



# Developing Your Multi Academy Trust

The message that we are getting in respect of Academy schools is that the focus is now on increasing capacity in the system by growing existing Multi Academy Trusts rather than establishing new Trusts.

There are still a large number of small Trusts consisting of 2 – 5 schools. In order to maximise the benefits of Multi Academy Trusts, the push seems to be to create larger sustainable MATs with 8 – 12 schools.

The DfE issued guidance in December 2016 entitled “Multi Academy Trusts – Good practice guidance and expectations for growth” and the recommendations within it are becoming increasingly relevant as the focus on growth intensifies.

For MATs looking to grow, a key factor in ensuring sustainable growth is ensuring that an effective governance structure is in place to enable management of the current schools and also to give the ability to grow in the future.

The key elements of effective governance are summarised as;

## Strategic Leadership

The Board of Trustees should ensure that there is a clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction. Without this, the activities of the schools within the Trust are likely to be inconsistent and will not give the results required. Once this is established, plans can be put in place to deliver the strategy set by the Board and the Board will be able to effectively challenge the CEO

and other staff on results based on the strategic plan developed. For schools joining the Trust it will be clear what they will be expected to achieve and contribute as part of the Trust.

## Accountability

The Board of Trustees is ultimately accountable for the use of public funds awarded to the Trust. There must be effective communication of decisions and results to relevant parties including parents and Local Governing Bodies and there must also be a mechanism such that feedback is received back from these parties so that it can be incorporated in Board plans and decision making. This will ensure that for schools joining the Trust it is clear that their viewpoint and concerns will still be heard.


## People


It is important the Trust Board is established based on the skills required rather than as a legacy of arrangements that existed in schools before they joined the Trust. Skills gaps in the Board should be identified following a skills audit and Trustee recruitment undertaken based on the skill shortages identified. It is important that the Board is established based on the planned ultimate size of the Trust. In order to give capacity for growth it is likely that a Board member with an HR background will be required, in addition to financial and legal experience, in order to respond to the challenges of a growing Trust. An external member with an educational background is also recommended.

Continued overleaf

We welcome the opportunity to help you find solutions to your challenges and explore business opportunities.

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If you would like to discuss this in further detail, please get in touch with our friendly advisor below.

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### Structures

The Governance structure will not be the same for all Trusts and the level of autonomy given to Local Governing Bodies will vary. Ultimately the Trust Board must set the strategy for the Trust and the Executive Management Team will be responsible for delivering that strategy. The level of delegation to Local Governing Bodies should be set out clearly so that for current and new schools it is clear what each is responsible for. For schools joining the Trust it should be clear what level of autonomy they are sacrificing.

### Compliance

In order to ensure compliance, regularity and value for money it is important that the systems in place are consistent across the Trust. Policies and procedures should be put in place such that if a new school joins they can incorporate the new systems as soon as possible. Standardisation of reporting across all areas including finance allows the Board to more easily compare schools and identify issues arising. It also improves efficiency in the production and

review of information and allows benchmarking across schools within the Trust.

### Evaluation

As a MAT grows the governance will need to be periodically reviewed both in terms of levels and skills. It is useful to consider an external review of Board effectiveness to provide an external perspective. In terms of the structure, as the Trust grows it may decide to create regional Boards that govern a group of schools within the Trust.

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