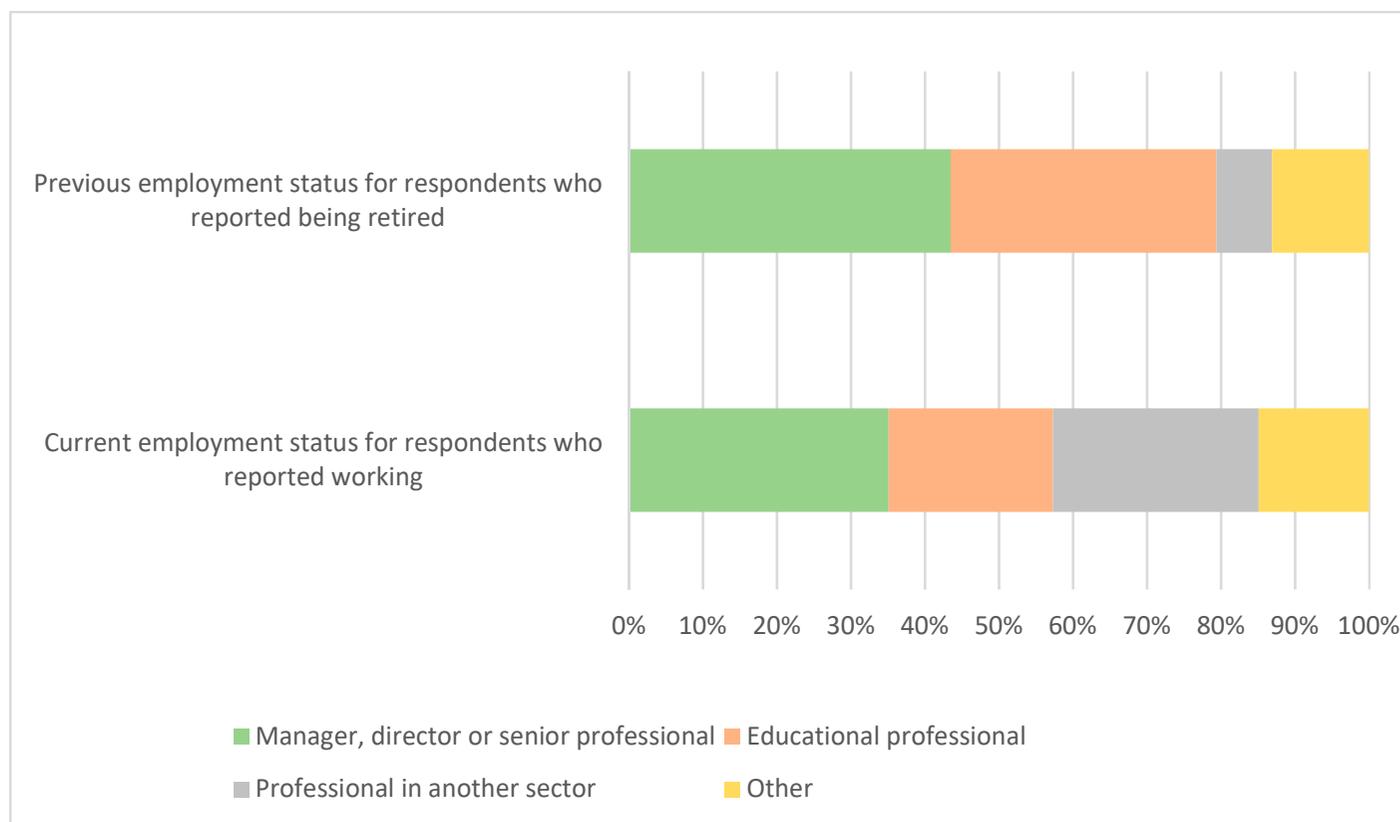
1. In terms of other responses not included in the pie charts, respondents either reported that they would "rather not say" what they previously/currently did for work, had a background in technical, professional or administrative work, or offered a free text response which included things like "owning a business" or "chairing a company".

Respondents' working arrangements

Part of the reason for this flexibility was that a number of respondents reported that they were either self-employed (and therefore could decide their own working arrangements) or worked for an education organisation where there was overlap between being a trustee and their working duties (i.e. working for a diocese or a local authority). Of those that worked in the public sector, all respondents noted that their employer was supportive of their decision to be a chair of a trust board as did 90.6% of private sector employees.

Finally, the majority of participants outlined that their work helped them with governance duties. The data shows that: 58.5% agreed or strongly agreed that their work helped them understand education policy and developments; 77.4% agreed or strongly agreed that their work helped them understand governance; and 86.8% agreed or strongly agreed that their work helped them think strategically.

Figure two b: Occupation of respondents currently and previously employed.

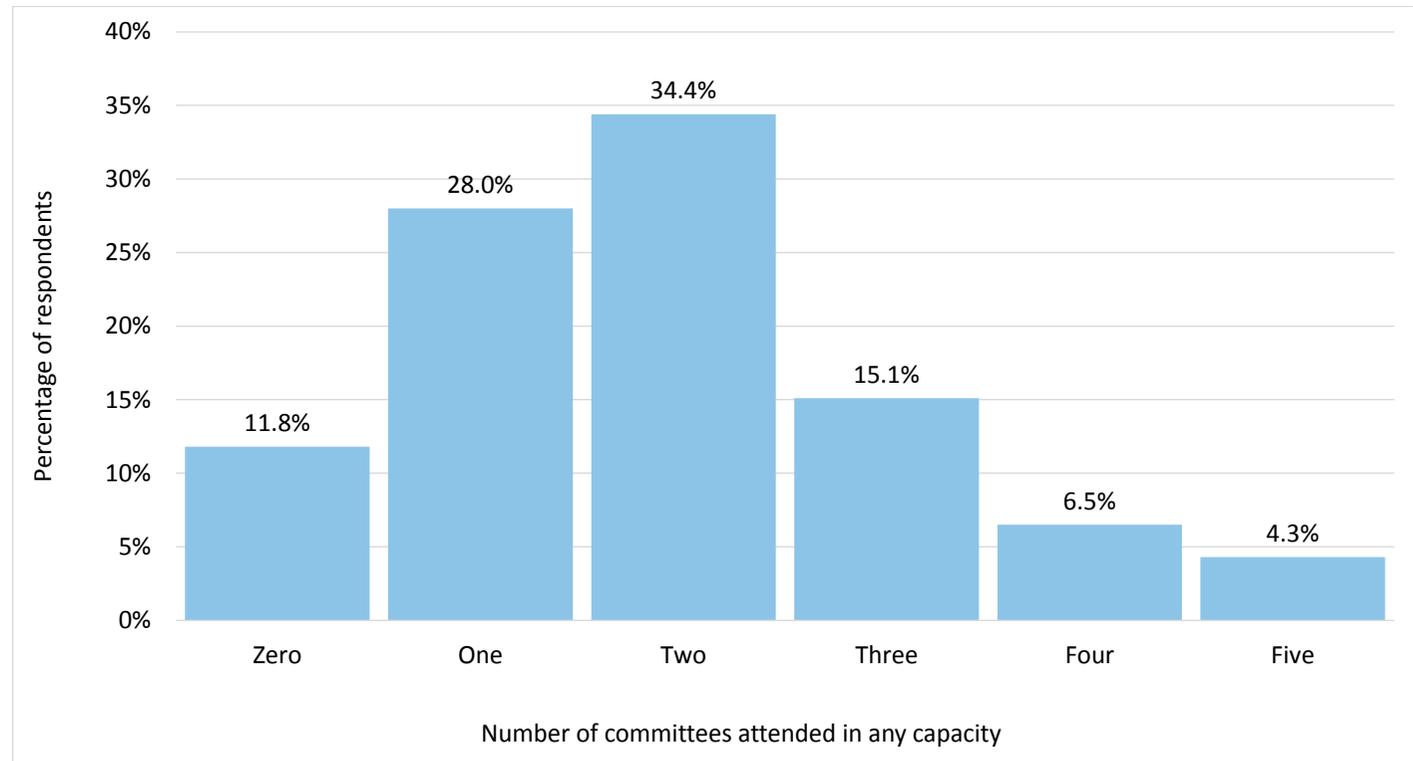


How are chairs spending their time?

