



SARASIN
& PARTNERS

Corporate governance and voting guidelines

2026

This document is intended for retail investors and/or private clients. You should not act or rely on any information contained in this document without seeking advice from a professional adviser.



Introduction

Sarasin & Partners is a long-term and active fund manager that takes seriously its stewardship responsibilities. We believe that sound corporate governance contributes to long-term value for our clients.

In particular, voting rights give shareholders both the opportunity and responsibility to participate in the stewardship of companies. As the agent of shareholders, Sarasin & Partners will endeavour to vote on shareholder resolutions in accordance with the principles and guidelines outlined in this document. We will be transparent in explaining the reasons for voting decisions.

These guidelines set out broad corporate governance principles that we believe should be universal and enduring. However, as companies vary in size, complexity, corporate form, cultural context and norms, the guidelines allow for flexibility, with due consideration to the particular circumstances of individual companies. Consequently, these guidelines should not be read as an exhaustive or limiting statement of our voting approach. We will use the principles expressed in these guidelines to inform our response to unforeseen circumstances should they arise. In certain instances, we may take an active decision to diverge from these guidelines where there are compelling reasons to do so, and it is in our clients' best interests. For example, where a vote against a resolution would negatively impact an ongoing dialogue with a company, we may defer judgement to the next voting opportunity.

These guidelines are informed by the relevant best-practice codes and guidelines for the markets in which we invest. In the UK, these include the Financial Reporting Council's UK Corporate Governance Code and the UK Stewardship Code, the Investment Association's various guidelines, and the Pensions and Lifetime Savings Association's Corporate Governance Policy and Voting Guidelines. Outside the UK, these guidelines are informed by other relevant codes and guidelines, such as the OECD Principles of Corporate Governance, the International Corporate Governance Network's Global Governance Principles and Global Stewardship Principles, the EU Directive on Shareholders' Rights, and the Japanese Corporate Governance Code and Stewardship Code.

Throughout this document, the term 'non-executive directors' is used to refer to board members who do not hold a management role within the company, the term 'executive directors' is used to refer to those who do, and the term 'directors' is used to refer to both groups collectively. Where we indicate that we will vote 'against' a particular proposal, in jurisdictions or companies where this is not an option, we will implement the next closest vote, such as 'withhold'. We rely on a proxy voting service provider to implement the guidelines outlined in this document. In situations where our service provider is not able to do so, we will manually apply our guidelines to selective holdings.

Voting guidelines

1 Role, structure and operation of boards

The role of the board of directors is to foster the long-term success of the company in the interests of shareholders. As the board is ultimately responsible for ensuring effective management of the company, its composition is crucial. While the structure and operation of the board differ between companies and jurisdictions, several key principles should guide board composition. First, the roles of chair and CEO should generally be separate. Second, the overall board should have an appropriate level of independence from management. A board composed of a majority of independent non-executive directors can help to ensure objectivity and effective challenge. Third, board members should be competent and effective, and should have to stand for re-election annually to underpin accountability to shareholders.

Audit, remuneration and nomination committees are important for the effective governance of companies. To promote independence from management on these key issues, these committees should be composed entirely of independent non-executive directors. In the financial sector, it is increasingly thought that a risk committee is vital for ensuring sufficient oversight of risk-taking and internal controls. This is, in particular, a recommendation of the Financial Stability Board, the OECD, and the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision.¹

1.1 Separation of chair and CEO roles

Principle

The board's ability to exercise judgment independently of management is weakened if one person fills both the roles of chair and CEO. The roles of chair and CEO should therefore generally be separated.

Voting guideline

We will generally vote AGAINST a resolution to appoint the same person as CEO and chair, unless the board has appointed a lead independent director (who fulfils our independence criteria – see below). In this case we will ABSTAIN.

We will support proposals to have a fully independent chair and FOR separating positions of CEO and board chair.

1.2 Director independence and effectiveness

Principle

The board must be able to act objectively and exert authority over management. This is best achieved by constituting the board with a majority of non-executive directors who are independent of management. In order to be considered independent, a director should not be in relationships or circumstances that are likely to affect his or her judgment. For example, a director generally cannot be considered independent if he has been an employee of the company or group within the last five years, holds cross-directorships, has significant links with other directors through involvement in other companies or bodies, or has served on the board for more than twelve years (in the UK – nine years).

Voting guideline

We will vote AGAINST a resolution to appoint non-independent directors where the resulting board does not have a majority of independent directors.

Directors that have served on the board for more than twelve years (in the UK – nine years), or who have material links to the company or its executives are considered non-independent.

Where we have voted AGAINST directors for non-independence for two years running, we will escalate our concern by voting AGAINST the chair of the nominations committee as well. If the committee chair is not up for election, we will vote AGAINST the longest-serving committee member.

If we have voted AGAINST directors for non-independence for four years, we will further escalate our concern by additionally voting AGAINST the board chair.

