

Frequently Asked Questions

This paper sets out a number of frequently asked questions (FAQs) about academy status and being part of a multi-academy trust that have been captured during the communications and the statutory public consultation that took place between 3rd September 2018 and 19th October 2018. Consultation and communication has been a continuous and open process, utilising various approaches since the earliest stages of the application process and the schools are continuing to consider all feedback.

Although the formal consultation about the formation of the Trust has finished, you can still either e-mail us on info@attenboroughlearningtrust.org.uk, use our on-line contact form on our website the Attenborough Learning Trust, or drop a note into reception at any of the schools if you would like to bring something to our attention, or ask a question about the way we are working.

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1. [Academies and academy trusts within framework of state funded education](#)

1.1. [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.

1.2. [Why does the government want schools to form a trust?](#)

Lots of positive reasons put forward by government around the best people who can make school improvements are already working within trusts. The government believe that the most effective form of school improvement is school to school support.

1.3. [Can each school decide themselves to be part of the trust?](#)

Yes, for schools that are performing well, as ours are, it is for the governing body of each school to decide if they want to become an academy and join the trust.

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The schools who have come together have been working with each other for a long time and are part of geographical city cluster and local city development groups. As we've already worked closely together, we all felt it was the right thing to do to explore the possibility of working more closely and more formally together as a MAT. Some research suggests that MAT's of this type who decide to work together have a greater positive impact on school improvement than those who are forced because of performance issues.

1.4. Why are we calling it the "Attenborough Learning Trust"? There is nothing re: arts and science in what we are doing so far. What are the drivers?

At the original discussions early on we all put together what the schools' ethos/drivers were and this was then reflected in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to create the ethos and principles for the MAT.

We wanted a name that reflected the local area - i.e. not 'Highfields' as it is already a school - as is 'King Richard', but that also encompassed all elements of education and learning. The Attenborough name was suggested and felt by all schools to be local and positive and as the name is synonymous with setting up the university, welcoming refugees in the war time, the arts and science.

It is for all schools to decide what they want for their curriculum focus to meet the needs of their children and communities. Holistic development of children is included in the MOU. Not all schools want to be a 'sports school' or an 'arts school' but all are about education and we all teach science and the arts. The current plans highlight local decision making for schools.

1.5. What are the benefits of becoming a trust and moving from the LA?

We want our schools to have better opportunities and make better locally focussed decisions of what to do with our money. The process of being in the trust together with the other schools will support collaboration arrangements that would be more formal.

1.6. Would only primary schools have the opportunity to join the Attenborough Learning Trust?

In the memorandum of understanding (MOU) it states it would be a partnership of primary schools in the first instance, but special schools and secondary schools would not be ruled out in future years

1.7. Will there be any point where our independence and uniqueness is likely to change?

Our Memorandum of Understanding clearly sets out the desire for each school to retain its unique characteristics. Governance of the school beyond the Local Governing Body will move from the LA to the Trust. Independence can be seen as the right to make decisions about the school, which the Local Governing Body will still be able to do. As is the case now with the LA, if the school becomes vulnerable, the trust will become more involved in the day to day running of the school.

1.8. Who is trust ultimately accountable to?

Central government through the Department of Education and the regional Schools Commissioner. It must also work with the Local Authority for safeguarding, high level SEN and school places and admissions. The schools will also still be subject to Ofsted assessments.

1.9. Is it set up as a charity?

Yes, and a public body in legal terms challengeable through judicial review.

1.10. Are academies allowed to employ unqualified teachers?

Any school can employ an unqualified teacher currently but that would not be our intention. We would want to employ the people with the right skills and qualifications who are capable of helping us delivering our vision. We view fully qualified teachers as those who are best placed to deliver the required outcomes.

1.11. What happens if one school performs badly?

There is a school improvement strategy and monitoring programme that informs the CEO and trustees if a school is at risk of hitting a problem. We have developed a model for school to school support and improvement, but a more formal approach to support may be triggered if improvements cannot be achieved quickly enough for the children. There is a detailed framework for when a school's performance is at risk of not meeting the required criteria or standards and a strategy to address any of the identified deficiencies. Our approach is about supporting each other, proactively identifying potential issues and working together before potential issues become problems.

1.12. There have been poor impressions of academies. How will this be different?

We have taken that into account and all of our schools are trusted in the community. Being in the MAT will allow us to use our resources for our values. Lots of things will stay the same, a few bits will be better. For example, the MAT could buy the services of a Speech and Language specialist so that children can be seen in school rather than missing appointments in the community. We plan to be able to support families in need more quickly.

