



Attenborough Learning Trust

Frequently Asked Questions

Autumn 2018.

This paper sets out a number of frequently asked questions (FAQs) about academy status and being part of a multi-academy trust. The answers will be developed and added to as more questions are raised and our plans are further developed.

1. Academies and academy trusts within framework of state funded education

1.1 What is an academy?

An academy is a state-funded school operated by an academy trust which is directly funded and regulated by the Department for Education, rather the local authority. It must offer, free of charge, a full, broad and balanced curriculum, but it has more freedom to determine how it spends its budget to deliver that curriculum than local authority-maintained schools.

1.2 What is an academy trust?

An academy trust is a charitable company which is funded by the Department of Education to run academy schools. It is funded through an agreement and must follow strict rules on how that funding is used. As a charitable company, nobody can make a profit from it. Because it is funded from public money, it must follow rules to ensure that it obtains good value for money and it is subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

1.3 What is a multi-academy trust?

A multi-academy trust (MAT) is a single academy trust charitable company which runs more than one academy. This enables groups of school who share similar values to work together as part of a single organisation, but each school retains its individual ethos and identity and a local governing body.

1.4 What is the Attenborough Learning Trust and why become an academy in the new trust?

The Attenborough Learning Trust (ALT) is a new multi-academy trust proposed by the founding schools to support and run the schools, which has been given approval by the Department for Education. Together our schools have worked to establish the structure of leadership and governance and determine the way the trust will work and how it will support the schools. This will be a new trust for Leicester.

Being an academy gives a school greater freedom over their curriculum, budget and staffing. The multi-academy trust structure also gives us the opportunity:

- to continue and further develop our programme of school improvement;
- to build upon and share our successes as schools to help more children;
- to further strengthen and improve our links with our communities and other local schools;
- to use the increased flexibility to benefit all the children and the wider community of Leicester.



We can also see clear positive reasons for closer co-operation through:

- improving the education resources and facilities that we offer our children and their families;
- having open and honest challenge to each other that focuses on improving children's outcomes;
- being able to work more effectively and efficiently and buying resources and services more cost effectively;
- sharing responsibility and bringing together our wider skills;
- having the scope to create new career opportunities for our staff where this will enhance teaching and learning in our schools
- working together to better help and support our communities which in turn enhances the educational experience of pupils.

Geographically the founding schools are very close to each other. We have benefited from some collaborative working in recent years and we now wish to formalise and expand these opportunities.

It is our belief that each school within the multi-academy trust can bring a good deal to the other schools in the group through our collaborative approach.

1.5 Do the schools break all ties with Leicester City Council?

No, the council is still responsible for all sorts of areas of school life, including safeguarding (concerns must still be reported to the local authority), the allocation of school places in the first-year intake for each school and funding for high level special educational needs and disability. More generally, the council is responsible for ensuring that there are enough school places for all of the children in Leicester so, for example, none of our schools could reduce their capacity (the number of pupils they take) unless the council agreed.

The council provides some services to schools, and many of those services are offered to academies and will be taken up by ALT where they are the best option.

1.6 Isn't this privatisation of our schools?

No. When private companies bid to run public services, like a prison, or collecting rubbish bins and recycling, they fix a price and then try to deliver the service for less than the price, so the rest can help to pay their directors and make a profit to give to their shareholders. An academy trust has no shareholders and cannot make a profit. None of the members, trustees or local governors are paid for the role and the only thing we are allowed to spend our money on is the education of our pupils.



2. Governance and Leadership

2.1 How will ALT be governed and managed?

Like all academy trusts, (and like all companies which are charities) ALT will have Members and Trustees.

The “Members” are like shareholders in a commercial company. They are the only people able to amend the Articles of Association of the Company (and for an academy trust they require consent from the Secretary of State). They will appoint the Trustees to run the MAT and independent auditors to review the accounts. They will meet 1-3 times each year to assess the performance of the trustees, review the auditor’s report on the accounts and to plan for new trustees as necessary.

The “Trustees” are like the directors in a commercial company. They determine policies, strategic planning and make decisions for the MAT. They are the statutory governing body of each academy within the MAT, but the majority of the school specific governance is delegated to the local governing bodies for the schools.

The founding schools have decided that the executive leadership of ALT will consist of a Chief Executive and a Director of Finance and Operations who will be appointed by the trustees. The trustees will then delegate responsibility for the day to day running of the MAT to those executive leaders.

The trustees will delegate much of the school specific governance to local governing bodies who will, as now, include elected parents as well as appointed individuals.

