

Formation of the Multi-Academy Trust – Frequently Asked Questions

Updated 05/02/23 to reflect the emerging questions from the live consultation.

What is the driver of the move to form a multi-academy trust?

The government has made it clear that it sees a trust-led system as the future of the education system in England. Against this backdrop, we have engaged in thorough and careful discussions with valued local partners to establish a trust that serves the students, families and wider communities of the Fylde and Wyre. All of the partners in this venture are strong and bring a track record of successful education and improvement to the table. As such, we aim to create an organisation that is greater than the sum of its individual parts to make secondary and post-16 education in this area a beacon of excellence.

What are the potential benefits of the formation of a MAT to the students of Hodgson Academy?

Given the quality of the providers we plan to partner with are strong in their own right, we see the following as the key benefits to the students at Hodgson:

- Teaching and learning collaboration.
 - This means that Hodgson can benefit from having the best teaching and learning practice shared into our school from our partners as well as benefitting from sharing ours across the MAT. This might be in classroom delivery, homework structures, classroom/behaviour management, SEND and alternative provision or staff coaching – as examples. Having specialist alternative provision within the trust will give our staff access to a resource to assist in techniques for students who are struggling with mainstream school (note this does not mean preferential access to places but to collaboration with the schools). Equally, with a high-achieving post-16 college in our trust, our students will be able to benefit from the guidance and collaborations around high-achieving students and the pathways available post-16.
- Curriculum collaboration.
 - We know that having (and delivering) a highly effective curriculum is key to student success that allows them to access the next stage of their education or employment. A formal partnership will allow Hodgson to access the best parts of our partners curriculum to internally challenge our own provision as well as to share ours with our partners. Also, the opportunity to internally quality-assure across the trust, bringing together the curriculum knowledge within it, will be powerful in driving continuous improvement.
- Staff access and development.
 - Having good teachers in classrooms, supported by teaching support and administration of high quality, is instrumental in ensuring an effective education. Collaboration in a multi-academy trust will allow staff development activities to be undertaken at-scale across the trust as well as to solve issues that would otherwise prove to be problematic through offering opportunities, such as secondments, to talented teachers and leaders to keep them in the trust and influencing education within it. It also provides a forum for staff to share good practice, as outlined above, but also to collaborate more formally in areas where there are only a small number of staff in school but in important areas. Examples might be in the teaching of subjects such as music and art as well as in site management and data management.
- Efficiencies in the scale of the organisation.
 - This process, some immediate but many occurring over the first two-three years of the MAT, can see processes such as HR, finance, payroll and procurement be managed centrally thus taking advantage of the significant economies of scale available to a MAT.

This saving can then be used to fund teaching and learning improvements in the schools at the 'chalk-face', which is where it should be. It should be noted that these efficiencies can take time to see the full reality of as existing agreements must be respected and we certainly do not see making people redundant as a way to achieve this – however, over time, it will become apparent.

- Access to funding and potential for development. As the government's direction of travel is to a fully trust-led system, there is funding available for trust growth projects (such as employing dedicated HR or educational psychology staff) as well as to develop the buildings and facilities – and these funds are only available to academies. It should be pointed out that Hodgson has received significant funds over recent years for capital investment that has covered heating, windows, air conditioning, fire doors – all of which would not have been possible if we were not an academy. The difference as a larger MAT is that we would not have to bid for this funding (as we currently do, and some bids do fail), it would come automatically as well as there being more of it.

Have the leadership/governors considered the possible disadvantages of a MAT, as seen or perceived in some other MATs, and how would they mitigate them?

