

Trustees: 10 Questions to Ask About AI.

You don't need to be an AI expert to govern its use well.

AI is already becoming part of everyday work in many organisations. Staff may be using tools such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini or Claude for everything from drafting and research to meeting notes and analysing information.

For trustees, the job isn't to understand every tool or approve every use.

Your role is to understand enough to ask good questions, challenge where necessary and get appropriate assurance that AI is being used responsibly.

These ten questions are a good place to start.

1. Do we actually know how AI is being used in our organisation?

Don't assume that because the board hasn't approved an AI project, nobody is using AI.

Ask:

- Which tools are staff already using?
- What are they using them for?
- Are any teams using AI more extensively than others?
- Are there uses that senior leaders or trustees don't currently know about?

You need a reasonable picture of what's happening before you can govern it.

2. Have we agreed what people can and can't use AI for?

Staff shouldn't have to work this out individually.

Ask whether there is clear, proportionate guidance covering:

- approved tools
- appropriate and inappropriate uses
- information that shouldn't be entered into AI systems
- when outputs need checking

- situations where a human must remain involved
- what staff should do when they're unsure

This doesn't necessarily mean creating a huge new AI policy. Existing policies and procedures may simply need updating.

3. What information are we putting into AI tools?

This is one of the most important questions trustees can ask.

Think about personal information, confidential information, beneficiary or service-user data, safeguarding information, health information, HR matters and commercially sensitive material.

Would we be comfortable with this information being entered into this particular system, and do we understand what happens to it afterwards?

4. Are we using AI for anything that could affect people?

Some uses carry much greater consequences than others.

Pay particular attention if AI is involved in areas such as:

- recruitment
- funding or grant decisions
- access to services
- safeguarding
- complaints
- assessments
- employment
- decisions about beneficiaries or service users

AI may support parts of this work, but consequential decisions about people need appropriate human judgement and oversight.

5. Have we thought about bias, equality and who could be disadvantaged?

AI systems can reproduce or amplify biases.

Trustees should ask:

- Who could be affected by this use?
- Could some groups experience different or poorer outcomes?
- Have the people most affected been considered?

- Are accessibility and inclusion part of how we're assessing the tool?

Don't assume that using technology automatically makes a process more objective.

6. How are we checking whether AI-generated information is accurate?

AI can produce incorrect or invented information while sounding completely convincing.

Ask what checking is expected when AI is used for:

- facts and statistics
- research
- quotations and references
- advice or guidance
- external communications
- important reports or board papers

The level of checking should reflect the potential consequences if the information is wrong.

And remember: asking an AI system to check its own answer isn't independent verification.

7. Who is accountable when AI is involved?

The answer shouldn't be "the AI".

Trustees should understand:

- who is responsible for deciding when AI can be used
- who owns the work produced with it
- who checks important outputs
- who can stop or change a use that isn't working safely
- how concerns or incidents are escalated

Technology can support someone's work. It doesn't take over their accountability.

8. Do our staff have enough understanding and support to use AI well?

Responsible use isn't achieved by publishing a policy and hoping everybody reads it.

Ask whether staff understand:

- what the tools can and can't do
- confidentiality and data risks

- the possibility of inaccurate or biased outputs
- when they need human review
- where to go when they're unsure

Training should reflect what people actually do with AI, rather than expecting everyone to become an AI specialist.

9. How will we know if something goes wrong?

Think beyond major data breaches.

An AI-related problem might include inaccurate information being published, confidential information being entered into the wrong system, biased outputs influencing work, inappropriate automated decisions, or staff using an unapproved tool because there wasn't a suitable alternative.

Would people know how to report this, and would the right people know what to do next?

AI should sit within your existing arrangements for risk, safeguarding, data protection, complaints and incident management wherever possible.

10. How will the board know whether our approach is still appropriate?

AI tools and the ways organisations use them will continue to change.

That doesn't mean AI needs to become a standing item at every board meeting.

It does mean trustees should agree what assurance they need.

That might include:

- significant new uses of AI
- emerging risks or incidents
- changes to approved tools or organisational guidance
- learning from staff
- whether AI is actually delivering the benefits expected
- areas where additional board decisions are needed

The aim is proportionate oversight, not more paperwork.

You don't need all the answers today.

If some of these questions uncover gaps, that's useful.

Good governance doesn't mean having a perfect AI policy before anybody uses the technology. It means understanding what's happening, identifying where the significant risks are, putting sensible safeguards in place and reviewing your approach as things change.

The board's role is not to become the organisation's AI department.

Understand > Ask > Challenge > Seek assurance > Decide where necessary.

And keep human judgement at the centre.

Want to see where your organisation stands?

Try the free AI for Non-Profits Governance Checker.

It gives you a quick picture of your organisation's current approach to AI governance and three practical next steps.