2. Governance and Leadership

2.1. What is the role of the members of the Trust?

Members are the only people who can change the Articles of Association of the Trust (its constitution), and they appoint external auditors to check the accounts. They also appoint the Trustees. In a business they would be called shareholders.

2.2. Have the Trustees been nominated already?

There has been one round of applications already, but the second round is now live. We are looking for members from local community

2.3. Are all the Members and Trustees roles unpaid?

Yes, all Members and Trustees are unpaid.

We also have a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and a Director of Finance and Operations which are operational roles and are paid and which are part-time at present.

2.4. What is the CEO's role?

It is to lead the direction of the trust and oversee the Headteachers of all of the schools and hold them to account.

2.5. Would the CEO dictate what is to be done?

The CEO would oversee just like the Raising Achievement Partner does now and reports would go to the CEO instead of the LA.

2.6. Where are the members from?

There are lots of details on the website. and 2 of the members are governors from Shenton and Green Lane. They have helped to create our MAT so that they are fully aware of and believe in our ethos and aims.

2.7. What/who are members?

They are volunteers appointed on a skill set. They have a connection with the community representing a mix of education and business backgrounds.

2.8. Would the CEO/Board of Trustees be able to overrule the LGB, for example in a decision about performance management of a Headteacher?

Performance management decisions are made by a panel, and that panel would include the CEO and the Chair of Local Governors. Decisions relating to employment are never made by a governing body as a whole, but always by a panel, and each employee has the right to appeal against any decision to another panel who may overrule the first decision.

2.9. Is there a big discrepancy in the numbers of governors on the LGB?

Schools have different numbers of governors on the LGB. This structure is flexible and dependent on school's circumstances to allow schools to be able to carry on with the models they are using, or change them if they want to.

2.10. Where does the accountability lie for the LGB? Is it a sounding board more than a governing body?

The LGB is accountable to the Trust and the Trust is accountable to the outside world, but of course parents and the community around each school would still look to the governing body, and the matters discussed and decisions made by the governing body will not change very much.

2.11. Would governors from one school have the opportunity to communicate with the other school governors within the MAT?

Yes, it's about getting the collaborative arrangements and networking right, so the meetings are meaningful, and people learn from each other. Governance is still a huge part of school improvement.

2.12. Is there a possibility for governors to join other governing bodies within the MAT as they have a joint responsibility and would it be a shared governing body for all schools?

Yes, we will be looking for more opportunities to improve collaboration amongst governing bodies, but each school will still have their own Local Governing Board.

2.13. Why decision to consult made after the Academy Order was granted?

The Academies Act provides that a school may consult either before or after an Academy Order is applied for / granted.

As a group of local schools forming a new Multi Academy Trust, a significant amount of planning was required to set out the proposed ethos, leadership, governance model and financial plans before we could make the applications for Academy Orders. We decided to conduct the formal consultation with the benefit of the information developed over a period of time between the schools, rather than carry out a consultation before we could describe in any detail what kind of Academy Trust we proposed to form.

An Academy Order is a permission and does not mean that a school must convert. The decision has not been taken prior to consultation, the consultation would have been less meaningful had it taken place before we were in a position to make the applications for Academy Orders, and once in that position, it was sensible to wait until we knew whether we would have the Secretary of State's consent before starting the Stakeholder consultation.

2.14. What and how leadership has been identified?

It was necessary to identify leadership in our applications to the Secretary of State. Two Interim and Conditional appointments were made. Again, we feel that most stakeholders would prefer to be consulted with as much information as possible about the organisation the schools propose to form, including the identity of the leadership team.

Two part time roles were identified as essential to the continued planning for the Trust, and if the Trust goes ahead, to lead it the first academic year. Each Headteacher was invited to apply for the role of Interim Chief Executive Officer (Designate), and each School Business Manager was invited to apply for the role of Interim Director of Finance and Operations (Designate). Interviews were conducted by an independent panel. If the Trust does not go ahead, then both individuals will resume their current roles full-time. If the Trust does go ahead, then both roles will be advertised nationally to make permanent appointments from January 2020.

2.15. Who is the line manager for the CEO?

At this implementation stage the role is currently only a CEO designate, this is Jane Ridgewell. When/if the Trust comes into being at that point the CEO role will be a part time role, and Jane will remain as Headteacher of Highfields, but on a part time basis. The CEO part of the role will be line managed by the Board of Trustees. The Headteacher role will be line managed by the local governing body and a member of the Board.

3. [The process of forming Attenborough Learning Trust](#)

3.1. Will other schools come onboard in the future?

Yes. We must grow but admission to the MAT will be based on our moral purpose and schools will be risk assessed to ensure they fit with our ethos and values and whether they have suitable skills and experience to enhance our MAT and also if we have the capacity to support those schools that might be struggling in an area. The system is about school to school support.