Some respondents carried out more duties than others. Aside from attending full trust board meetings, which all respondents of course did, there was a variety of practice in terms of how many, and which, additional duties respondents took on above and beyond this.

Looking firstly at committee responsibilities, as reported in **figure three**, 81.7% of respondents reported sitting on at least one committee of the trust board. Looking at the top three committees attended, 46.2% of respondents reported attending a committee relating to finance, 29.0% reported attending a committee relating to audit, and 20.4% reported attending a committee relating to academic standards. Across all of the committees, respondents reported chairing committees in nearly a quarter of all cases (24.9%), with just over half (52.9%) attending but not chairing committee meetings. Overall, respondents were most likely to chair committees relating to finance.

Figure three: Showing the proportion of respondents who attended 0- 5 committees in any capacity.



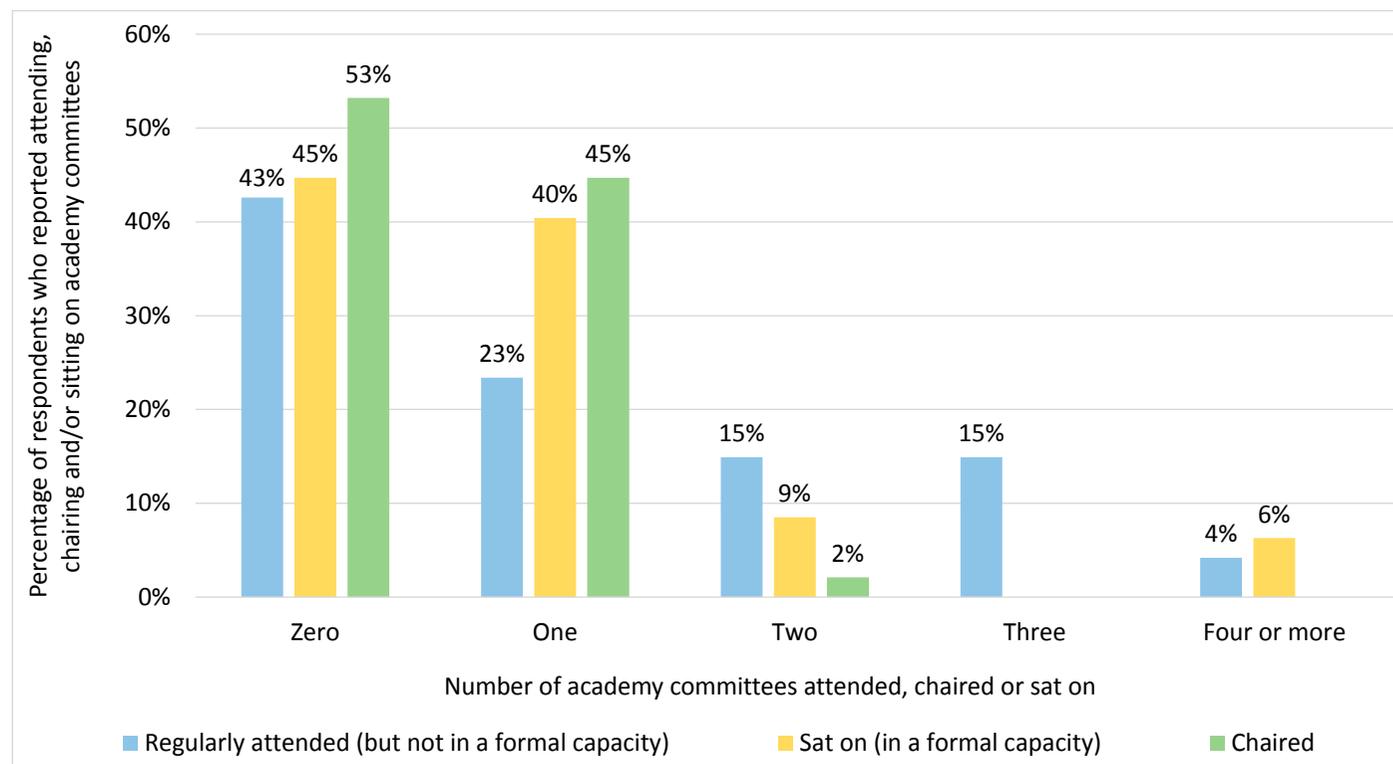
How are chairs spending their time?

The data also shows that 47.3% reported spending time on the work of academy committees, which many trusts call local governing boards or sometimes academy councils.² As well as attending the meetings, these duties included: reviewing the agenda, minutes, papers and other documents; having discussions with various individuals, including clerks, headteachers and executive leaders; and following-up on actions post meeting. Of those that reported spending time on academy committee duties, **figure four** offers a breakdown of the number of academy committees' respondents sat on, attended or chaired.

In addition, 73.1% also reported being members in their MAT. Less than half of respondents (40.9%) were both members and attended academy committees in some capacity.

When asked why chairs attended governance meetings other than the board of trustees, respondents reported that it was a way to communicate between the different layers of governance and management. Furthermore, they outlined that it was important for the chair to understand what is going on across the trust, to ensure that governance is operating effectively, and to offer their particular expertise in different settings. As one respondent said, they sit on other tiers of governance "to inform, listen, and be kept in touch".

Figure four: Showing those respondents who reported spending time on academy committee duties and a breakdown of how many academy committees they observed, attended or chaired.