¹ See Financial Stability Board, 'Thematic Review on Risk Governance', Peer Review Report, 12 February 2013, http://www.financialstabilityboard.org/publications/r_130212.pdf

1.2 Director independence and effectiveness (continued)

Principle	Voting guideline
The board and its committees should have the appropriate balance of skills, experience, time and knowledge to enable it to discharge their responsibilities effectively.	<p>We might vote AGAINST a resolution to appoint directors who are judged not to have appropriate skills, experience, and knowledge.</p> <p>We will vote AGAINST directors who are overcommitted.</p> <p>We consider executive directors who serve on more than one outside boards, and non-executive board members serving on more than five boards as overcommitted. A chair of the board is considered equivalent to two outside board positions.</p>
One of the best measures of board effectiveness is whether the company creates economic value, considering, wherever possible, negative externalities imposed on society. We believe that directors should be held accountable for generating returns below the cost of capital.	<p>We will vote AGAINST all executive directors if the average return on equity over the past three years (including the last financial year) is below 5%.</p> <p>We will extend this rule to other markets when our voting service provider is able to implement this rule in non-Japanese markets.</p> <p>We will vote AGAINST directors where there is evidence that the strategy being pursued runs contrary to societal welfare. Additional criteria are outlined in Section 5.</p>

1.3 Director attendance

Principle	Voting guideline
Directors should attend all board and committee meetings and prepare in advance of meetings. Directors who do not regularly attend board meetings cannot effectively represent the interests of shareholders.	We will vote AGAINST a resolution proposing to re-elect a director who has attended fewer than 75% of board meetings (unless there is a unique set of circumstances that explains these absences and will not be repeated) and relevant committee meetings held during the previous year.

1.4 Committees

Principle	Voting guideline
Audit, remuneration and nomination committees are essential for the effective governance of companies.	We will vote AGAINST a resolution to reappoint the chair (or the most senior independent director when the chair is not up for re-election) if the company does not have key committees with responsibility for audit, remuneration or nomination matters.
Each of these committees should be composed of independent non-executive directors. Committee members should be held accountable for delivery in their area of responsibility.	<p>We will vote AGAINST a resolution to appoint a non-independent director to the committees covering audit, remuneration, nomination or governance matters. If the director is not up for re-election, e.g., in the case of a staggered board, we will vote AGAINST the chair of the nomination committee.</p> <p>Specific voting rules for committee directors are dealt with in relevant sections below.</p>

1.5 Elections

Principle

Regular re-election enhances shareholder ability to scrutinise directors' performance. While a certain amount of continuity of directorship is important, we do not believe annual re-elections result in excessive turnover in practice. Directors will tend to be re-elected as long as they fulfil their responsibilities. Consequently, we generally support the move toward annual elections for all directors.

A staggered or classified board prevents the entire board of directors from being replaced within one election. This acts as a takeover defence, which reduces management's accountability to shareholders. It also prevents shareholders from expressing their dissatisfaction with a particular director's performance in their area of responsibility.

Requiring a majority vote for directors to be elected, even in uncontested elections, makes directors more accountable and protects the value of shareholders' votes.

We are not supportive of plurality voting systems where even a single vote can result in a director being appointed, even where all other shareholders withhold support.

The board should respect shareholders' decision on a director if this is approved by majority of outstanding votes cast.

We believe that director elections give an important opportunity to shareholders to express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the work of a particular director, especially related to the works of the relevant committee. We use this opportunity to escalate our concerns after a certain period of time.

Voting guideline

We will vote FOR a resolution to institute annual elections for all directors.

If no directors are put to a vote in a particular year, we will, where possible, vote against the financial statements as a means of escalating our concerns.

We will vote AGAINST the chair of the nomination committee where a company operates a staggered, classified or other type of non-annually elected board.

We will vote FOR resolutions calling for majority voting thresholds for director elections.

We will vote AGAINST the chair of the nomination committee for ignoring a majority shareholder vote on a director appointment.

We will vote AGAINST the chair of the relevant committee if we have voted AGAINST lack of independent board majority, remuneration report or policy, or the auditors or the reports and accounts in the past two years consecutively.

We also apply a further escalation rule, where will vote AGAINST the chair of the board if we voted against the above items for four years consecutively and have informed the chair about our concerns.

1.6 Policy on diversity

Principle

We believe that shareholders' interests are best represented by a diverse and independently minded board of directors. As an investor member of the 30% Club, we expect at least 30% of board members to be female. In the UK, in line with the FCA listing rules, we expect 40% gender diversity and for non-AIM companies, at least one of the senior board positions (chair, CEO, CFO or SID) to be female. Where boards fall short of this, it raises concerns about groupthink and the risk that appointments are not truly made on merit.

Following the recommendations of the Parker and McGregor-Smith reviews in the UK, we also take account of ethnic diversity.

Voting guideline

We will typically oppose the election of the nomination committee chair if a board comprises less than 30% female directors (In the UK non-AIM companies we expect 40%).

For UK non-AIM companies, we will typically vote against the nomination committee chair if there are no women in a senior position (chair, CEO, CFO or SID; or chair of a board committee for investment trusts).