3.2. What if one school changes their mind once academised?

Once an academy, a School cannot return to the Council sometimes, when a school is not doing well in a Trust, the DfE may want it to join another MAT.

3.3. Does the CEO have to leave her current job?

Not at the moment. If the trust is formed, the CEO job will initially be 3 days a week, so the CEO will stay at their school as Head for 2 days a week while an acting head covers the 3 days. This is the arrangement until January 2020.

3.4. Was it anticipated that trustees would join the local governing bodies (LGB)?

No, each LGB would have a link Trustee who may attend meetings occasionally/when necessary. Trustees are not allowed to sit on the LGBs and if a Trustee had been drawn from an existing governing body, on conversion they would step back from that LGB role. The idea of the link Trustee was to ensure there was a line of communication between the LGBs and the Board.

3.5. Are parents genuinely being consulted or are you just asking for opinions? How can we object to the process, make changes?

Joining the MAT is the governors' decision. We want to listen to points of view. All opinions will be taken on board, but it is not a vote.

4. [What will change after we join Attenborough Learning Trust?](#)

4.1. Will admissions change?

The admissions 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 Leicester City Council will still administer the applications.

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 must still work with the local authority to ensure that appropriate funding and facilities are in place.

4.2. In practical terms, what are those increased opportunities for children?

These won't happen straight away but will build. It won't just be about going out of school on trips but would help us provide expertise and support, peripatetic lessons for example. It would also benefit children by experiencing other year groups that aren't available in their school.

4.3. Does school dinners eligibility remain the same?

Yes, the LA will still administer the free school meal applications.

4.4. What happens if one of the schools fails or if the trust fails?

There are currently no procedures for schools being reabsorbed into local authorities. If a school fails it is the MATs responsibility to intervene. If a trust failed, the DFE would intervene, provide money and give a notice period to improve. The CEO is ultimately accountable as is the DFO. If a trust fails financially, new appointments could be made, or schools could become part of other trusts.

4.5. Will class sizes be capped?

We will still have to follow the same rules, for example the limit on infant class sizes.

4.6. Is the extra support outlined above realistic?

A group of schools working together have greater potential/ability to share expertise. Being part of the same organisation means that there is less chance of pulling out of agreed plans. In this way we can build our capacity and expertise.

4.7. What would be the Trust's interaction with the support for SEND in the city, considering the LA's Ofsted report?

It was a city-wide issue and as an academy, schools would still interact with specialist services. If the Trust saw a particular need that needed investment or additional support within its schools this could be bought in as part of the top slice.

4.8. Will Ofsted still come in?

Yes, Ofsted will still come in. The first inspection of all new schools, including academies, and academy converters will usually take place within three years of opening. In most instances, OFSTED will not select new schools for a first inspection until they are in their third year of operation. Ofsted may conduct a section 8 monitoring inspection of any new school at any time, including within three years of opening, where information they hold or receive causes sufficient concern.

4.9. What about City Catering? Will that change?

No, the contract will come across to the Trust. If the Trust changed to a new supplier in the future then the catering staff working at the school will transfer by TUPE to that new provider (this is exactly the same as when any school changes provider)

4.10. Will an academy mean that school teaching changes, e.g. curriculum content?

Nothing will change. Schools can already choose how to teach the curriculum in maintained schools. We would still follow the national curriculum. We will still have topic choices etc. as we do now as the national curriculum is not prescriptive in the delivery method.

4.11. Could the MAT decide its own holidays so that we can have the same holidays as the county?

MATs can decide their holidays although the Attenborough Learning Trust plans to keep the same holiday pattern as the city council.

5. Staff

5.1. How does the teachers' pension scheme work?

Every Academy Trust has to offer the Teachers' Pension Scheme, pensions will continue seamlessly.

5.2. What happens to years of service if you leave and go into a maintained school or another academy trust?

Years of service for accrued pension and redundancy rights are not affected, but a staff member would have to check before you move that your years are recognised by another Trust or local authority for the purposes of accrued maternity and sickness absence benefits. Local authorities usually recognise years of service.

5.3. Will pay and conditions stay the same?

The Academy trust has taken on all pay and conditions – Trust wants to maintain the staff, so they wouldn't want to make the terms and conditions any less favourable. Pay increases will occur in line with how they usually would.

5.4. Who decides priorities?

Mostly Headteachers and SENCOs. School development plans begin to draw out joint priorities from plans already in place. There is a range of flexibility and a safety net written in and a menu of support for schools.

