

Cotham School
Consultation on
Multi-Academy Trust arrangements

Frequently Asked Questions (Updated 26 September 2016)

It seemed before that it was a red-line issue that all members of the MAT should be co-ops as should the MAT itself be; how and why has this been dropped? This was the original thinking of the Governors, however the DfE revised the Memorandum and Articles for multi-academy trusts to provide 2 models. The first being Model 1 Standard articles. The second being Model 6 which accommodate multi-academy trusts with both cooperative and non cooperative schools. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/academy-model-memorandum-and-articles-of-association>

There would be more scope for growth if schools could join which were not cooperative schools hence the dropping of the all multi-academy trust members being co-ops.

Academies joining a MAT are not like members joining a club, it is more like companies being taken over by a conglomerate, and in this vein the articles of the overarching body will inevitably have an overarching effect on the member trusts. You need to ensure that this does not compromise the co-operative nature of Cotham nor work against its existing values and principles, and that needs to be enshrined in the articles i.e. they cannot be off the shelf-articles but must have at least some extra provisions to provide this protection This is part of the work being carried out at the moment, There is a proposed governance structure on the school website, governors would be grateful for any views on the proposed structure. Please comment using the form on the website. Questions will be shared with Governors and published with answers, but please do make comments on the website form.
<http://www.cotham.bristol.sch.uk/form/?pid=82&form=22>

You need to think very carefully about the articles. Off-the-shelf they presumably provide legality, but you need to ensure that provisions are explicitly in there to prevent undesirable outcomes and to enable desirable ones. For instance as this is effectively a corporate merger, who ends up owning the assets and who is able to dispose of them? Is there a risk of expropriation of council property? Is there a risk of asset stripping? What provision is in place to ensure LA representation? What provision is in place to prevent the introduction of selection / conversion to Grammar School status etc? The members will be the owners of the trust and own any assets. They will also have the power to make any changes to the trusts governance structure and the way in which it meets its object. You will notice that there is little difference between the objects in both Model 1 & 6 of the articles. Or the power of the members and trustees. The difference between the 2 models being the way the members and trustees are appointed and replaced.

How will a trust with a mixture of co-ops and non co-ops work? All you materials up to now envisaged all members being co-ops and hence having a hierarchy of fora - yet if non-co-ops are to be members, then how does that work? Model 6 articles say that the multi-academy trust has to have a forum, they do not specify that all of the schools in the multi-academy trust need to have a Forum. We would imagine that members of the constituencies of the multi-academy trust would make up the Forum. This would mean that there were no hierarchies as all students, parents, staff, etc...of the multi-academy trust can choose to join the Forum meaning that the forum is not dependent on individual schools being co operative schools. This is a change to previous cooperative multi-academy trust articles where all schools had to be part of the schools cooperative society and have a Forum. The members of the trust have the power to decide on the nature of the Forum and how it is structured, there is no specific structure laid out in the model 6 articles. Schools can now choose to be or not to be cooperative schools. This will not be the case under the proposal in the consultation as Model 1 articles do not include a Forum

How is Cotham governors forming a MAT with like-minded educationalists a unique opportunity? Cotham School has been presented with a golden opportunity to bring on board a group of educational experts who can help shape the development of our multi-academy trust plans. We can use their expertise to put in place the very best effective and democratic academy governance, their experience to develop collaborative school-to-school improvement strategies that work and their business acumen to ensure every penny is spent well and focused on our students learning.

How will the formation of our MAT be different to the 'big chains'? The multi-academy trust will be formed by changing and adapting our current articles of association and renaming the trust 'Prima Learning Trust'. Unlike some of the big chains the trust will not be sponsored by a private company or big business. It will be led by Cotham School working collaboratively with its trust family of local schools.

Is Cotham being 'taken over'? Actually in legal terms it's the other way round. Cotham School is taking over Prima Learning Trust. Cotham School Trust will take on the name, have permission to use some of the policies it has developed and have access to its team of experts. After the multi-academy has been established, Prima Learning Trust as it is currently constituted will be closed down.