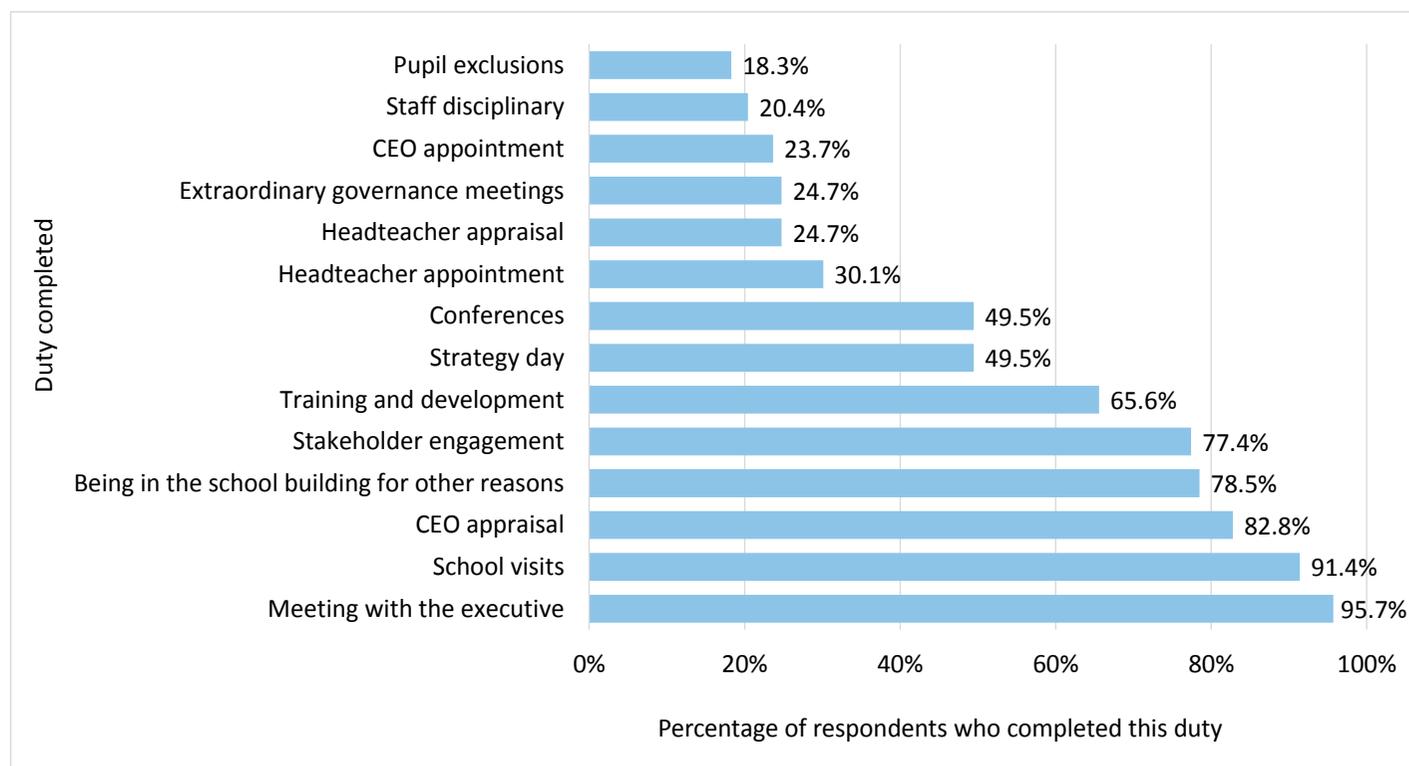


2. While 50.5% of respondents reported sitting on, attending or chairing an academy committee, several respondents gave a partial survey response. This means that only 47.3% of respondents reported spending any time completing academy committee duties.

How are chairs spending their time?

Beyond attending governance meetings, respondents also reported a number of other duties they completed within the past twelve months. Looking at the most common activities listed in [figure five](#), almost all respondents (96%) had spent time meeting with the executive (including the chief executive), visiting a school and appraising the chief executive. In contrast, less than a quarter had participated in pupil exclusions, staff disciplinary panels and chief executive appointments.

Figure five: Percentage of respondents who undertook the following duties within the past twelve months.



How long does it take to chair a MAT?

Looking across all of the responses, participants reported across a number of measures³ that it takes them, on average, 371.8 hours per year to chair their MAT. This is the equivalent of:

- 49.6 days per year (if a day is calculated as 7.5 hours, i.e. a “working day”);
- 123.9 hours per term;
- 31.0 hours per month; or
- Almost one (0.95) day per week.

To put this into perspective, this is the time equivalent of 21.4% of a full-time job.⁴ In comparison to other volunteering roles, the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2017) calculated that volunteers across England spent 83.1 hours per year on their volunteering duties.

Looking at the range, it is important to note that there is huge variance between the respondent who reported spending the least amount of time on governance duties and responsibilities (87 hours a year, or 1.7 hours a week) and the respondent who reported spending the most time on governance duties and responsibilities (1,248 hours a year, or 24 hours a week).

Value of the time given by chairs

Using the ONS’s (2017) conservative calculation that “volunteering [is] valued at £14.43 per hour, in line with market rates” then the average chair, in this study, offered £5,365 worth of time to school governance per year. With 1,144 MATs in England as of September 2018, this is the equivalent of £6,137,560 per year across the sector as a whole for the chair of MAT trustees’ time. Significantly, the ONS (2017) hourly rate is lower than the median salary reported by respondents, which was £30,001 – £40,000 per annum. If taking £30,001 and £40,000 per annum as an alternative measure of a MAT chair’s contribution, respondents donated between £6,420 and £8,560 of time to chairing their MAT. Extrapolating this to all chairs of MATs in England, this works out at between £7,344,720 and £9,792,640 worth of time given by chairs of MATs across England per year.

3. The variables included in the analysis included: The time it takes to travel, plan and prepare, attend and follow-up on: full trust board meetings; trust board committee meetings; academy committee meetings; and meetings of the members (if applicable to respondents). If applicable, the survey also explored respondent’s time over the last twelve months: appraising the chief executive/ headteachers, recruiting a new chief executive/ headteachers, carrying out training, attending conference events, attending staff disciplinary and pupil exclusion hearings, and attending extraordinary board meetings. Strategy days, meeting the executive, stakeholder engagement, school visits and being in the school building for other reasons were also taken into account.

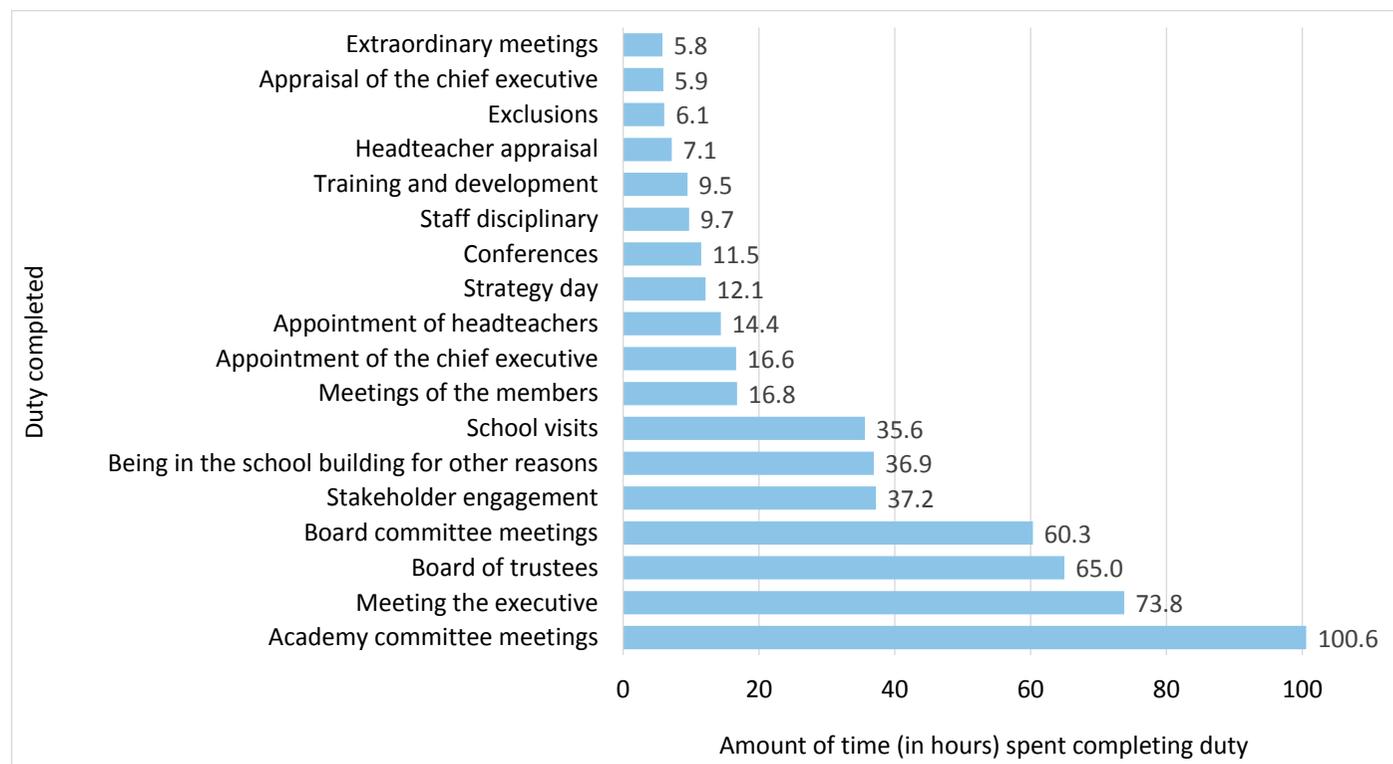
4. Based on the understanding that full-time workers (working 37.5 hours a week with 28 days statutory leave) spend 1,740 hours per year working.

How long does it take to chair a multi academy trust?

6.1 Time spent on different activities per year

Figure six shows the time it took respondents to carry out a series of governance responsibilities across a one year period. Looking at the most time consuming activity, those respondents that reported attending academy committee meetings spent a mean average of 100.6 hours per year on this duty. The second most time-consuming activity per year consisted of meeting with the executive team (including the chief executive), which took up an average of 73.8 hours for those respondents who completed this duty. Finally, planning/preparing for, travelling to, attending and following-up on full board of trustee meetings was the third most time-consuming activity annually. Over the course of a year, all respondents reported that they spent a mean average of 65.0 hours on this duty.