2.2 What are the main responsibilities of the MAT once the schools have converted and the trust opened?

Typical activities include:-

- Setting a strategic direction for improvement of educational progress and attainment.
- Ensuring that the right infrastructure (people & resources, leadership & management) is in place to deliver the necessary changes to support the educational improvement.
- Challenging progress in all areas of the trust and its academies’ operations whilst providing support and guidance aimed at promoting success.
- Responsibility for the performance of the academies, including monitoring and where necessary establishing a plan of action to improve performance.
- Setting up committees with a specific focus to monitor aspects of trust and academy life.
- Leading involvement with parents and the wider community, to promote the MAT and support community engagement.
- Ensuring value for money and good use of public funds and leveraging other finance and resources when needed.
- Championing the MAT in the wider community in order to bring new resources to the schools and the trust, for example through holding events, arranging mentoring and building links with business.



3. The Process of Forming ALT

3.1 What does the conversion process involve?

The conversion process for schools to become academies has been made as simple as possible and is explained in the [Department for Education's conversion guide](#).

ALT itself is established by forming a new company with the appropriate constitution (called its "Articles of Association"). In our case, we did this early to make sure we were able to register the name. ALT must enter into a "master" funding agreement with the Secretary of State for Education before any schools can join it. It will then enter into a "supplemental" funding agreement for each of the schools.

The key areas of work are related to;

- the use of land, buildings, other assets and contracts for services by creating appropriate leases and transfers
- a financial review and budget setting
- staff TUPE transfer (whereby all staff transfer with continuity of service, retaining as closely as possible their existing terms and conditions)
- establishing new governance, policies and procedures at the MAT level

The ultimate decision for any school to convert to become an academy and join a multi academy trust is made by the governing body of the school.

3.2 Do schools need to consult before converting?

Yes. All schools are required to carry out a consultation before converting to an academy and joining a multi academy trust, but it is up to them to decide with whom and how to consult. There is no specified length of time for the consultation and schools have flexibility in how it is conducted.

Schools/Academies may wish to consult with a range of people and organisations, for example:

- parents/carers
- school staff
- local schools and the local community
- the Diocese and other local trusts
- local businesses
- local councillors and politicians

For ALT we have started this process with the information shared on our [academy website](#), and we have now arranged a series of consultation events for each school which are listed on our [News Page](#).



3.3 When might this all happen if the plans are approved and ALT goes ahead?

The planned date for the schools to join is 1 February 2019.

We have already done a lot of work to get the proposed structure right for all the schools joining ALT and to obtain Academy Orders for the six schools. The next phase is formal consultation with stakeholders which will help further inform our plans and the TUPE consultation with staff, whilst continuing to develop the financial and strategic planning, due diligence (the process of ensuring that we are aware of all of the potential issues, whether financial or in terms of standards of teaching and learning), and drafting all of the legal documents required between the existing governing bodies, the department for education and the local authority.

The governing bodies, the department for education and the local authority are happy with the proposed date.

3.4 Who is doing this work, and how is it paid for?

All of the schools have got together to form a working group of headteachers and governors, and these are the people who have worked on the planning and made decisions so far, each keeping the rest of their school's governing body informed. The group has brought in some experienced academy trust professionals, a project manager, a human resources consultant, an accountant and a solicitor to advise and do the work which is not within our area of expertise. Each school will receive a grant of £25,000 which will be used to pay for the cost of conversion.

If we decide not to go ahead, we will pay what costs we have incurred up to that point, and any balance has to be returned to the Department for Education.

4. What will change after we join ALT?

For pupils, parents and carers, staff and governor's day to day, the operation of the school, its leadership and governance will not feel different. When a school becomes an academy, all of the pupils on roll transfer automatically to the academy and so do any applications for places. Parents and carers do not need to do anything differently.

4.1 Will the schools be changing their names and uniforms?

No. Our schools value our individual uniqueness's as well as our shared vision and objectives. We have already agreed that school uniforms and names will not be changed.

4.2 Will the schools be changing the length of the school day, or term times?

There are no plans to change, and if we do ever change in the future it would have to be after a significant consultation with staff and parents/carers.



4.3 Will admissions change?

Not significantly:

The policies will stay exactly the same when the schools convert, and when they are reviewed they have to stay consistent with the national school admissions protocol.

The council will still administer the applications for places into reception classes. The only real difference is that “in year” applications do not go through the local authority (unless there are issues around high level special needs to consider).

When parents apply for a place “in year”, because they have moved in to the area, or want to change school, the application will be made direct to the school and the governors will make the decision whether to admit.

Parents and carers will still be able to appeal against a decision not to admit a pupil. The appeals panel will still be independent.

Where pupils have high level needs, the schools will still work with the local authority to ensure that appropriate funding and facilities are in place.

4.4 If we raise money for our school, will it be shared with the other schools?

No. Money from fund raising activities is separate from other school funds, and can only be used for the purpose it was raised for.