In the UK (non-AIM companies), US and Canada, we will typically vote against the nomination committee chair if there is no board member from a minority ethnic background.

2 Executive remuneration

Three core principles underpin our votes relating to executive remuneration. First, an executive director's total remuneration package should align the individual's incentives with long-term value creation, and thus shareholders' interests. Second, while levels of pay should be sufficient to attract, retain and motivate high calibre management, excessive compensation reduces shareholder value and should be avoided. Third, to ensure clarity of incentives, pay structures and metrics should be disclosed and simple to understand.

Executive share ownership is perhaps the simplest and most effective tool for ensuring alignment with shareholders. Shareholdings must represent a material share of the executives' reward and wealth, and must be held at least until retirement from the company in question.

A significant proportion of executive remuneration should be related to through-cycle performance targets, and should be reviewed (although not necessarily changed) regularly. Performance metrics should be simple to understand and be clearly linked to the creation of enduring value: put simply, returns on invested capital should exceed the cost of capital through a cycle and over time. Performance targets should be disclosed in the Remuneration Report unless there are compelling reasons for confidentiality. Under-performance should not be rewarded.

2.1 Alignment with long-term value creation

Principle	Voting guideline
Share ownership is a core component of any incentive scheme that seeks to align executives with long-term shareholders. We favour remuneration schemes that require material long-term shareholdings by executives held until retirement from the company to encourage long-term, through-cycle, behaviour. A material proportion of the shareholding should be held for at least one year following departure from the company to protect against 'bad leaver' problems, and alignment with remaining shareholders.	<p>We will vote AGAINST the remuneration report and policy where schemes do not require material executive share-ownership, unless local laws or requirements prohibit this. The expectations for the level of such material shareholding, expressed in the percentage of executives' base salary, will be different for different geographies reflecting differences in pay structures and how difficult it is to deliver the material level of alignment.</p> <p>We will vote AGAINST the remuneration report and policy where the actual shareholdings fall below our materiality thresholds, unless the executives are new and working towards achieving this minimum target, or local laws/regulations prohibit our expected shareholdings.</p> <p>We will vote AGAINST the remuneration report and policy where there is no post-departure holding requirement (only applicable to UK and Irish companies due to limited data availability).</p> <p>In cases where there is no disclosure of shareholding requirements, or the actual shareholding, we will vote AGAINST the remuneration report and policy.</p>
Performance targets should not be tied to short-term share price performance, which can be driven by near-term sentiment and news, but reflect underlying business fundamentals that drives longer-term total shareholder return.	<p>We will consider on a case-by-case basis (for our largest positions due to limited data availability) whether to vote AGAINST the remuneration report and policy where performance targets are not aligned with creating economic value.</p> <p>When there is no disclosure of performance metrics or targets, we will vote AGAINST the remuneration report and policy.</p> <p>We will vote against the remuneration report and policy if the performance period is shorter than what is generally expected under prevailing market practices.</p>

2.1 Alignment with long-term value creation (continued)

Principle	Voting guideline
<p>Executive performance criteria should be clearly linked to the achievement of stretching performance targets that can be clearly attributed to the incumbent managerial team, rather than broad sector or industry moves. Median or worse performance should not be rewarded.</p> <p>While we acknowledge the value of some time-based awards in boosting executives' shareholdings (as long as they are required to hold these shares for a minimum period), we believe this should be balanced with performance-based awards to reinforce alignment with shareholder interests.</p> <p>Performance achieved at the expense of society, for instance by accelerating climate change, should not be rewarded.</p>	<p>We will vote AGAINST the remuneration report and policy if performance criteria are not sufficiently stretching (including using an inappropriate peer group), and if targets are based on worse than median performance.</p> <p>We will consider voting AGAINST the executive remuneration proposal if, based on research, we have quantitative concerns about pay alignment with financial performance. We will vote AGAINST Say on Pay (SoP) at companies where time-based awards constitute more than 50% of the LTIP.</p> <p>Criteria linked to environmental and social factors are considered in Section 5.</p>
<p>Where an annual performance target is not met, 'retesting' should not be allowed; the award for that year should be foregone.</p>	<p>We will vote AGAINST the remuneration report and policy if it allows for 'retesting' / shifting the goal posts/ repricing options retroactively.</p>
<p>Long-term incentives should be granted in shares rather than in cash as share ownership is a core component of any incentive scheme that seeks to align executives with long-term shareholders</p>	<p>We will vote AGAINST remuneration report and policy where the long-term incentives are not granted in equity shares (in the US – entirely in equity shares).</p>
<p>The remuneration committee should have the ability to reclaim or 'claw-back' compensation where it has been awarded erroneously or for performance that is short-lived, due to, for instance, excessive risk-taking that destroys value.</p>	<p>We will vote AGAINST the remuneration report and policy where there are inadequate 'clawback' policies to enable a company to reclaim compensation (bonuses and other incentives) awarded for performance that was subsequently found to be erroneous or short-lived.</p>

