

Future of Schools Forum Meetings – Remote Meetings Format

Purpose of the Report

1. To present the permanent legislative changes around the format of Schools Forum meetings and the responses to the consultation following these changes in legislation.

Main Considerations

2. National regulations govern the composition, constitution and procedures of schools forums. These regulations can be accessed at: [The Schools Forums \(England\) Regulations 2012 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/1045/contents/making).
3. Temporary changes to the legislation in place during the COVID19 pandemic have now been made permanent. Schools Forum need to consider how to most effectively conduct meetings moving forward.

ESFA arrangements in place during the COVID19 pandemic

4. Historically, The Schools Forums (England) Regulations 2012 required that schools forums physically meet at least 4 times a year. Clearly this was challenging during the pandemic. It was important that schools forums continued to meet, but the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) recognised the difficulties in doing so physically while adhering to public health guidance on social distancing during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.
5. The ESFA therefore amended regulations to enable schools forums to meet remotely, while they are unable to meet physically in a room during the outbreak of COVID-19.
6. The government laid The Schools Forums (England) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 before Parliament on 28 May 2020, which came into force on 18 June 2020.
7. This included (but was not limited to) telephone conferencing, video conferencing, live webcast, and live interactive streaming. These arrangements were in place for the 2020 to 2021 financial year, up to the end of March 2021.

Number of Schools Forum Meetings Per Calendar Year

8. The March 2020 meeting of Schools forum was cancelled due to the pandemic and any still relevant reports were brought to the June meeting. The minimum number of meetings per year is four. It is therefore proposed that future March meetings are to be retained only if urgent or, decision making is required. Meetings would therefore be as follows:

January
March (optional)
June

October
December

ESFA permanent arrangements post the COVID19 pandemic

9. The School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2021 amended The Schools Forums (England) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 to make permanent provisions to enable schools forums meetings to be held remotely.
10. Like the temporary arrangements, this includes (but is not limited to) telephone conferencing, video conferencing, live webcast, and live interactive streaming. Where a schools forum decides to hold a public meeting by remote means only, the forum should provide support or make alternative arrangements so that any interested parties who do not have telephone or online access can attend virtual meetings.

Consultation Process

11. Forum members were asked to complete a MS teams survey indicating their preference for meeting arrangements. The responses are attached as Appendix 1.
12. In addition to this the schools forum schools funding and SEN working group discussed the results and agreed the proposals below

Proposals

1. Schools forum are asked to note the permanent change in statutory arrangements around schools forum meetings.
2. Schools forum are asked to vote on the following proposals:
 - a. Every meeting is held virtually with the exception of the main decision-making meetings which are generally, December to agree formula changes and transfers in principal and January, where the schools budget formula is voted on and finalised.
 - b. That the number of future meetings be reduced to four per annum; January, June, October and December – with the March meeting available as optional should urgent items arise, or decision making be required.

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