4.5 How will the school pay for things like improvements to the buildings?

The Department for Education funds “capital” spend as well. Academy Trusts can submit applications for capital funding for things like improvement works and extensions.

If the Local Authority want a school to increase in size to increase the capacity, or if specific work is required to accommodate a pupil with high level needs, then the Local Authority still pay for the work.

4.6 If I disagree with something happening at school, can I still go to the head teacher and governors?

Yes, and if you are still not happy you will have the option of appealing to a panel of trustees and/or local governors from different schools. This does not necessarily mean that the decision will be different, but you will at least know that the matter has been considered by someone not closely connected with anyone involved.

4.7 Will the schools still get Ofsted inspections?

Yes. Ofsted monitors standards in all schools, including academies. They also monitor the performance of an academy trust overall.

4.8 My child has special educational needs or a disability, will they receive the same level of support?

Yes. Exactly the same rules apply to academies as to other schools, including local authority involvement. Any plan in place to support your child will continue as before.



5. Staff

All staff will be invited to a separate consultation which will deal specifically with the impact of conversion to academy on their employment.

5.1 Academies don't have to follow national pay and conditions for staff, so will ALT change them?

No. All of the staff already employed in the schools will, in any case, be protected by the TUPE regulations. We are keen to attract and retain the best staff, for which it will be necessary to offer competitive pay and conditions.

All staff in academies must still be offered the same pensions (Local Government Pension Scheme/ Teachers Pension Scheme) as if they were local authority schools, and they are still public sector employees for all other purposes.

The TUPE Regulations also protect trade union recognition agreements, which means ALT must negotiate any proposed changes to terms and conditions with those unions.

5.2 Will staff have to move around to different schools?

Existing staff have their current place of employment in their contract and may not be required to work elsewhere unless they agree to do so.

New staff might be employed with their place of work defined as any of the schools within ALT, because they are all within walking distance.

In the interests of delivering high quality education to our students, it is clearly desirable to have specialist staff able to work across the group to support particular areas. This will also have the advantage of creating new opportunities for staff who want to develop additional skills and expertise.

The headteachers will work together to plan future staffing requirements, and if one school is over its staff budget because of fluctuating pupil numbers and another school under-staffed, ALT has the same obligation as any other employer (including the council) to try to find an alternative to redundancy by looking for a suitable alternative role.

6 Finance

Funding to the schools within a MAT continues to be allocated on an individual academy basis. Funding is governed through the master funding agreement between the Secretary of State and the MAT and the supplemental agreement between the Secretary of State and each school within the MAT.

6.1 How is academy funding calculated?

Most funding for the running of academies comes from the general annual grant (GAG). This is paid to academies by the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), based on a formula provided by your local authority and calculated on a comparable basis to the running costs of maintained schools in the same local authority. The ESFA will tell the trust and schools how much GAG funding the trust and the schools will get and how the grant has been calculated.



6.2 Will we get more money as an academy?

Academies receive the same level of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the local authority as a maintained school. 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

6.3 What will happen to a school's surplus budget when it converts to an academy / joins an academy trust?

The Local Authority will transfer the surplus budget to ALT (they have a period of four months to assure themselves that all of the debts of the "old" school have been paid first). ALT will hold each school's surplus for that school, the same way it receives and hold the academy funding for all of the schools.

6.4 What will happen to the various service contracts that a school has in place?

ALT will look at the contracts the schools hold with external suppliers and the local authority for services such as catering, cleaning, security and ICT. Where the schools want to keep a contract with an existing supplier, we will need to discuss with the supplier how to transfer it to the academy trust. Software licences will need to be renewed or transferred to the trust.

Academy trusts must also decide whether their existing financial and management information systems are suitable for the requirements of an academy and multi-academy trust, as they will have to produce management accounts, cash flow reconciliations and balance sheets.

7 Land

7.1 What happens to the school buildings and land when a school becomes an academy?

Being community schools, the sites and buildings are generally all owned by the local authority who will grant a 125-year lease, rent free, to the MAT for the purposes of running the school only. The trust cannot sell, share or sub-let the site or any part of it without the consent of the local authority and the Secretary of State.

Where land is owned by another organisation, as is the case with one of the Sparkenhoe sites, the lease will be transferred from the Council to ALT.

7.2 Will the Ark Theatre become part of the new academy trust?

Yes. It will retain its primary use as part of Sparkenhoe school, but may be used for other schools as long as the primary use is still Sparkenhoe.



8. Your questions and views

We want to know your views, and in particular any questions you might have.

Please either [e-mail](#), contact us via our [website contact page](#), drop a note into reception at any of the schools, or ask your question at one of the consultation events.

If you would like to ask a question or submit your views but are not able to e-mail, access the website, post at reception or attend an event, please let us know by contacting one of the schools.