2.2 Simplicity

Principle	Voting guideline
<p>Pay structures and metrics should be as simple as possible to avoid unnecessary confusion, risks of obfuscation and misalignment. This is vital to ensure clear incentives for executives, and so that shareholders understand how executives are aligned.</p>	<p>We will consider on a case-by-case basis whether to vote AGAINST pay packages that are unnecessarily complex, including those with multiple and overlapping performance-related components; and where there are an excessive number of metrics within a performance plan (only applicable to our largest positions due to limited data availability).</p> <p>We will vote AGAINST the remuneration report and policy where there are more than four metrics in the long-term incentive plan (LTIP). Excessively complex LTIPs work contrary to the goal of providing clear incentives, and make it hard for shareholders to understand what motivates executives. We will also scrutinise pay metrics on a case-by-case basis and will vote AGAINST if we believe the metrics and targets are too difficult to understand.</p>

2.3 Quantum of pay

Principle

Voting guideline

Moderation is one of our principles on executive compensation. Excessive levels of pay are a form of rent extraction by insiders, and can exacerbate inequalities and social tensions within and outside of companies. It is the responsibility of the remuneration committee to ensure that the quantum of executive compensation is appropriate.

We will generally vote AGAINST the remuneration report and policy if an increase in quantum of executive compensation is out of line with performance and peers, and/or represents a material increase in the percentage of earnings measured over, say, three years and not adequately explained by the company.

We will consider on a case-by-case basis whether to vote AGAINST the remuneration report and policy when the overall quantum awarded to the CEO is above certain level, which we define differently for different geographies.

Executive directors should not receive unconditional or excessive transaction, termination, change in control, or recruitment bonuses not clearly justified by performance.

We will vote AGAINST the remuneration report and policy where the remuneration scheme includes transaction, termination, change in control, or recruitment bonuses that appear to be ex-gratia or excessive, unless exceptional circumstances exist.

Outside of the US and Canada, we will vote AGAINST the remuneration report and policy in which variable incentives are not pro-rated in situation of executive departure, termination or change in control. In the US and Canada, we will vote AGAINST remuneration resolutions in the cases of single-trigger/auto-accelerated equity vesting acceleration.

Executive director notice or contract periods should in general be no longer than two years so that shareholders have an opportunity to assess performance on a regular basis.

We will vote AGAINST a resolution to approve a remuneration report where an executive director can receive more than 24 months' pay termination payment, unless exceptional circumstances exist.

A shorter contract may be appropriate where the executive director's remuneration agreement would otherwise require an excessive severance payment.

A longer initial contract term may be appropriate in exceptional circumstances, such as when a new CEO has been recruited to a troubled company.

Executive directors should not be given egregious benefits, such as excessive pension entitlement. We believe pension contribution (as a percentage of salary) to the executives should be the same as those to the general workforce.

We will vote AGAINST the remuneration report and policy in which executive directors are given egregious benefits that represent an excessive extraction of economic rent from the company, measured in terms of a share of the company's earnings, or the individual's base salary.

We will vote AGAINST remuneration report and policy if pension contribution (as a percentage to salary) to the executives is not the same as that to the general workforce.

Remuneration committees should ensure that all discretionary payments that fall outside formal remuneration schemes, including benefits in kind, are justified, appropriately valued and suitably disclosed.

We will vote AGAINST the remuneration report and policy that includes discretionary payments that are not justified, appropriately valued and suitably disclosed, unless exceptional circumstances exist.

2.3 Quantum of pay (continued)

Principle

Remuneration committees should avoid excessive pay disparities that can damage organisational cohesion, increase reputational risk, and undermine employee engagement and loyalty

Voting guideline

We will consider voting AGAINST the remuneration report and policy in cases of excessively high CEO-to-average-employee pay ratios, i.e., falling in top deciles in each of the markets, UK and US, where this data is available.

Existing shareholders collectively own the company and have a right to maintain their interest without excessive dilution. The operation of share incentive schemes should not lead to excessive share dilution

We will vote AGAINST the remuneration report and policy if a proposed share incentive scheme breaches dilution limits of 10% in ten years for all schemes.

2.4 Remuneration committee responsiveness

Principle

Remuneration policies/reports should be put to a shareholder vote annually. This represents an important shareholder right. Although in many markets this is purely an advisory vote, we expect the board to respect, and act on, the outcome.

The remuneration committee should respond to significant (20% or more) shareholder dissent received at the AGM. It should conduct a review of the executive remuneration policy and arrange shareholder consultations on the proposals.

Voting guideline

We will vote AGAINST the chair of the remuneration committee when Say on Pay (SoP) voting is less frequent than once a year (or if it does not happen at all).

We will consider voting AGAINST all incumbent remuneration committee members if SoP is not put to a vote in the current year and there have been remuneration-related concerns in the previous year, i.e., we voted against the executive remuneration proposal.

If the remuneration committee failed to implement the outcome of a vote on executive compensation at the previous AGM, we will vote AGAINST all incumbent members of the remuneration committee.

