

Busy Governance Guide to Multi Academy Trusts (MATs)

1. A Multi Academy Trust (MAT) is a single trust responsible for a number of academies. It consists of the Members, who are governed by their Articles of Association and have ultimate control over the academy trust and Trustees, who are responsible for the same core governance functions performed by the governing board in a maintained school. Trustees can delegate governance functions to local governing bodies (LGB) or committees and have complete discretion over what is delegated. They may, for example, decide to delegate all functions to academies in the chain that are performing well and only a few to those academies that need greater support. Alternatively, where a MAT wishes to retain all governance functions centrally, it may establish a local advisory committee at the school level, which has no formal governance function but which advises the board of trustees on its decisions.

2. Why join or form a MAT? Governors have a responsibility to provide high quality education for the pupils in their care and the view of the DfE is that schools who work together in a formal partnership deliver far better outcomes than stand-alone schools. If you are considering joining or setting up a MAT your first question should be 'will this improve outcomes for our pupils?'

3. Ask questions as to the track record for the sponsor or school – for example does it have the core competence to deliver successful school improvement; do their values, vision, ethos and philosophy match yours; what are the implications for your staff; what is the impact on your budget; will there be a loss of your schools' identity and reputation in the community? See the [DAG Busy Governance Guide to Partnership – Due Diligence](#) for more detail around the questions boards should ask.

4. The process: To convert as a multi-academy trust you can either join an existing trust or you can work with other schools to set up a new trust if the regional director feels there is a need for a new trust in your area. There are two ways to create a new multi-academy trust. You can either:

- Convert with schools you already work with
- Start a relationship with a new school.

To convert as a multi-academy trust, each school in your proposed trust needs to submit a separate application and each governing board must pass a resolution to convert to become an academy. As part of your application you will also need to provide evidence of how the stronger schools in your proposed chain will help the weaker schools to improve. If you are an existing academy you can join or apply to set up a MAT immediately. If you are a maintained school you can convert to an academy and join a MAT at the same time. This is a legal process and whilst funding used to be available from the DfE to help with the initial cost of conversion, however, from 1 January 2025 the funding has been withdrawn. If your school is part of a federation, i.e. where 2 or more schools are working together under one governing board, you must comply with the [School Governance \(Federations\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#), including the [amendments that came into force on 1 September 2015](#). According to these regulations, any federated school that wishes to convert to academy status must have the support of at least 50% of its 'prescribed governors' before applying.

When you are given the Articles of Association examine them carefully: this is your future partnership document so make sure that you know exactly what you are signing up to.

5. Be clear about what your governing board can expect from their MAT and what powers, responsibilities and accountabilities you will have after the changes. It may involve fewer governors and a potential loss of power, but, equally, it may also mean that schools within the MAT have their financial systems, corporate governance and legal issues managed for them. This, in turn, may mean you are free to focus on the core business of the pupils' attainment and progress.

6. Avoid confusion over who is accountable for what, by making sure that your MAT has a scheme of delegation (SoD) which makes the distinction and accountability between the layers of governance clear. The NGA suggests redefining the Local Governing Body as a local advisory board (LAB) with a new role description.

7. Try before you buy: Trust partnership working for academy trusts and those thinking about working with a trust before joining one could allow schools to come together to test whether a formal partnership would benefit both parties. They do not deliver the full benefits of formally joining an academy trust but are a time-limited way for all parties to explore how a permanent arrangement might work. This latest [guidance](#) provides information, case studies and a model service level agreement (SLA) to support academy trusts and schools to establish trust partnerships.

8. Your final question is the same as the first: will the MAT influence, impact and improve our levels of achievement and the quality of teaching and learning? If the answer is 'yes' then consider proceeding – if 'no' then you may need to hold further discussions until you are satisfied that you have done the best for your pupils.

9. Where can I get more information?

- [National Governance Association](#)
- [Convert to an academy: Guide for schools](#)
- [Multi-academy trusts: establishing and developing your trust](#)