



Guide to Recruiting to Multi-Academy Trust Boards

INTRODUCTION

Great boards build, grow and sustain great academy trusts. The support they provide and the accountability they demand from trusts are central to ensuring good governance and public trust.

This guide is for trusts – particularly growing multi-academy trusts that want to attract and recruit new independent non-executive directors or trustees to their boards from business and the professions. It has been put together by [Academy Ambassadors](#) – a not-for-profit organisation set up to raise the calibre of people recruited to academy boards.

You can find in here practical advice on running an effective recruitment process.

1) GETTING STARTED

Recruiting non-executives to the board is just as important as recruiting the right senior staff in the academies.



**BE CLEAR ABOUT THE TIMING OF THE ADVERTISEMENTS,
SHORTLISTING, INTERVIEWS AND SCHOOL VISITS;
AND YOUR EXPECTATIONS AROUND WHAT IS TO BE PROVIDED
FROM CANDIDATES:**

The chief executive or principal should have some input to the process – many trusts choose to have them show potential new non-executives/trustees around the school(s), and have an informal conversation. Some CEOs come to the interview panel with feedback, for example on the candidates skills in handling executive/non-executive relationships.

If you are a newly forming trust you may not yet have a trust board to lead on the recruitment. It is however likely that you would have a steering board or project board that is driving the new trust development and therefore your recruitment panel could be selected from this group. Depending on the skills available within your steering board you may wish to bring in an independent expert to support or lead the process.

1) GETTING STARTED (CONTINUED)



AGREE WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PROCESS:

It should normally be the chair of the board – not the principal or chief executive - who oversees the process, supported by a clerk or company secretary.

When recruiting a new trustee or non-executive a short-lived informal search committee can be helpful to open up the process, often including the chair of your board, a member of your MAT, a trustee of your board with HR skills and sometimes an independent expert with a strong reputation for independence and rigour.



CLARIFY UPFRONT WHO MAKES APPOINTMENTS AND HOW MANY NEW NON-EXECUTIVES YOU WANT

Your Articles of Association should say how many non-executives/trustees the members can appoint, how many (if any) are elected, how many must be appointed by a Foundation or Sponsor Body and who makes final decisions on appointments. If your trust is a faith-based organisation it is very likely there will be additional restrictions on who you can recruit and how and you must agree the process with the Diocese or other appropriate body.

Each trust has its own rules specified in its articles on size and make-up of trust boards, however most trusts are moving towards what's now widely regarded by DfE and others as best-practice:

For members: usually five members, three as the minimum – an odd number is recommended to allow effective decision making. These members must include people with educational and business/commercial experience, and have the expertise to effectively hold trustees and employees to account across all aspects of the trust's operations. With that in mind employees must not be members of the trust, this includes the executive principal / headteacher. In addition only 19.9% of members can be LA associated.

Trustees: there should be between six and ten trustees with clear separation between members and trustees to allow for robust challenge and accountability. It is permissible for members to also act as Trustees, but the majority should not sit on both groups. LA influenced individuals must make up no more than 19.9% of trustees and the total number of Trustees who are employed by the AT cannot exceed 1/3.

For members and trustees it is advised that the members and/or trustees should include at least one person not involved with the MATs or school's previous/other activities to provide a measure of external challenge.

1) GETTING STARTED (CONTINUED)



DEFINE YOUR AMBITIONS AND CHALLENGES

Recruiting to the board is often an opportunity to take stock – don't assume you just need 'a new non-executive to fill a gap'. Answer yes to any of the following and you may want to pause and commission an independent review of governance or have a board health-check:

- Is the trust on the cusp of change – growth, ethos, structure or locality?
- Are there problems of trust and credibility with any key partners: the DfE, Regional Schools Commissioners, EFA, parents, local community?
- Has the performance of any academies been unexpectedly low or apparently 'held back' by local circumstances?
- Is the chair likely to move on in the next 1-2 years?