Shareholder interests are at stake when remuneration schemes are amended, so prior shareholder approval should be sought for any substantive or exceptional amendments to remuneration scheme rules, including:

- changes to limits in favour of scheme participants
- changes which make it easier for scheme participants to achieve performance targets, and
- changes which give broad and unjustified discretion to the remuneration committee

We will vote AGAINST the remuneration report and policy and will consider on a case-by-case basis whether to vote AGAINST the remuneration committee members if substantive or exceptional amendments are made to the remuneration scheme, and a vote is not awarded to shareholders prior to the changes taking effect, unless the remuneration committee can justify the actions taken.

It is important that remuneration committees are held accountable for under-performance in their oversight of the firm's compensation practices.

We will vote AGAINST a remuneration committee chair, where we have voted AGAINST the company's proposed remuneration (either policy or report) for two or more consecutive years, and our concerns have not been adequately addressed. If the committee chair is not up for election, we will vote AGAINST committee members or the chair of the board.

If we have voted AGAINST remuneration resolutions for four years, we will further escalate our concern by additionally voting AGAINST the board chair.

3 Accounts, audit and internal control

A company's report and accounts provide vital information for shareholders as they review the company's stewardship each year. In addition to meeting legal requirements, the report and accounts should provide a transparent view of management's performance, and a reliable (and not overstated) view of capital. The board should establish formal and transparent arrangements for assessing financial and other reporting, risk management and internal control procedures. The board's statement of internal controls should provide shareholders with a clear understanding of the company's internal control and risk management processes.

The audit process is critical to verify the financial performance of a company, its capital position, the consistency between the financial accounts and management's forward-looking statements, and to ensure that management has effective internal control and financial reporting systems. Independent and effective external auditors are necessary for good corporate governance.

Auditor independence may be impaired if the same audit firm has audited the company for a long time, or if the audit firm earns material fees from non-audit services. Transparency helps to facilitate good auditing processes. Shareholders should have information on the audit committee's terms of reference and work programme, including the key audit risks considered by the board and how these have been addressed. These matters should be set out in clear language, avoiding 'laundry lists'. Shareholders should know about any potential conflicts of interest affecting the audit, including the value of non-audit work relative to the audit; the length of audit firm tenure; and other relationships that could influence the auditor's objectivity. Any third-party or regulatory assessments of the auditor or audit committee should be disclosed to shareholders.

3.1 Affirming business solvency and true and fair reporting

Principle	Voting guideline
<p>The board should establish formal and transparent arrangements for ensuring financial and other reporting provides shareholders with a 'true and fair view' of the company's capital position and performance.</p> <p>While statutory reporting and accounting requirements vary by jurisdiction, we expect that both narrative and financial disclosures accurately reflect (and do not overstate) a company's prospects, capital or performance. All material information, including foreseeable losses or liabilities, should be included. Financial statements should be prudently drawn up.</p> <p>Where adherence to accounting rules result in a misleading picture of the entity's economic health and/or fail to provide the necessary transparency noted above, then we expect the board to over-ride these accounting rules where permissible or provide supplementary information to ensure shareholder have a true and fair view.</p> <p>Climate risks should be treated like any other material risk, and incorporated into both the narrative report and financial statements. Supplementary voting rules on climate factors are set out in Section 5.</p>	<p>We will vote AGAINST a resolution to approve the report and accounts where it fails to include a statement of responsibility for accounts and an auditors' reporting responsibility, and a statement of going concern.</p> <p>We will consider on a case-by-case basis whether to vote AGAINST the report and accounts, the auditor and/or the audit committee chair where the company receives a qualified/ adverse opinion by the auditor, or where we perceive the report and accounts fail to provide a true and fair view due to, for instance, excessively aggressive assumptions;</p> <p>In the case of companies likely to be materially impacted by climate risks, we will consider voting AGAINST the report and accounts, the auditor and/or audit committee directors where we determine that the disclosures of the materiality of these risks and impacts for the financial statements are not sufficiently clear or prudent to prevent overstatement of performance or capital.</p>

3.1 Affirming business solvency and true and fair reporting (continued)

Principle

The audit committee / board should ensure the disclosure of distributable reserves (consistent with local company laws), and the dividend paying capacity of the entity. Ideally, shareholders should have visibility of the capacity beyond the parent to underlying group holdings, including any constraints within a group that could limit dividends in the future.

The board should confirm to shareholders that the entity is a going concern (i.e. viable) for the foreseeable future. This period should be for at least 12 months, and normally longer reflecting the period over which the company plans and makes decisions on capital deployment. If shorter, the board must provide a compelling justification.

Voting guideline

We will consider on a case-by-case basis whether to vote AGAINST the report and accounts, the auditor and/or the audit committee chair where we believe there is insufficient visibility of the entity's underlying capital strength, including its distributable reserves; or there is evidence that the entity has been over-distributing.