Figure six: Breakdown of time spent in one year by chairs carrying out the following duties.

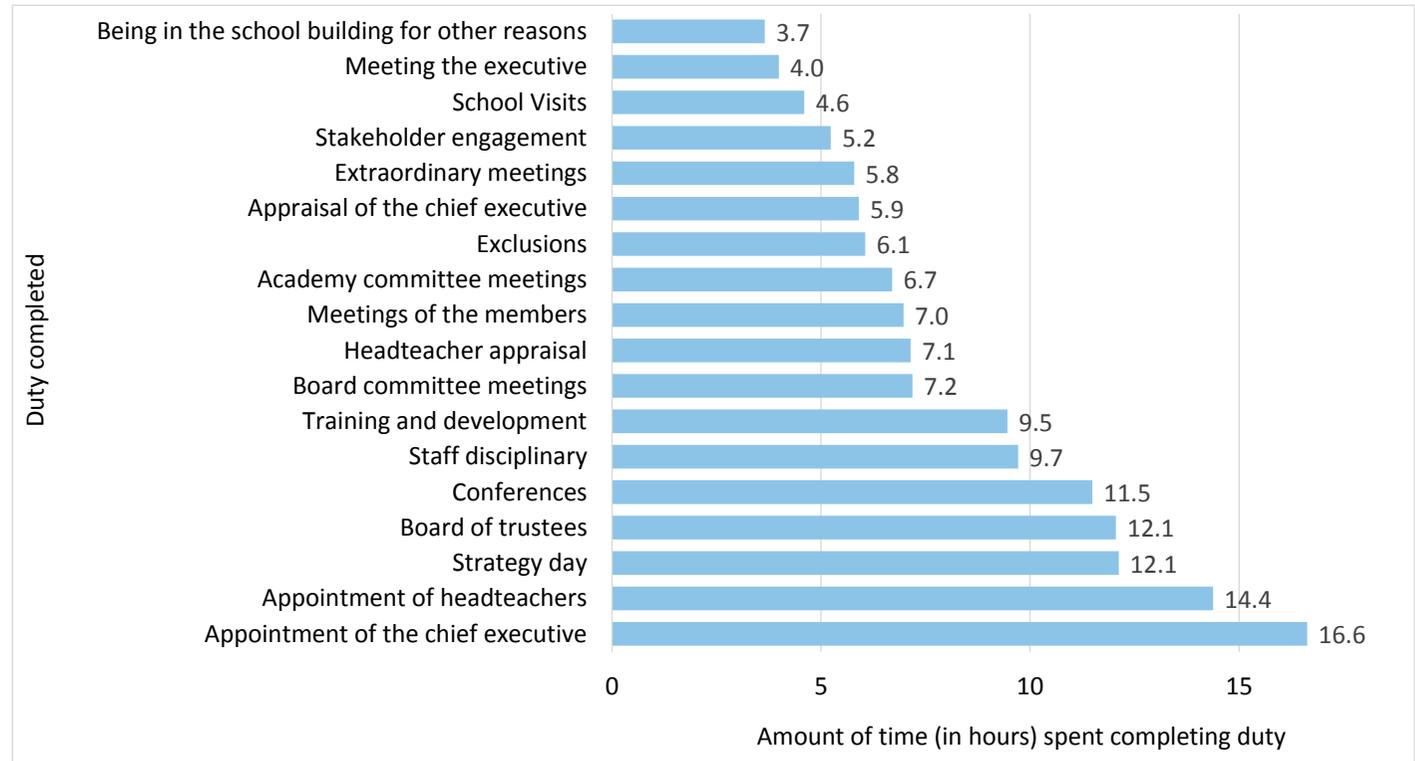


How long does it take to chair a multi academy trust?

6.2 Time it takes to carry out each MAT governance duty per occurrence

While **figure six** shows the time it takes to chair a MAT across a whole year, some duties are carried out more frequently than others. When each responsibility is taken as a standalone occurrence, **figure seven** shows that recruitment processes for a new chief executive or headteachers were the most time consuming activities – taking up, on average, 16.6 hours and 14.4 hours respectively per occurrence.

Figure seven: Breakdown of the average time taken by chairs to complete one episode of each duty.



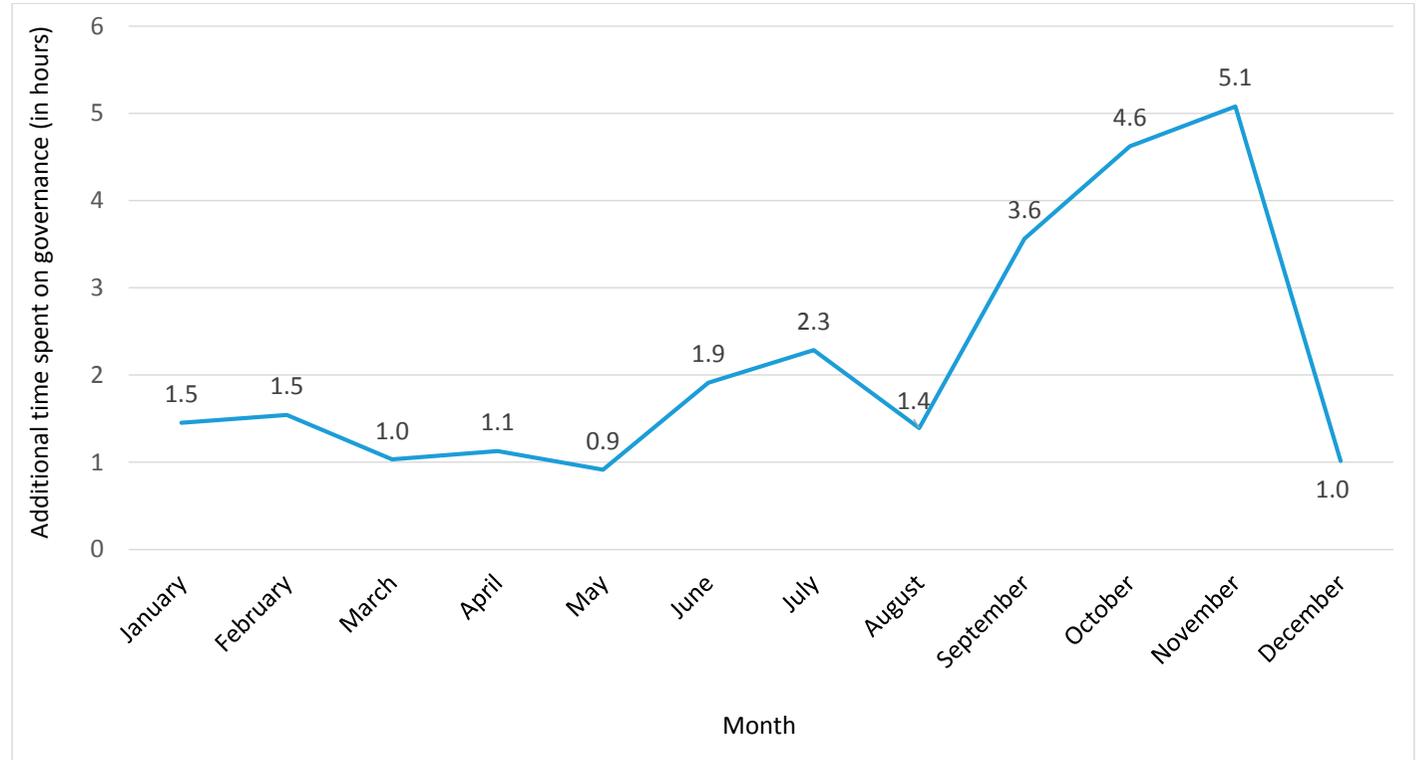
How long does it take to chair a multi academy trust?