How will the change affect the flow and control of funding to the school? If the change goes ahead and is approved by the Department for Education the new multi-academy trust will be issued with a master funding agreement with a supplementary funding agreement issued in respect of Cotham School. This ensures that the multi-academy trust receives the funding allocated for Cotham School. The new multi-academy trust intends to operate a full delegation model which means that funding and decision making will be delegated to schools. The only funding that is proposed to be retained by the

multi-academy trust will be to cover those legal and financial duties that can only be exercised by the trust. An example would be completion and submission of financial returns to the Education Funding Agency and arrangements for internal audit.

What are the specific roles provided by the Prima staff, that is, the organisation chart? Prima does not have any paid members of staff so no specific roles have been allocated in the new organisation chart.

How is it foreseen that this will affect the recruitment, management and development of teaching staff? We want Prima Learning Trust to be an 'employer of choice' that good and outstanding teachers want to work for. Prima Learning Trust has developed the Prima Guarantee that would guarantee all teaching and associate staff an entitlement to professional development. As other schools join our multi-academy trust they will be expected to contribute to a multi-academy trust wide programme of training and development. Altogether we think that this is an attractive package which will enhance our ability to recruit, manage and develop the very best staff. In our view this is one of the most exciting aspects of the proposal.

Why have Cotham School decided not to use the Cooperative articles for the new Trust? Governors considered very carefully whether to stay with the Co-operative model and decided to consult on a recommendation to set up the new trust using standards multi-academy trust (MAT) articles of association. The main reasons are:

- Governors felt that the standard articles are more welcoming and inclusive of all types of schools (with different stakeholder consultation structures) and are not a barrier to being 'cooperative'.
- Having standard articles does not prevent the school from having fully representative stakeholder engagement. Indeed the governors believe that engagement tailored to the needs of the community leads to higher standards and a more inclusive school.
- That the Forum model has only been partially effective in engaging all our families and communities and is not judged as meeting the interests of our diverse school community.
- Finally, disappointment that despite Cotham School paying an annual fee to the Cooperative Schools Society and College it has not provided Cotham School with the school improvement advice and regional networking needed.

Where is the existing Prima Learning Trust based? Prima is Bristol based. It brings together the expertise of lifelong educationalists, educational research and legal experience. The Trust approached Cotham School to be the founder school to form a collaborative partnership which brings together

schools and communities in order to further improve learning and achievement for all children and young people in Bristol.

Who is/are the driving force(s) behind Prima? Prima was established by Colin McLean, CEO of Best Practice Network, who brought together an exceptional board of Trustees to deliver Prima's vision of providing excellent educational provision for students supported by outstanding professional development for staff.

Who are its key players and why?

Paul Brett

A former teacher, headteacher, and Chief Education Officer of a UK local authority, Paul brings a lifetime of outstanding educational knowledge to the role of Chair for Prima. He has experience of working both nationally and locally in politically driven environments, as well as the intellectual background needed to be a system leader in his own right. Paul is also Chair of the International Schools Partnership, which runs schools around the world.

Colin McLean

Colin is the Chief Executive of Best Practice Network. He is responsible for the leadership and strategic management of this highly successful company, which has a track record of delivering outstanding school improvement and professional development services to schools. A former Registered Inspector for Ofsted and a Lead Facilitator for the National College, he is also a Trustee of a MAT in Cornwall.

Jayne Clemence

Jayne is Director of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. Her experience includes headship of two special schools in London, and working with Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) as an additional inspector as part of the School Improvement Division.

Peter Daw

Peter is a highly qualified educator and leader of school improvement, with wide-ranging experience as a successful senior manager. He has served as a very accomplished HMI and evaluator of educational quality, and has proven success in improving educational outcomes in school, local authority, regional, and national posts.

Gary Wilkie

Gary is Chief Executive of the Learning in Harmony Trust (which includes a special school) in London. He is a National Leader of Education, and as a National Support School, Sheringham has supported schools in three authorities. Gary was chair of Newham Association of Primary Headteachers from 2001 to 2013, and led the development of Newham Partnership Working – a mutual company set up by schools to run a range of services in Newham and beyond.

