

JOINING A MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

MULTI-ACADEMY TRUSTS

A multi-academy trust (MAT) is a single entity established to undertake a strategic collaboration to improve and maintain high educational standards across a number of schools. A group of schools form a single MAT which has overarching responsibility for their governance.

The MAT is accountable for the performance of each school in the group, although each can still have their own governing body which operates subject to delegation of power from the MAT.

WHAT TO CONSIDER

How well do potential MATs align with the school ethos and vision?

In deciding to join a trust, it is crucial the school leaders, governors and parents are comfortable with its ethos and vision, and happy that this aligns with the ethos and vision of your school. Looking at policies for how the trust manages key areas such as performance management, curriculum, teaching and learning, and behaviour can give a more concrete view of how the trust's ethos is lived. Other areas may include their attitude to stakeholders and local governance.

What does it mean for pupils?

There will be no change to the day-to-day running of the school. Academies are just schools, with a slightly different management structure.

THE ACADEMISATION PROCESS

Who can become an academy?

Primary and secondary schools that have been rated outstanding or good with outstanding features by Ofsted can submit their individual applications to convert. In addition, any school – primary or secondary, can apply with other schools as part of a formal partnership, providing at least one is rated outstanding or good with outstanding features, or they join an existing academy trust with a proven track record of school improvement.

Does my school need agreement from the local authority?

Your school will be free to discuss its plans with any local partners, including the local authority; however, the Academies Act 2010 has removed the need for the LA to approve your plans. All that will be required is a resolution passed by the governing body. Once the Secretary of State has confirmed that your school will become an academy, he will direct the local authority to cease to maintain it.

Do schools need to consult before converting?

Yes. All schools are required to carry out a consultation but it is up to them to decide whom and how to consult. There is no specified length of time for the consultation and schools have flexibility in how it is conducted.

Does my school have to hold a consultation with staff?

The current employer of school staff (local authority or governing body depending on the type of school) will need to conduct a TUPE consultation with all staff (teaching and non-teaching) and the unions as part of the staff transfer process.

Do we have to cover the full cost to convert to an academy?

No. Total costs will vary from school to school but the DfE will pay a flat-rate grant of £25,000 to the school's bank account. Our school will receive this grant although schools converting in the future may not, as announced in the autumn budget. This grant may not cover the whole costs involved, but we hope that by expecting schools to contribute the remaining costs they will keep them to a minimum. To reduce potential legal costs the Department has produced model legal documentation which is available to download from the website. In exceptional circumstances (for example if the school is involved in a PFI contract and needs additional legal advice) support above this level may be agreed.

How long will it take?

Most schools convert in around three months (it may take longer if there are complicated issues).

ADMISSIONS

Would academies be part of coordinated admissions with the LA?

Yes, all academies continue to be within coordination i.e. the process for allocating school places to children. This means that parents/carers only need to complete one application form (but they can name several schools on it). Parents/carers will be given an offer of a single school place. Using secondary coordination as an example, parents will apply to the LA on 31 October. The LA will send a list of applicants to the schools by a date agreed in the locally agreed coordination scheme (this is owned by the LA who agrees it with all its schools). The schools then rank the applicants against their oversubscription criteria, and send a ranked list back to the LA. The LA then coordinates admissions across its schools and with neighbouring authorities and offers parents their highest available preference on 1 March.

FINANCIAL ISSUES

What support is available to academies if they get into financial difficulty?

Academies, like all schools, are expected to maintain strict budgetary controls and are required by their funding agreement to balance their budgets.

Will academies be forced to buy in expensive services?

No. Academies are not forced to buy in any type of service by particular providers. The experience of academies to date is that they can buy in services more effectively for themselves due to economies of scale in shared services such as finance and administration and the academies within the MAT can often negotiate preferable contracts and services, improving value for money. They are free to buy back the services from the LA or find them elsewhere.

Will we get more money as an academy?

Academies receive the same level of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the LA as a maintained school plus additions to cover the services that are no longer provided for them by the LA. The Government is clear that becoming an academy should not bring about a financial advantage or disadvantage to a school. However, academies have greater freedom on how they use their budgets, alongside the other freedoms that they enjoy.