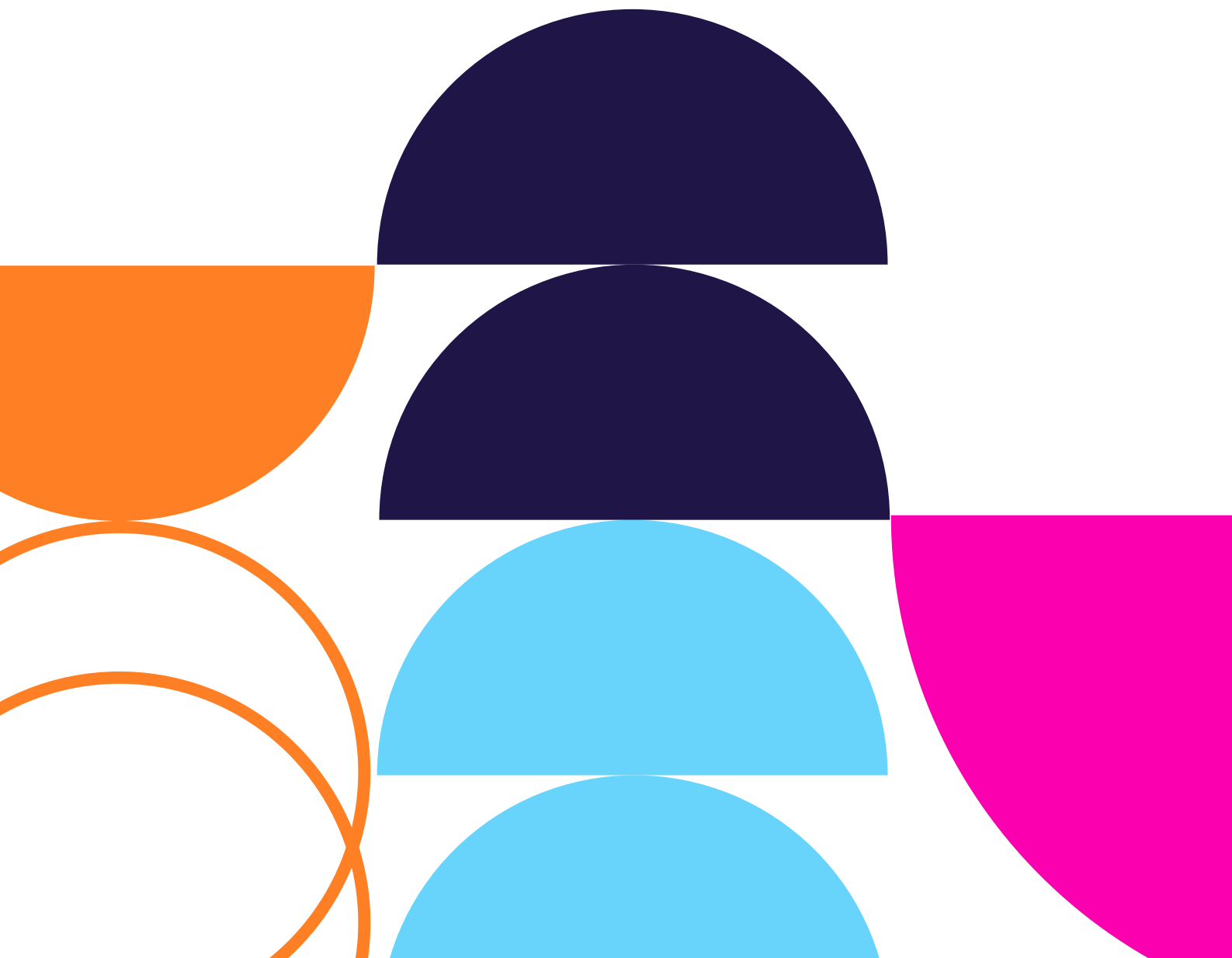OnBoard

BOARD INTELLIGENCE PLATFORM

How technology helps MAT boards become **more efficient and effective**

Multi-academy trusts

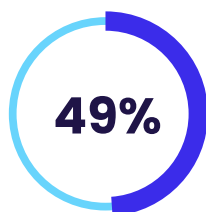## How technology helps MAT boards become more efficient and effective

Multi-academy trust (MAT) boards tell us they want to work more efficiently and effectively on behalf of the schools, students and staff they represent.

Technology can help a board achieve these aims; but many MATs have been reluctant to embrace digital transformation in a formalised way. Of course, technology was the go-to solution during the pandemic to keep people connected and enable remote working when it wasn't possible to meet face to face. In many cases, however, trusts adopted free-touse software and services that don't integrate with each other, and were never designed to meet boards' specific needs.

So what's holding MATs back from pursuing real digital transformation?

49% of respondents say a **more engaged board** is a primary driver of board effectiveness.