In the UK, we will consider on a case-by-case basis whether to vote AGAINST the report and accounts where the viability statement is not tied to the planning horizon, and capital expenditure timeframe, of the entity in question, unless adequate justification is provided.

3.2 Statement of internal controls

Principle

The board's statement of internal controls should provide shareholders with a clear understanding of the company's internal control and risk management processes. Any material weakness in internal controls must be taken extremely seriously.

Voting guideline

We will consider on a case-by-case basis whether to vote AGAINST the report and accounts, the auditor and/or the audit committee chair where its statement of internal controls fails to include appropriate levels of detail, or has been found to be lacking, e.g. when a material weakness rises to a level of serious concern, or an external authority highlights serious weaknesses. Unless it provides an adequate justification otherwise, the board's statement should include:

- A description of key risks to the business outlook and how risk is managed on an ongoing basis
- An acknowledgment of board responsibility for internal control and risk management
- A description of the review process
- A disclosure of any material joint ventures or associates not covered in the statement

We will vote AGAINST report and accounts, the auditor and/or the audit committee chair where evidence of internal control failure, e.g. payment of illegal dividends or material fraud in most recent reporting period.

3.3 Auditor independence

Principle

Voting guideline

Robustly independent external auditors are a necessary protection for shareholders.

We will vote AGAINST a resolution to appoint an auditor where we are in possession of information that the firm has currently, or had within the past three years, a significant connection with the audited company.

We will vote AGAINST the appointment of an audit committee member where we are in possession of information that the member has a direct and material connection with the audit firm.

Auditor independence may be impaired if the same audit firm has audited the company for a long time.

We will vote AGAINST a resolution to reappoint the audit firm if they have been in their position for more than 15 years.

It is important that audit and non-audit fees are transparent.

We will vote AGAINST a resolution to reappoint an auditor if a full break-down of the nature of audit and non-audit fees is not provided.

Auditor independence may be impaired if the audit firm earns excessive fees from non-audit services.

We will vote AGAINST a resolution to reappoint an auditor where the fees from non-audit services is greater than 25% of fees from audit services for two consecutive years.

Shareholders need to know the tenure of the auditor in order to assess its independence.

We will ABSTAIN on the (re-)appointment of the audit firm if there is no or misleading (e.g. when firm omits audit tenure prior to IPO) disclosure of the audit firm's tenure.

We will vote AGAINST the (re-)appointment of the audit firm if there is no disclosure of the audit firm's tenure.

3.4 Auditor committee responsiveness

Principle

Voting guideline

It is important that audit committees are held accountable for under-performance in their oversight of the firm's audit. This requires close monitoring of independence and audit quality.

We will vote AGAINST the audit committee chair, where we have voted AGAINST the appointment of the auditor or the report and accounts for two or more years, and our concerns have not been adequately addressed. If the committee chair is not up for election or new, we will vote AGAINST committee members.

If we have voted AGAINST the appointment of the auditor or the report and accounts for four years, we will further escalate our concern by additionally voting AGAINST the board chair.

4 Capital structure and shareholder rights

A company's relative reliance on equity and debt financing has impacts for the risks it faces, and the claims on the wealth it generates. Consequently, some of the most important rights awarded to equity investors as providers of long-term risk capital are around votes for changes to the capital structure. Shareholders should exercise their voting rights to protect their long-term interests.

4.1 Issue of new shares

Principle

The issue of new shares should not lead to excessive dilution of existing share capital.

Companies may allot new share capital, but new share capital allocation should generally not exceed one third of issued ordinary share capital, or two thirds of issued ordinary share capital for a rights issue. Any resolution recommending a larger issue of share capital should provide a clear and legitimate business justification for doing so.

Voting guideline

We will vote AGAINST a resolution proposing to issue new shares amounting to over one third of the issued ordinary share capital, or two thirds of issued ordinary share capital for a rights issue, unless the company provides a satisfactory justification.

4.2 Pre-emption rights

Principle

When companies issue new shares, they should generally offer these shares to existing shareholders first in order to prevent dilution of existing shares. A limited number of shares may however be issued to raise cash or for remuneration purposes without a pre-emptive offering to existing shareholders. Shares issued without pre-emption should be limited to 10% of issued ordinary share capital in one year, unless companies provide a satisfactory justification.

Voting guideline

We will vote AGAINST a resolution proposing to issue new shares without pre-emption rights if the amount exceeds 10% of issued ordinary share capital in one year, unless the company provides a satisfactory justification. We will consider the rationales on a case-by-case basis.

For investment trusts and funds, our limit is 20% and the additional condition is that the company should promise not to price new shares below NAV.

4.3 Share repurchase

Principle

Companies should only repurchase shares in the market when it is commercially advantageous to do so, and with shareholder approval. Share buybacks should generally not exceed more than 10% of issued ordinary share capital.

Voting guideline

We will vote AGAINST a resolution to repurchase shares totalling more than 10% of issued ordinary share capital, unless the company provides a satisfactory justification or discloses the share repurchase limit. We will consider the rationales on a case-by-case basis. For investment trusts, the limit is 15%.

