



# Case Study

Alpha Plus Group Limited





# Alpha Plus Group



## Industry

Education

## Headquarters

London, United Kingdom

## Board Management Goals

- Reduce time spent preparing board papers
- Improve board paper security
- Simplify communication with board members in different countries

## Results

- Board paper preparation time significantly reduced
- Board communications now hosted on a secure platform
- Board members can attend secure virtual meetings regardless of location

Alpha Plus Group (APG) is one of London’s largest private school providers, owning and managing 20 nurseries, schools and sixth-form colleges. It also operates schools and colleges in Cambridge, Manchester, Tonbridge, Coventry and New York.

APG prides itself on supporting all its schools with the resources and information they need to provide ‘gold standard’ education for their pupils, including:

- High aspirations and expectations for all pupils and staff
- Outstanding leadership at all levels
- Working closely in partnership with parents
- A focus on high-quality teaching and learning
- A commitment to self-review and continuous improvement

This includes access to technology and modern learning environments, regular curricula reviews and support for students to gain entry to their preferred schools and higher education institutions.

These are serious commitments and ensuring they’re met requires a high standard of governance. Keeping APG’s board abreast of the information needed to deliver such governance was proving a significant challenge.

“Our board paper process was a complete nightmare,” says Company Secretary Julia Norton. “We have eight board meetings a year. And we have 13 people who have to have a board pack. Those can be anything from 200 to 350 pages every time.



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“So, it was a case of printing out 13 times 350 pages, filing them into 13 packs and getting them sent to the relevant people wherever they might be in the country or in the world.”

Preparing the board packs was a time-consuming task and security was a concern; board packs can go missing or be left behind in schools, offices and other locations. Julia notes that “As a PLC, there’s some very sensitive information” in those packs.

**“[The directors] thought it’d be complex and difficult, and take a long time to learn, but actually they learned it instantly.”**

— Julia Norton, Company Security,  
Alpha Plus Group

### Finding a simpler, better solution

Julia realised that a software platform would provide the convenience, security and extra features needed to streamline and improve all APG’s governance processes – not just board pack preparation.

After doing some research into the different options available, she decided that OnBoard was the right package. Not only did it have the capabilities APG needed, but it also presented them through an intuitive, easy-to-use interface.

“We liked OnBoard’s simplicity,” Julia says. “The way it’s presented is very user-friendly. We have a lot of elderly board members and some of them aren’t very IT-savvy.

“But it’s extremely easy for them to use; I can set it up on their PC or their iPad in seconds and I can show them in a minute how to use it.

“They particularly like the notification by email, and they don’t even have to log in, they can just click and go straight to the papers. They find that very useful and easy. OnBoard came out to demonstrate it to the directors, and they bought into it right away.

“They thought it’d be complex and difficult, and take a long time to learn, but actually they learned it instantly.

“It’s so user-friendly that I don’t think we could run the company without it now.”

OnBoard has also made organising meetings much simpler than previously, thanks to its virtual meeting capabilities, as Julia explains.



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**“It’s simple to use, it’s very user friendly. There’s no awful setup process and the support is brilliant.”**

— Julia Norton, Company Security,  
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“Wherever anyone is, even if they’re at a school for the day, if they’re working from home or they’re out the country, they can join using the Zoom integration and have the papers there. They can be a part of the meeting rather than having to send apologies.

“And people love it. They don’t have to organise their diaries around all these meetings – they can just join wherever they are.”

### **Support: always appreciated but rarely needed**

Julia has also appreciated OnBoard’s service, from the initial demonstration to training and ongoing support. Software rollouts can be complex and difficult; the key is to manage problems and find solutions on the fly.

“We did have a couple of teething problems,” Julia says, “but the service has been amazing. We had one or two minor technical problems in the early days but the OnBoard support team was always right there and didn’t mind spending time and going through things very, very thoroughly with me.

“Having that support is great and they always offer to give training when we have new board members – but it’s so simple that we haven’t needed to take up the offer yet.”

**“I can put a board pack together in a half an hour and get it published.”**

— Julia Norton, Company Security,  
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## Efficiency dividends

Julia says one of OnBoard's key benefits has been the amount of time it saves. "Once I've got the papers and they've all been given authorisation, I'm good to go. I can put a board pack together in a half an hour and get it published," she says. "That includes setting up the Zoom meeting.

"Previously, it took three secretaries the best part of a week to produce those packs."

Crucially, "I feel more in control of the board packs now," Julia says. "As Company Secretary, I publish them. When the secretaries were doing it, they did a great job, but it was hard to get keep track of everything and have final oversight. Now, I can easily make sure I'm happy with everything before I publish."

APG is also reducing its environmental footprint by distributing the packs electronically, rather than printing and shipping them to board members around the world.

**"I thoroughly recommend OnBoard to anyone."**

— Julia Norton, Company Security,  
Alpha Plus Group

## Good governance is growing

Perhaps best of all, once OnBoard was established as APG's board platform, Julia realised she could deploy it to improve other parts of the business.

"At first, we only used it for board meetings," she says. "And then we progressed into our other committee meetings. Now, we're running a couple of projects and we've used OnBoard to run our project meetings.

"The CFO told me that for one of our projects, we really couldn't have run it without OnBoard because there's a lot of papers that we have to issue at the last minute to people who are dotted all over the place and they can just spend 20 minutes before the meeting, catching up on the papers, and we're ready to go."

Asked for her final thoughts, Julia says "I thoroughly recommend OnBoard to anyone. It's simple to use, it's very user friendly. There's no awful setup process and the support is brilliant."