6.3 Time it takes to chair a MAT per month

Some tasks were not carried out regularly, and not equally distributed across the academic year. The data shows that certain times of year were disproportionately busier for chairs of MATs (as shown in **figure eight**).

Across all responses, the busiest time for respondents was the autumn term. This can be largely attributed to chief executive and headteacher appraisals which commonly took place in the autumn term. The data shows that 68.4% of chairs appraised their chief executive in October or November, with 76% also completing headteacher appraisal at this time of year.

Figure eight: Showing the average amount of time (in hours per month) taken by respondents to complete additional tasks beyond the time taken to complete trust board, academy committee, trust board committee and member duties.



How long does it take to chair a multi academy trust?

6.4 The time it takes to chair a MAT per element

Actually carrying out each individual duty was the most time-consuming element, followed closely by planning and preparing for meetings and, finally, travelling. When asked to give more details on what respondents do in terms of planning and preparation, 75 respondents noted spending time on agreeing/discussing/planning the agenda for board meetings, 45 mentioned preparing/reading papers ahead of meetings, 44 noted reading and reviewing minutes of previous meetings, and 29 reported liaising/communicating with the clerk (note, some respondents did skip this question).

As outlined in [figure nine](#), respondents were also asked how much time they spend following up on actions from full trust board meetings, trust board committees, members meetings and academy committee meetings. Respondents reported that they spent, on average, 38.9 hours per year following up on actions raised when carrying out these duties.

Figure nine: Showing the yearly time spent (in hours) completing different elements of each activity, including travel time, time spent planning and preparing for meetings, time spent attending the meetings and time spent following-up on actions.

	Travelling (hrs)	Planning and Preparing (hrs)	Attending the meeting/ carrying out activity (hrs)	Follow-up (hrs)
Full governing board	6.6	24.8	15.9	17.9
Trust board committees	10.1	19.4	20.3	10.5
Meetings of the members	2.8	5.9	4.5	3.6
Academy committee meetings	16.4	31.3	31.3	21.6
Meeting with the executive	17.5	21.3	33.5	~
School visits	10.1	8.4	17.1	~
Visiting school building for other reasons	9.9	9.5	17.6	~
Stakeholder engagement	11.4	9.4	16.4	~

N.B. The ~ denotes where data was not collected as part of the survey.

What makes a difference to the time it takes to chair a MAT?

Beyond the descriptive statistics reported above, a number of hypotheses were tested to explore what factors influence the time it takes to chair a MAT. Specifically, these hypotheses revolved around:

- whether working fewer hours as part of a paid role influenced how much time respondents spent chairing their MAT
- whether those who took on additional governance responsibilities beyond chairing the trust board spent more time on governance
- whether those in larger trusts, or in trusts with a high number of schools in Ofsted categories, spent more time chairing their MAT.

The terms “statistically significant” and “statistically insignificant” are used throughout this section. This is because, as this study used a sample, rather than looking at all MATs in England, statistical testing was carried out to assess the chances of a particular finding being present amongst the general population of MATs.⁵ Phase two will seek to uncover some of the explanations for these findings.

7.1 Those who attend academy committees spend significantly longer on governance duties

The 47.3% of respondents who reported spending time carrying out academy committee duties spent, on average, 426.4 hours per year in total on governance. This is compared to those who did not carry out duties for academy committees who spent, on average, 322.7 hours on governance. The difference between those who did ($M = 426.4$, $SD = 198.5$) and those who did not ($M = 322.7$, $SD = 204.4$) spend time on academy committee duties was statistically significant; $t(91) = 2.477$, $p = 0.015$.

Similarly, those respondents who reported spending time on member duties spent an additional 58.4 hours on governance per year compared to those who did not report spending any time on member duties (387.5 hours compared to 329.1 hours). However, this finding was statistically insignificant; $t(91) = 1.208$, $p = 0.230$.

5. In this study, a confidence threshold of 95% was used, which is a fairly standard measure in social research. This means that, if a finding is found to be “statistically significant”, there is a very high chance that, if an identical study was carried out looking at all MATs in England, the same finding would be revealed. In this sense, statistical significance testing allows the researcher to make inferences about a given population based on relatively small number of cases.

The “strength” of statistical significance is measured as a p-value. For the purposes of this study, a p-value of between 0.00 - 0.05 means that a finding is statistically significant. The smaller the p-value the greater the strength of the statistical significance.

What makes a difference to the time it takes to chair a MAT?

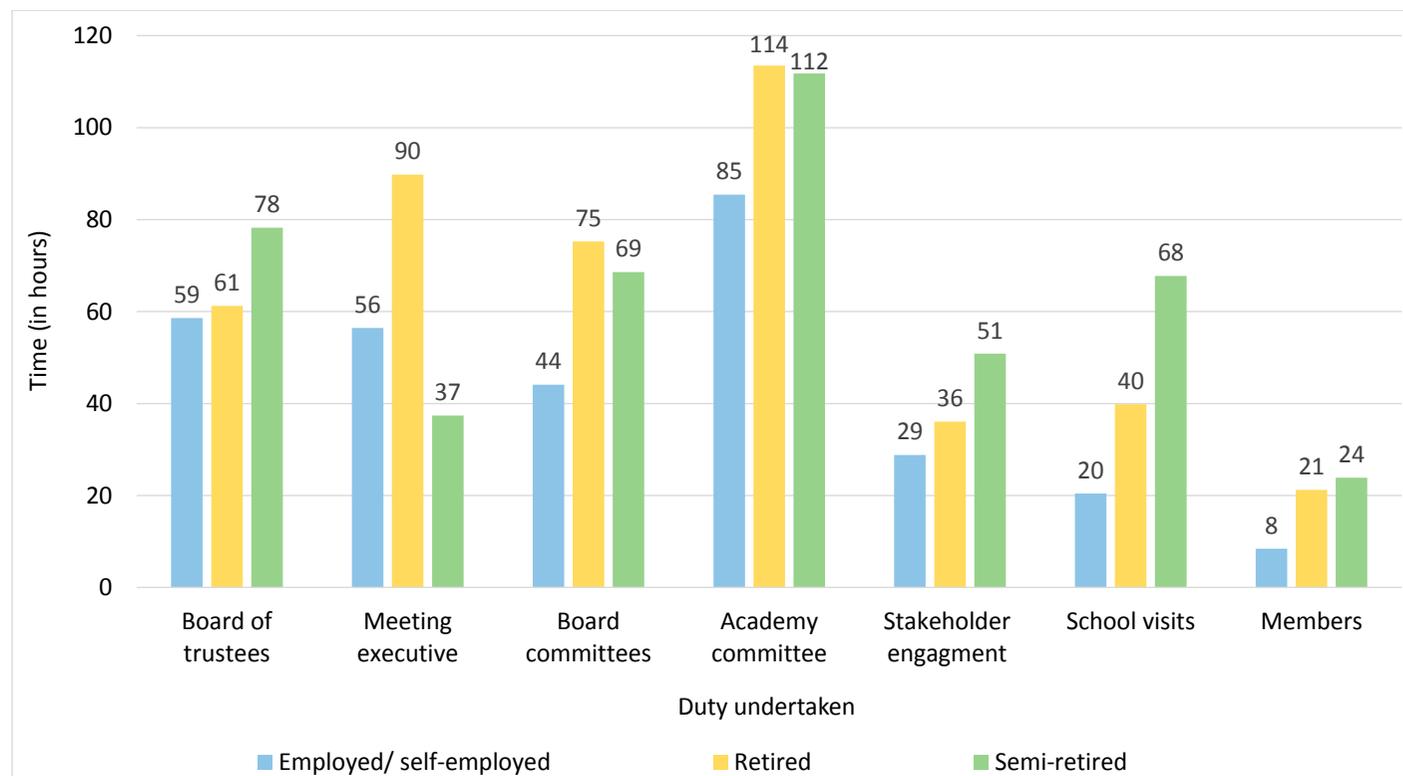
7.2 Retirees spend significantly more time on chairing duties

The data shows that those who reported being semi-retired or retired, compared to those who reported being employed or self-employed, spent longer on governance duties compared to those who reported being either employed or self-employed. The biggest differences were in the time spent with executives.