4.4 Treasury shares

Principle

Companies can repurchase shares from shareholders and hold them 'in treasury'. These shares should not subsequently be reissued in a way that is detrimental to existing shareholders.

Voting guideline

We will vote AGAINST a resolution to reissue treasury shares at a discount to net asset value, unless the company provides a satisfactory justification.

4.5 Mergers, acquisitions and corporate restructuring

Principle	Voting guideline
<p>Mergers, acquisitions and other forms of corporate restructuring can create value for companies, if properly evaluated, planned and executed. However, poor corporate restructuring can destroy shareholder value.</p> <p>All corporate restructuring should be assessed by considering the best interests of shareholders, rather than those of directors, management, or other parties. In particular, companies should ensure that minority shareholders are treated fairly throughout the process, from initial discussions to execution.</p>	<p>We will consider corporate structuring resolutions on a case-by-case basis.</p> <p>We will vote AGAINST all incumbent directors at companies that have take-over defences in place, such as poison pills, dead-hand or slow-hand pills, or other similar provisions.</p>

4.6 Other shareholder protections

Principle	Voting guideline
<p>Shareholders have few, but key protections and mechanisms for exerting influence over management. These vary by jurisdiction, but tend to include, the right to appoint and remove directors; to call a special meeting, to propose resolutions for the AGM, to change the Articles of Association, to approve major capital restructurings or issuance, etc.</p>	<p>We will vote AGAINST all resolutions to remove or reduce shareholder protections, e.g. right to call special meetings, act by written consent, one-share one-vote; and support resolutions that introduce or increase these rights.</p>
<p>Shareholders should be given sufficient information to consider a management proposal in order to cast an informed vote.</p>	<p>We will vote AGAINST a management proposal, if there is insufficient information to make an informed decision.</p>
<p>Companies should respect the principle of one-share-one-vote.</p>	<p>We will vote AGAINST the governance committee chair, or the chair of the board, if a company has a multiple-class capital structure with differential voting rights without a reasonable timeframe to revert to one-share-one-vote.</p> <p>We will vote FOR proposals that seek to introduce the introduction of the one-share-one-vote principle.</p>
<p>Shareholders should be given a right to call special meetings.</p>	<p>We will vote AGAINST the governance committee chair, or the nomination committee chair, if the right to call an extraordinary (special) shareholder meeting is absent, or where the required ownership threshold exceeds 15% of outstanding shares.</p>
<p>Companies should not shield themselves from takeovers as these mechanisms can entrench management and weaken accountability.</p>	<p>We will vote AGAINST the incumbent directors if new anti-takeover defences are adopted or renewed since the last AGM.</p>
<p>Companies should hold shareholder meetings in a format convenient to shareholders</p>	<p>We will vote AGAINST against any proposed amendment to the articles of association that would allow closed-door shareholder meetings in any jurisdiction it occurs (currently only Italy).</p>

5 Environmental and social matters

Prudent corporate management includes assessing, addressing and monitoring material risks associated with environmental and social issues. Companies are best placed to understand which environmental and social risks are most likely to affect their business; they should communicate these risks to shareholders in their audited statutory annual report. Financial statements should be consistent with these disclosures. A company's transparency and accounting with respect to these risks helps investors to assess their likely investment impact.

5.1 Assessing and addressing environmental and social risks

Principle

Voting guideline

The board should disclose in its annual report its policies and procedures for identifying and managing material risks arising for environmental and social issues. Where these risks result in material impacts for the business, e.g. foreseeable losses and liabilities these should be included in the financial statements.

In cases where a company faces material environmental and social risk, we will consider on a case-by-case basis whether to vote AGAINST resolutions to approve the report and accounts, auditor, and/or audit committee chair where it fails to explain the company's process for monitoring and addressing that risk; or fails to properly reflect them in the financial statements.

For companies where we have significant labour or human rights concerns, concerns regarding ethical AI or nature & biodiversity, we will review progress to ensure that our concerns have been addressed. Where this is not the case, we will vote AGAINST the responsible director, including the board chair.

5.2 Climate-related voting

Commitment and strategy

Given the gravity of the threat posed by climate change, we expect all directors to make an explicit net-zero commitment to align their company strategy with the Paris Agreement goals of keeping temperature increases to well below 2°C, and ideally to 1.5°C.

We have further strengthened our climate voting policy with regard to companies on our climate amber list, in the following respects:

1. Directors need to set out how they will deliver on the net-zero commitment, including any alterations to capital expenditure and operations and interim targets should be set; and
2. The commitment and transition plan and progress report should be part of the company's annual report to shareholders.

For companies with material exposure to climate risks and/or where their activities result in material climate impacts, we will vote AGAINST the chair where our analysis shows they have failed to explicitly commit to align the strategy with the Paris Agreement and/or set appropriate net zero emissions target(s). This includes an assessment of whether a company's proposed transition plan is being implemented, e.g. whether capital expenditure and operating plans have been appropriately modified.