Source: 2022 Board Effectiveness Survey, OnBoard

Obstacles to digital transformation

We typically observe three main obstacles to real digital transformation within MATs: budgetary constraints, a lack of appetite for digitisation, and the fact that collaboration isn't a priority.

Our budgets are constrained
This is the primary reason cited by many MATs. Just like many other organisations and enterprises, MATs are experiencing the effects

We don't have the appetite to digitise
Within many MAT boards, there's a reluctance to adopt new technologies. This may be because board members are unwilling to change their habits, are concerned about usability, or are frightened of new things. But given that, as individuals, most of us are happy to use smartphones, laptops and tablets and all the apps and services they give us access to, perhaps it's time to revisit that reluctance.

Collaboration isn't a priority for us
This obstacle isn't always articulated. But what we often see is board members receiving their board papers just a day or two before the meeting — or even on the day itself. This leaves them with little opportunity ahead of the meeting to research any of the topics, discuss them with colleagues, or vote on them.

Let's look at digital transformation another way

Lack of budget is clearly a reality for the vast majority of MATs. It's tempting to reconcile that lack of budget with the idea that, if everyone's happy with the way things are done now, there's no point making changes. Furthermore, given that budget is always tied to costs, it may be a struggle to justify the investment in new software or other technology.

But there's another way to view the situation, as Anderson Dy, VP of International Sales at Onboard puts it: "What is the reality of a MAT's processes, and what is the real cost of a process?" Anderson was speaking in June 2022 at the Optimus Education event 'Operating an Efficient Trust.'

Neutralising operational cost

Consider how many people and how many hours it takes to collate, digitise, review, edit and distribute board papers ahead of every meeting. Three people? Six hours? Not to mention the stress and potential for mistakes to creep in.

That inefficient process also comes with a cost. "What many people don't realise is that inefficiency causes internal costs to the trust or MAT," says Anderson. "If you aggregate all those hours and all that effort, you may find you can justify investing in a solution that could streamline the process and neutralise its operational impact."

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Digitisation: risks and realities

Like it or not, MAT boards were generally forced to digitise at least some of their activities during the pandemic. Many will have used free consumer-grade email and videoconferencing services to share information and keep everyone connected.

And if that ad hoc approach seems to be working well, you may not see the point of changing to a more structured digital solution.

But if you're sending and receiving sensitive board papers via free email services, have you stopped to think about the potential information security risk? Board papers may contain information about the trust's performance, finances, Ofsted ratings or strategy. Not only could an insecure email or email account be compromised, there's also nothing to stop a recipient from sending those board papers on to another party who isn't authorised to see them.

"If a trust values its privacy, it needs to exercise control over how its information is shared," says Anderson. If confidential MAT information should fall into the wrong hands, it could lead to reputational damage. "The conversation would then no longer be about the cost of software: it would be about the cost of re-engineering your internal operations and, potentially, the cost of lawsuits," says Anderson.

> **"If a trust values its privacy, it needs to exercise control over how its information is shared."**
>
> Anderson Dy,
> VP of International Sales, Onboard

Benefits of improved collaboration

If there's no time to review and discuss board papers before the meeting, it means each board member only has their own view of the topics on the agenda; additionally, there may be limited time during the meeting to discuss each important point. "I believe we're doing an injustice to the trustees, to the board and to the schools we represent if we're not deliberating thoroughly and in more depth," says Anderson.
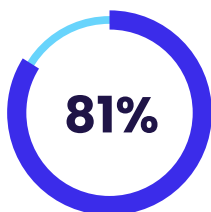
On the other hand, once a trust starts to embrace digitisation, it opens the door to enhanced collaboration and greater engagement. "The more you collaborate, the more you can refine a decision and make it applicable for the long term," says Anderson.

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Transform with the right technology

Working remotely (at least some of the time) remains a reality for many MAT boards, which means that digital tools in some form or other are here to stay.

81% **of respondents will continue to meet remotely or via hybrid methods** for next 6-12 months, solidifying the reliance on technology tools.

Source: 2022 Board Effectiveness Survey, OnBoard

Using software that's designed specifically for boards — board portals or board intelligence software — can:

• Empower MAT board members to be more efficient and effective
• Increase collaboration and engagement
• Streamline internal costs that may not have been accounted for
• Minimise information security risk

Just like the apps and services we happily use on our smartphones and other devices, a well designed board portal solution will be simple to use — helping to overcome individuals' reluctance to change or their fear of the new. "A MAT board that's bold enough to embrace technology can become a more efficient and more attuned trust for the betterment of the schools it represents," says Anderson.

"We started using OnBoard during the pandemic and it's brilliant. The system is so intuitive that when people really start to use it, it works. It lets me as CEO keep people regularly informed. And more importantly, it lets members be informed because they have access to everything."

CEO, multi-academy trust

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Ready to know more?

To learn more about how digital transformation can help your MAT operate more efficiently and effectively:

• Call us on +44 (0) 203 8072317
• Email us at enquire@onboardmeetings.com