We have considered a number of pitfalls seen in other schools/trusts and have explicitly considered each. As examples:

- Loss of autonomy and identity.
 - At inception all the of the institutions in this MAT are strong – good results and Ofsted good and better. Therefore it would make no sense to make alterations to how they are run. However, to secure that, the Scheme of Governance and Delegation, which is the document that sets out the terms of engagement between the schools and the MAT, cements local autonomy into the trust setup and way of working. The role of the governing bodies in each of the schools will very much be ensuring high-quality education and stakeholder engagement (as it is now). The trust will be overseen by a board of Trustees, all of whom buy into the spirit that this MAT has been constructed around, and effective governance systems, designed deliberately to eliminate conflicts of interest, will ensure that school autonomy and identity is preserved. Specifically, the school name or uniform will not be changed.
- A MAT represents a private company, with profit as a motivator, and/or a drive for privatisation of the schools' sector.
 - This is completely untrue. MATs, whilst having a company name and number, also operate as a registered charity, thus complying with charity law in the UK, as well as under Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) regulations. Any budget surplus/reserves are specifically for the use of the schools and MAT for the education of the children in it.

Have the leadership/governors considered the risks of not forming a MAT with other like-minded providers in coming to this decision?

- The trust landscape is developing rapidly and there is a risk of becoming isolated. Then as more trusts develop, Hodgson may find itself in a situation whereby we would have to join a trust in the future – possibly of our choosing – but not one we would necessarily have a leading role within.
- Further to the above if, in the future, improvements were seen to be needed at Hodgson that the school (as a single academy) was not seen to be able to deliver by itself, the DfE Regional Director now has the power to direct schools to a trust of his/her choosing in order to secure these

improvements. Being part of a trust would allow any improvements to be driven from within the trust.

- Schools cannot continue as they are, and certainly not as they were 10 years or so ago. Local authority services have been scaled back in terms of scope and, therefore, quality. Trusts are now in a position to build capacity (especially given the funding allocations, outlined above) and, in some cases, provide support back to LAs who do not have such capacity.

What will the leadership structure of the trust look like? Will we lose our Headteacher?

Given that Hodgson is converting from single to multi-academy trust, the accounting officer (Mr Siddall) will continue in that role within the MAT and the plan is that a trust leadership team formed of the leaders of each of the schools be established to lead the trust on a day-to-day basis. This will mean some alterations to the leadership structures of the schools and as details are agreed they will be shared, however Mr Siddall will retain a key position to Hodgson and will bring other talented leaders into the structure – all of whom will seek to develop further the educational offer at Hodgson.

Will the school name or uniform change?

No. We are Hodgson Academy and will proudly keep our name and the current uniform.

Will staff contracts change?

No. All staff will transfer to the academy trust on their existing terms and conditions that are protected under TUPE law. It is not intended to change these once the transfer is complete.

As a partnership of schools will you have increased purchasing power?

Yes, it's probably the case that a group of schools will be able to obtain better value when negotiating contracts for services essential for running a school, such as insurance, accountancy, HR, Payroll, broadband and other internet and IT services.

Would staff be expected to move from one school/college to another?

No. Staff are employed under their existing terms and conditions to work in their current school. There may be opportunities for staff to work in another school or across the MAT, however these would be advertised, in the usual way and staff would willingly apply for, and accept, these roles.

Would our school's budget be used to bail out a new MAT member school if it was in financial trouble?

No and no decision will ever be taken that might jeopardise that. All schools within The Multi-Academy Trust have their own budget and financial control. If another school joined the partnership then they would only do so if their financial position was strong.

Will there be any change to the admissions policy and arrangements?

None whatsoever.

Will the curriculum change?

In short, no. We currently teach to the National Curriculum and we already have the power to change this if we wish. Our main consideration is to continue with a 'broad and balanced' curriculum that helps us instil in children a 'lifelong love of learning'.

Will the term dates change?

The current arrangements for the setting of term dates will continue.

Will children be moved between schools in the trust?

Absolutely not. The children belong to the school they were admitted to.

Would students from Hodgson be required to progress onto Blackpool Sixth Form, or would entry requirements be different?

Not at all. Students have the full range of options on leaving school at the end of Year 11. The Blackpool Sixth Form College has its own entry requirements that students would have to satisfy in order to gain a place on their desired pathway.