Employed or self-employed respondents reported spending, on average, 291.3 hours on governance a year (or 5.6 hours per week) compared to retired respondents (419.0 hours per year, or 8.1 hours a week) and semi-retired respondents (442.7 hours per year, or 8.5 hours a week). Exploring this further, there was a statistically significant difference between the time employed/self-employed respondents ($M = 291.3$, $SD = 147.8$) spent on governance compared to retired respondents ($M = 419.0$, $SD = 178.8$); $t(69) = -3.283$, $p = 0.02$. This suggesting that there is an association between the time spent on governance as a MAT chair and whether the individual concerned is employed/self-employed or retired.

In addition, **figure ten** shows that MAT chairs who reported to be employed or self-employed spent less time on a large number of commonly occurring duties. There also appears to be an interesting difference between how semi-retired and retired

Figure ten: Hours spent completing each duty per year, broken down as to whether respondents were employed/self-employed, retired or semi-retired.



What makes a difference to the time it takes to chair a MAT?

respondents chose to distribute their time. Based on a series of one-way ANOVAs, there is a statistically significant difference between the amount of time spent on member duties ($F(2, 83) = 3.940, p = 0.025$), school visits ($F(2, 77) = 3.612, p = 0.032$) and trust board committees ($F(2, 67) = 3.341, p = 0.041$) across these groups.

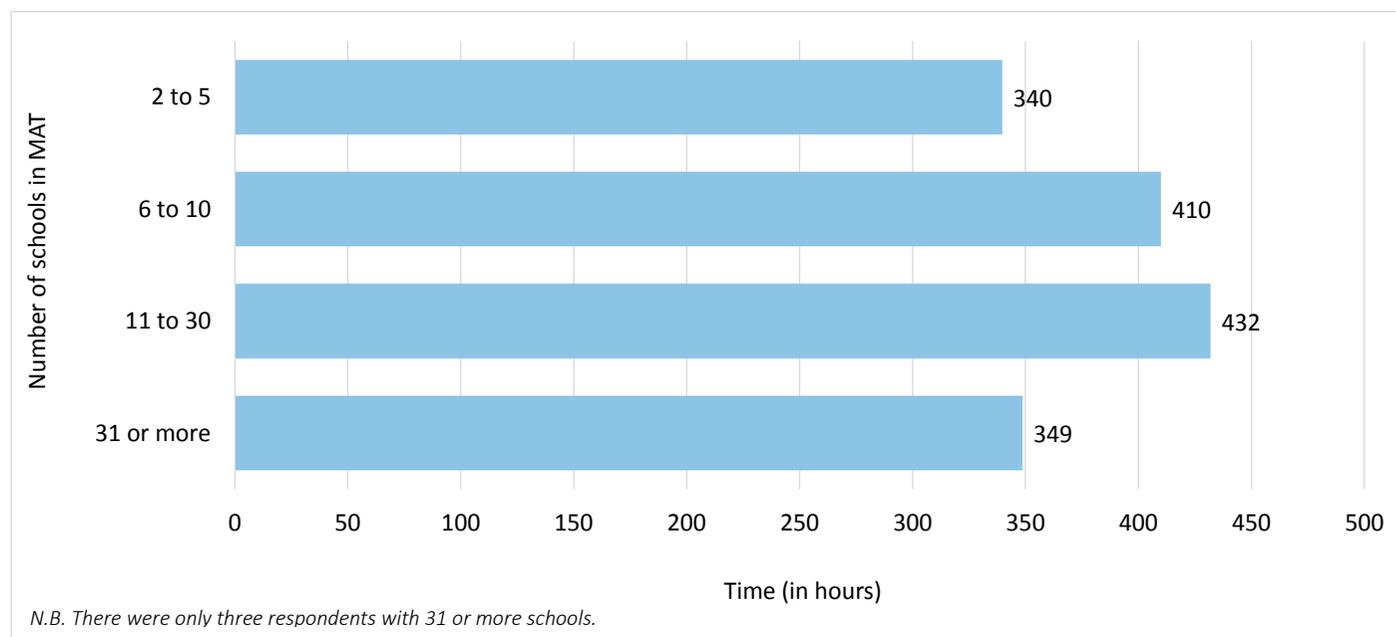
7.3 Time spent chairing varies depending on MAT size

Considering the impact of MAT size, of those respondents who were in MATs which had grown while they were chair, 83.1% reported that the role had become more time consuming (compared to 16.9% who reported that the time commitment had remained the same). This is somewhat reflected in the data, shown in **figure eleven**.

Exploring this in more detail, **figure twelve** shows that, whereas the time dedicated to trust board meetings remained consistent regardless of the size of the MAT, there was an increase in the amount of time chairs of MATs with 11 to 30 schools dedicated to board committees and school visits, but a decrease in the amount of time they spent on academy committee duties.

Looking across all of these categories, based on a series of one way ANOVAs the only statistically significant difference between the amount of time chairs spent on governance duties depending on MAT size was the time

Figure eleven: Average amount of time spent on chairing per year, broken down by number of schools in a MAT.



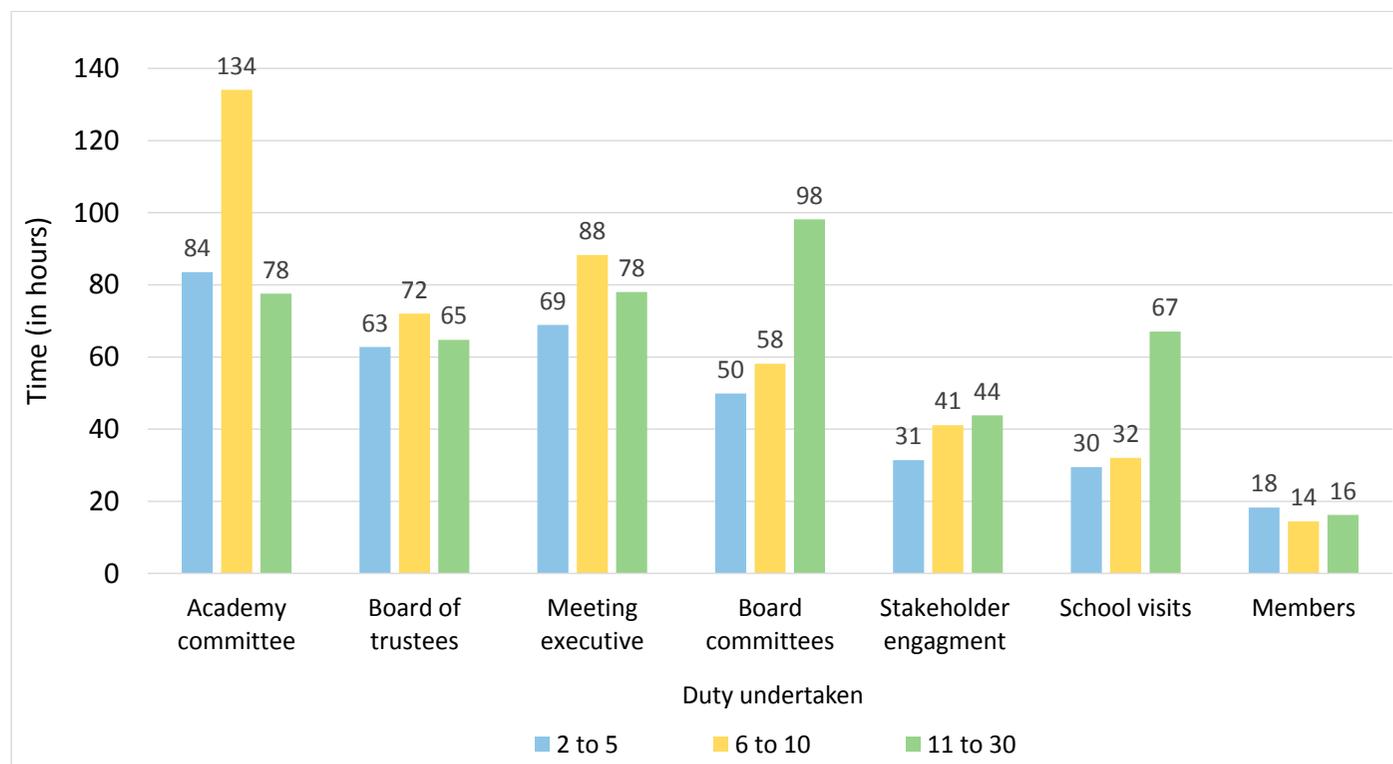
What makes a difference to the time it takes to chair a MAT?

respondents spent on trust board committee duties ($F(2, 68) = 5.027, p = 0.009$). This means that, for the other duties covered in **figure twelve**, these findings cannot be generalised to all MATs across England. This is further compounded by small sample sizes for some of these categories.