Professor Sally Thomas

Sally is a Professor of Education at the University of Bristol's Graduate School of Education and Director of the Centre for Assessment and Evaluation Research in Education. She has published widely on the topics of educational quality, effectiveness, and improvement, using a variety of research approaches (both qualitative and quantitative) – most recently contributing a chapter in The Routledge International Handbook of

Educational Effectiveness: Research, Policy, and Practice (2015). Her research interests include value-added measures of educational effectiveness, professional learning communities, pupil learning and citizenship, and education in developing countries. Sally's current projects include 'Evaluation of Research Learning Communities', funded by the Education Endowment Foundation, and 'Educational Progress of Looked After Children', funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

Yvonne Atkinson

Yvonne is a qualified solicitor and has served as Head of Legal Services – as well as Deputy Chief Executive and Borough Solicitor – in three local authorities. She has worked in the private sector, specialising in governance and public, charitable, and company law. More recently she has worked as a Director and Company Secretary for the Board Development Agency, which provides services for the charitable sector. Yvonne has also been a school governor.

What will happen to the existing Prima Learning Trust when the new MAT is set up? Once the new Prima Learning Trust is set up, the existing trust will be re-named (to allow Cotham School Trust, not the school, to legally take on the name). Having achieved its original objectives of finding an outstanding school to partner, the plan is that next year it will be wound up.

Why do Cotham School governors want to work with Prima Learning Trust? Cotham School governors have agreed that working with Prima Learning Trust offers a fantastic opportunity not only for Cotham School but for the family of schools that will form our eventual MAT. Prima are locally based and at their heart is school improvement through staff development with a clear impact of learners. The ability to tap into the pool of expertise will help accelerate Cotham School's improvement journey and that will benefit our students and young people's learning. Already, Prima Learning Trustees are making a difference and offering advice and support as the school plans for the future.

In addition, governors felt that a partnership with Prima will attract both Ofsted Outstanding and Good schools into the trust as well as providing the challenge and support needed for schools that require improvement.

Finally, Prima's commercial expertise will help the school make the most of economies of scale and enable more funding to be focused on children and young people's learning.

What are Prima's educational values? One of the reasons why Prima approached Cotham School as a potential partner is the fact that the values of both organisations aligned. A steering group made up from representatives from both organisations has agreed the proposed values for the new Prima Learning Trust.

“High Standards, Inclusiveness and Cooperation”

The vision of Prima Learning Trust is to provide life-enhancing education that

develops the character, talents and potential of every child regardless of starting point or context.

Prima schools are at the heart of their local communities and every school within the trust has its own unique identity. However, each has in common the same unwavering commitment to the highest aspirations for every child. Our schools have a positive culture and ethos where hard work, ambition and high achievement are celebrated and seen as the norm.

Our intention is to create a family of schools, cooperating within the Prima Learning Trust ethos and fully inclusive settings, who strive for and secure the best academic outcomes and therefore life chances for children and young people. We believe this can be achieved through outstanding leadership, strong self-evaluation, involvement of stakeholders in strategy development, outstanding staff and teacher development and excellent communication and engagement. The trust will be open and transparent, 'outward facing' and maintain partnerships with other organisations.

How will the new Prima Learning Trust be different from other MATs?

The new Trust brings together the outstanding practice of Cotham with the expertise of Prima Learning Trust. This combination brings additional capacity to ensure that the new MAT will be at the forefront of MAT developments. We want Prima Learning Trust to be an exemplar organisation where others want to join us or learn from us about what works well for pupils and students.

Can Prima assure us that it will work in the best interests of staff and learners?

The new Prima will include Cotham nominated members and trustees and will be committed to transparency and openness. It will invite external examination and audit of its outcomes and operations.

How will other schools join Prima? We want schools to want to join Prima Learning Trust in order to become part of a highly successful organisation based on collaboration, challenge and support. As the trust matures the Regional Schools Commissioner may recommend some schools join us to receive additional support. This may include circumstances where schools require improvement and who can benefit from our expertise. Appropriate due diligence will need to be carried out to ensure that the trust has a full understanding of the position of the applicant school.

What might be the right number of schools to make the MAT most effective?

The Trust has modest growth plans and wants to make a contribution to overall effectiveness of schools in Bristol. Over time we want to attract at least two primaries and another secondary school into the Trust. The government recommends that a financially healthy MAT should aim to have a minimum of 3,000 students.

If you have a question that we haven't covered please send it to matconsultation@cotham.bristol.sch.uk We will ensure that it is answered and added to this document.