5.5. Would the ethos of openness within the Trust be part of the recruitment process for new Headteachers to ensure it was retained in the Trust?

The Scheme of Delegation is being written but the Memorandum of Understanding already had the ethos of high delegation and governing body involvement in the appointment of new Headteachers outlined. There would be support from the Trust, similarly to the current Director's Rep role. Within the recruitment process there would be the opportunity to include questioning/tasks to ensure the applicant would continue the ethos. The advert and recruitment materials would include elements around the ethos of the Trust.

5.6. Who will appoint the new Headteacher?

A panel from the respective Governing Body together with the CEO and a representative from the academy (i.e. a trustee).

5.7. What is the skill set of the CEO?

It was strategic vision, a good knowledge of school improvement and the ability to facilitate networks and partnerships. CEO had to think beyond one school and recognise opportunities,

working closely with the Director of Finance and Operations (DFO) to ensure the money was used in the most effective and efficient way. It was an outward looking role.

5.8. Will internal appointments now be advertised throughout the MAT?

Yes.

5.9. Would Headteacher grading be reviewed to ensure consistency across the schools in light of the ability to award increments on governor discretion?

Headteachers will transfer by TUPE like all staff, and whatever grade they are on will remain. Increments are awarded based on targets for the year, and that will continue. We would review the banding of a school if there was a vacancy for a headteacher, but not until then.

5.10. Would NQTs transfer over with their induction still in place.

Yes, all staff will transfer across if employed by the local authority.

5.11. Would someone on a temporary contract they transfer over?

Yes, if contract end date is after the conversion date.

5.12. Who will pay staff? Where will the payslips come from?

The Attenborough Learning Trust will pay staff. We are in negotiations about the payslips - they may come from somewhere else - i.e. the county. But the pay and pay dates will stay the same.

5.13. Any changes to performance management?

No, including threshold applications. Everything would transfer over. However, the Headteacher would have a different line manager.

5.14. Will we still use SALT and EYST?

Currently every school in the city is under resourced. SALT and EP service provided by the local authority is statutory.

We hope to take what is statutory and then look at how we can enhance the provision.

5.15. Is there capacity within the structure to employ e.g. a family support worker or speech and language specialist?

Different scenarios have been tried out in financial models, including a shared speech and language specialist.

5.16. Have the unions been involved?

We have kept them informed, informally, about plans, and, more formally, they attended all of the TUPE meetings.

5.17. I receive a leisure card and discounts because I am an employee of Leicester City Council; will this stop?

We don't know yet. This is a non-contractual benefit, but we are looking at alternatives.

6. Funding and financial arrangements

6.1. How is academy funding calculated?

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.

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?

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 schools' surplus for that school, the same way it receives and holds the academy funding for all of the schools.

6.4. Does each school have its own money? Can other schools get at it?

Each school will contribute a percentage of its budget for central costs and the rest stays with that school.

6.5. Purely in terms of finances, how will you negotiate better as a group of schools compared to the buying power of the local authority. There will be extra costs for the CEO, how does that save costs?

Leicester City Council buys goods and services through Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO), which the schools use and the Trust will continue to use. However, there are other goods and services which are more specific to schools and not offered through that service. We do not expect to be able to reduce costs dramatically, but we will save where we can, and target those items not offered through ESPO.

6.6. Can financial information be provided to parents?

Yes, the Trust will publish its accounts annually.

6.7. Are you looking to reduce staffing costs?

All current salaries will be maintained, the current pay structure will be carried over with the same benefits for all current staff.

6.8. Currently schools give some of their budget back to Leicester City Council, what do they spend it on?

Smaller amounts include assessing free school meals and support for union activity, and larger amounts are spent on things like schools facing exceptional financial cost pressures. Also, funds go to school improvement, some initiatives aimed at all schools, some targeted at selected schools only.

In the MAT the percentage retained for central services will pay for CEO, DFO and schools improvement, as well as any additional specialist support functions such as speech & language that the schools agree to bring in; and we will pay Leicester City Council to carry on with free school meals and support for union activity.

6.9. What happens if schools face financial difficulties in the Trust?

Each school has its own budget and has its own surplus. If a school falls into difficulty then the DFO will work with the school to plan to recover the situation. By working closely together the finance staff will be able to spot any cash flow issues and alert the governing body of that school, well before any significant problems arise.

7. Land and buildings

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. How would the maintenance of the buildings be managed/funded?

It would be delegated in the school's budget. The school would keep Leicester City Council premises support initially and over time review whether it would be more cost effective as a Trust to employ

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specific staff across all schools. The Trust would be able to pool the expertise across schools and had already started to do this with the review of financial management packages.