7.4 There is no generalisable correlation between the Ofsted rating of schools within a MAT and the amount of time spent chairing.

Finally, based on linear regression analysis, the data suggests that there is no correlation between the percentage of inadequate or requires improvement schools within a MAT and the time it takes to chair (adjusted $r^2 = -0.121, p = 0.867$). Furthermore, the data also shows no statistically significant difference between the percentage of good or outstanding schools in a MAT and the time it takes to chair (adjusted $r^2 = -0.005, p = 0.460$).

Figure twelve: Time spent on individual duties per year, broken down by number of schools in a MAT.



Do respondents think the time commitment is manageable?

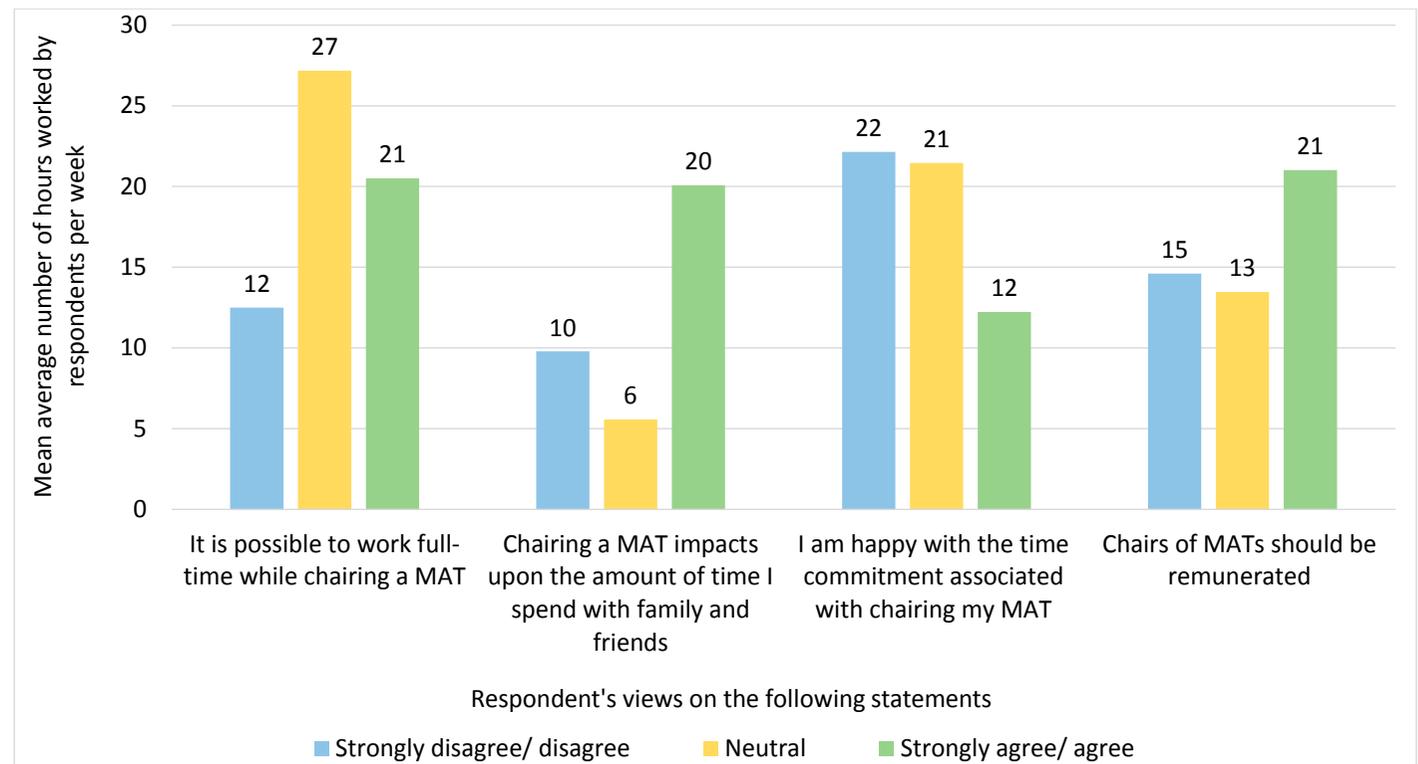
Looking at respondents' perspective on the time commitment, and the extent to which it impacts upon their personal lives, the data shows that:

- two thirds (66.7%) of respondents reported that they were aware of the time commitment associated with the role before they became chair of their MAT
- 63.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed that it is possible to chair a MAT and work full-time
- 66.6% agreed or strongly agreed that being chair impacts how much time they have to spend with family and friends

However, despite the majority of respondents reporting that chairing a MAT had a negative impact on how much time they spent with family and friends and in paid employment, 44.1% agreed and 10.8% strongly agreed that they were happy with the amount of time they dedicate to chairing their MAT.

Furthermore, while 31.2% either agreed or strongly agreed that MAT chairs should be paid, 37.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed. While this suggests a polarity of opinions on this subject, 30.1% put a "neutral" response – suggesting that a large proportion of respondents were indifferent to the remuneration debate.

Figure thirteen: How respondents feel about chairing a MAT, broken down based on how many hours of paid work they carry out per week.