Where the chair is not up for re-election, we will vote AGAINST the lead independent director.

Where we have a 'Say-on-Climate' vote, we will assess the credibility of the transition plans on a case by case basis.

5.2 Climate-related voting (continued)

Risk management

Boards should ensure full disclosure of material climate risks that stem from the physical impacts of climate change, and transition risks linked to decarbonisation associated with delivering the Paris Agreement goals.

We look to companies to ensure they evaluate these risks, and communicate both their view of the materiality of their exposure, and – if material – how they are managing these risks, including their governance and strategy for delivering risk reduction goals.

As with other material factors, these risks should be clearly outlined in the statutory annual report to shareholders. We encourage companies to follow the guidance set out by the Task Force for Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD).

For companies we deem to be materially exposed to climate-related risks, in our first year of voting, we will vote AGAINST the report and accounts and ABSTAIN on the re-election of audit committee chair where the company fails to:

1. Disclose their risk exposure;
2. The materiality of these risks for the business outlook, including the key results of any stress testing/scenario analysis that has been undertaken; and
3. How these risks are being managed to underpin long term resilience and alignment with a 1.5°C pathway.

In the second year implementing our climate voting rules at a company, and following engagement on this topic, we will vote AGAINST the audit committee chair and potentially other audit committee members where no improvement is made.

For UK companies, where climate risks pose a potentially threat to long-term viability, we will vote AGAINST the report and accounts and ABSTAIN/ AGAINST the audit committee chair (as above) where climate risks are not covered under the long-term viability statement.

Lobbying

Policy prevarication severely hampers global action on climate change. Business lobbying can influence policy-making and either contribute to government paralysis, or contribute to accelerating action. In the case of the latter, this may help support corporate profits in the short-term but harms societal – and thus company – interests in the long-term. We, therefore, expect boards to commit to:

1. Never lobbying, either directly or indirectly (e.g. via industry associations), against action that will help to address the climate crisis; and
2. Lobby in favour of more robust action on climate change.

We expect to see disclosures of lobbying undertaken that demonstrates adherence to this commitment.

We will vote AGAINST the chair and potentially other directors where the company has lobbied against action on climate change and, following engagement, failed to address this problem.

We are looking for companies to positively affirm they will lobby in line with the Paris Agreement. Where this commitment is not forthcoming or the entity is not in a position to provide an independently assured lobbying report, we will consider voting AGAINST the chair on a case-by-case basis.

5.3 Policy outreach and lobbying

Principle

It can be both legitimate and beneficial to investors for companies to take an active and constructive role in helping to inform and shape the public policy debate, particularly in those areas of policy that clearly impact company interests.

However, when corporate resources are deployed to seek political influence there is also potential for abuse. Any political outreach or lobbying must clearly serve the interests of the company and its shareholders. It must also be done transparently to ensure that executives are held accountable by the board; must be conducted within the confines of the law; and not at the expense of broader public welfare.

Voting guideline

We will generally vote FOR resolutions to provide authority for companies to engage in policy outreach and lobbying as long as there is full disclosure to shareholders on their lobbying policy, goals, which organisations they support and the value of that support (both financial and in-kind), and this support is in line with long-term shareholder interests.

We will generally vote FOR resolutions calling for greater company disclosure of their political and lobbying spending, including to third- parties, and its justification.

We will vote AGAINST any authority to make donations or contributions to a specific political party.

Where it becomes known that the company is supporting a specific political party without shareholder approval, we will consider on a case-by-case basis whether to vote AGAINST the reappointment of the chair of the audit committee, who has oversight of internal controls.

We implement climate-specific lobbying rules, outlined under climate-related voting above.

5.4 Pay equity

Principle

We support transparency on pay equity, particularly in regions where disclosure is not yet mandatory. We believe gender/racial pay gap reporting is appropriate to allow shareholders to better gauge how the company is managing inequities related to gender and ethnicity.

Voting guideline

We will generally vote FOR resolutions to report on a gender/racial pay gap.

5.5 Racial equity audits

Principle

We believe independent racial equity audits would help shareholders better assess the effectiveness of a company's management of racial inequalities and related risks.

Voting guideline

We will generally vote FOR resolutions to oversee/report on a racial equity audit.

5.6 Shareholder proposals

Principle

Shareholders should have the right to propose resolutions at annual meetings. Shareholder-proposed resolutions provide a means for shareholders to share their views and concerns with directors and other shareholders. They also allow directors to gauge the magnitude of shareholders' concerns. Companies should be prepared to engage constructively with shareholders about their views and concerns.

However, shareholder resolutions that seek to place unreasonable constraints on management can be detrimental to shareholder value. Shareholder resolutions that ask directors to pursue a certain course of action to the detriment of other shareholders' interests are by definition counterproductive.

Voting guideline

We will consider shareholder-proposed resolutions on a case-by-case basis.

In cases where we have serious concerns about an aspect of a company's practices, and engagement with the company has failed to produce a satisfactory resolution of our concerns, we will consider putting forward a resolution aimed at changing those practices.

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