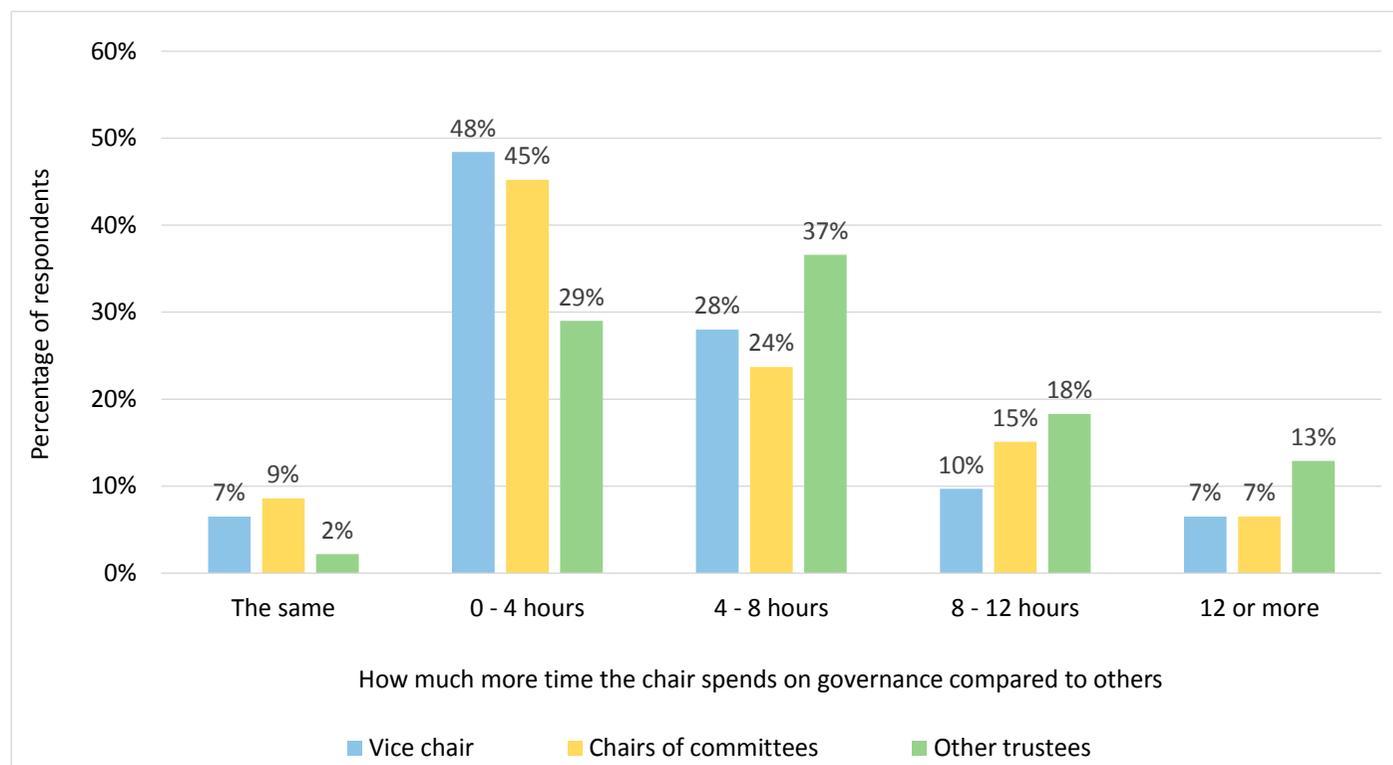


Do respondents think the time commitment is manageable?

Interestingly, the data shows clear differences in how respondents felt about their MAT time commitment depending on their working arrangements. As shown in [figure thirteen](#), this data is broken down depending on how many hours of paid employment respondents worked per week (where a respondent reported not being employed or retired this was recorded as zero). The data shows that, those who worked longer hours were more likely to disagree/ strongly disagree that the time commitment was manageable compared to those who did not work or who worked shorter hours.

The data further shows that, while 29% of respondents have considered resigning because of the amount of time it takes them to chair their MAT, across all responses, only 44.1% have a succession plan in place. Amongst those respondents that have considered resigning, 48.1% did not have a succession plan in place and 11.1% had not discussed putting a plan in place. Those respondents who had considered resigning were also asked why they had changed their mind. Although several respondents said that they had not resigned because they were committed to the trust (and stayed on out of a sense of duty), others commented that they stayed in the role because there was no one to replace them.

Figure fourteen: How much additional time respondents reported governing in their MAT compared to the vice chair, chairs of committees and other trustees on their board.



Do respondents think the time commitment is manageable?

8.1 Strategies to make the time commitment more manageable

Finally, in terms of strategies to manage time effectively, **figure fourteen** offers an indication of the extent to which chairs of MATs have delegated responsibilities to others on the governing board. It highlights that the majority of chairs reported doing between zero and eight hours more than other trustees each week. Of note, no respondents reported that anyone on the trust board dedicated more time to governance than the chair.

When asked which duties respondents delegated to their vice-chair, respondents reported that the board had delegated responsibility for chairing various committees to the vice-chair (with many respondents noting that their vice-chair chaired the finance committee). Other specific areas carried out by the vice-chair included marketing and communications, governance recruitment, training and induction.

When respondents asked what strategies had been put in place to manage their responsibilities, respondents reported:

- giving a number of administrative tasks to a paid clerk or governance professional
- limiting when they will respond to emails and blocking out time for self
- reducing the number of meetings, requesting that meetings do not occur during working hours and holding back-to-back meetings to reduce travel
- conducting as much business as possible over email, the telephone or via video conferencing
- changing the governance structure (for instance, reducing the number of trust board committees)

- delegating more tasks to others, particularly chairs of trust board committees but also other trustees and executive leaders
- ensuring that those at a trust board committee/ local governance level carry out the bulk of the workload
- treating chairing as a part-time job
- accepting the time commitment
- keeping diaries and timesheets of responsibilities and having a well organised schedule

Surprisingly however, of the 92 respondents that answered this question, 28.3% reported that they had not put in place any strategies to manage their time more effectively. Furthermore, out of all responses, none reported having a co-chair arrangement in place.



Preliminary conclusions

The data shows that chairs of MATs are spending significantly longer on governance within their organisation compared to those governing in other types of schools. While James et al. (2014) found that, in response to a survey of over 7,713 governors and trustees, 65% of chairs spent roughly 17 hours a month on governance, this study suggests that chairs of MATs are spending significantly more at a mean average of 31 hours per month governing.

Part of the reason for this is that, unlike those governing in standalone schools, chairs of MATs are able to take on additional responsibilities above and beyond their duty to chair the board of trustees. In particular, unlike those governing in standalone schools, chairs of MATs also have the option to be members and to govern at a local level. However, through members' guidance (NGA, 2019) and other sources of evidence, NGA strongly advises that overlap between the layers of governance causes issues in terms of blurred lines of accountability. For those respondents who reported spending time on member duties, this also took up, on average, an additional 16.8 hours per year.

While not all chairs choose to carry out this additional role, those respondents who did report spending time on academy committee duties spent, on average, 103.7 additional hours on governance per year compared to those that did not spend any time on academy committee duties.

Surprisingly however, despite the additional time commitment, the majority of respondents reported that they were content with the amount of time they dedicated to chairing their MAT. This suggests that the role offers

a perceived intrinsic reward that respondents generally value. As one respondent outlined in a free text response: "it is time consuming, but I love it, and a lot of the activities required I find enjoyable, and I do dedicate extra time to particular projects on a volunteer basis because it is enjoyable. Actually liking what you're doing and the people you do it with makes it easier". While dedicating extra time to "enjoyable" projects may not necessarily constitute best practice, this may be why over a quarter of respondents have not put in place strategies to manage their time more effectively, why many have chosen not to delegate much to others on the board, and why over 67% are against, or indifferent to, the remuneration debate.

Yet the data does show that, for certain groups of respondents, the role is far more demanding than for others. Of importance, the data also points to a lack of diversity amongst chairs of MATs – something that will need to be explored further in phase two. Retirees are also statistically more likely to spend longer on governance than those in paid work, and the data shows that those who work longer hours are more likely to report that they are unhappy with the time commitment and are more likely to report that the role has a negative impact on how much time they have to spend with family and friends. Furthermore, the data suggests that certain times of year are busier for chairs than others and, as a MAT grows, respondents feel that the time commitment also increases. Nevertheless, the data does seemingly highlight (albeit limited by sample size) that larger MATs have needed to rethink how they spend their time to match changes in their organisation.

Avenues for phase two

Based on these interim findings, NGA will look at several factors in phase two of this project in order to understand the nuances surrounding how much time those governing spend chairing their MAT and, most importantly, whether structuring how chairs spend their time in a specific way impacts upon the effectiveness of MAT governance.

In particular, phase two will explore further:

- how chairs prioritise their time, including time spent with executives and other stakeholders; and what factors or situations affect these decisions
- why respondents choose to take on additional responsibilities beyond chairing the board of trustees (such as, but not limited to, attending academy committees or being a member) and what perceived impact this has on the effectiveness of governance across the trust
- what alternative methods are used to communicate with those governing at academy level
- how chairs use their time to build the team of trustees, develop their knowledge, distribute responsibilities and plan for succession
- whether the number of trustees on the board affects the time needed by the chair
- whether chairs of growing and larger MATs make a conscious effort to adapt how they spend their time and what impact this has on the perceived effectiveness of governance across the trust
- how those in paid employment manage their time commitments compared to those who do not work and the perceived impact this has on the effectiveness of governance across the trust

- what the most effective strategies are for managing the time commitment for chairs of trustees (including delegating to others) and the perceived impact implementing these strategies has on the effectiveness of governance across the trust
- the intrinsic value of chairing a MAT and the debate around whether the added responsibilities associated with the role require remuneration

Phase two will be carried out shortly, with a final report to be produced later this year.



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