The National Governors' Association (NGA) routinely delivers full external reviews of governance and health checks to academies as part of its Training and Consultancy programme. See www.nga.org.uk/training. In some cases the Regional Schools Commissioner or [Academy Ambassadors](#) can provide a light-touch pre-recruitment diagnostic review.



DEFINE WHAT IS NEEDED TO DRIVE THE TRUST FORWARD

- a) Trusts often start with a skills-gap-analysis conducted by the clerk or equivalent.
- b) Be honest about capability: you may have financial skills but are they at the right level?
- c) Look forward - do you need specific business-growth, change management or building development experience?
- d) Look back - which area does the CEO get least challenge from the board on?
- e) Check - do you need to add people or slim and refresh the board? 81% of higher-performing sponsors have 9 or fewer board members. ([DfE WDGLL report](#))



TRANSLATE THE CHALLENGE INTO THE PERSON SPECIFICATION

Some of the expertise the board needs can only be gained at sufficient calibre, depth and breadth by going out to business, public sector, charity and the professions. Translating your needs to people from a different sector can be hard: this table suggests specific experience you may want to stipulate is required when you recruit.

1) GETTING STARTED (CONTINUED)

AREA OF EXPERTISE	EXPERIENCE
Business	<p>Business growth: managing business growth - commercial, retail or industry experience in growing a business, chain of businesses or franchises.</p> <p>Head Office and organisational development: creating, growing and managing a head office, including driving up business efficiency in central services; experience overseeing the establishment of a regional or cluster structure.</p> <p>Consolidation: planning for consolidation or even downsizing including managing financial, personnel and reputational issues and consequences.</p>
Governance	<p>Previous experience as chair: experience of chairing a board, developing the people, process and committees of a board, holding colleagues to account and engaging fellow senior board members in change.</p> <p>Governance: experience in leading rigorous, independent board structures that are both compliant and effective.</p> <p>Charity: experience operating within a large charity / not-for-profit organisation.</p>
HR	<p>Personnel: skills to handle the personnel challenges of a large and growing staff body, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing the performance of multiple senior staff • Remuneration decision-making to set leadership salaries • HR and legal expertise to handle grievance cases or where redundancies are planned • Recruitment skills to support growth, particularly in regions where recruitment is difficult • Succession planning where trustees or executive team is likely to retire or move on • Staff engagement and development
Legal	<p>Senior legal practice: larger trusts particularly look for legals skills at partner level and above where they are likely to have legal issues such as sponsorship of new schools, land acquisition, complex personnel cases.</p>
Financial	<p>Financial management: all trusts require independent, scrutiny of financial planning and budgeting. Some trusts have specifically recruited people who have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rebuilt a balanced budget from a deficit position • Planned for sustainable growth • Had experience in overseeing budgets of a particular value – eg no less than the trust expects in 5-10 years • Audit experience • Procurement expertise • Experience in bidding and securing grants
Asset Management	<p>Property and capital: architectural experience, building and capital development, managing large scale and/or disburse asset portfolios and/or change programmes.</p> <p>IT change programme – transforming and improving IT provision</p>
Other	<p>Communications Marketing and PR: skills to handle the stakeholder engagement challenges around large change, growth, reputational issues.</p> <p>Developing Relationships: where trusts are looking to strengthen and/or specifically develop new strategic sector relationships.</p>

2) RUNNING THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS



DRAFTING THE ROLE DESCRIPTIONS AND JOB ADVERTS

As with any other recruitment high quality materials attract high quality candidates:

- Use and adapt existing templates to avoid spending time re-inventing materials – there is one on the [AA website](#) – usually completed by the clerk/chair and approved by recruiting committee.
- Be very clear about the position: member, chair, trustee, local committee?
- Be very clear about practical details – where and when will meetings be held, what is the time commitment members/trustees are expected to give beyond attending board meetings, will each member/trustee be expected to serve on a sub-committee, will they be expected to undertake visits to the academies?
- Sell the role. Identify the personal and professional benefits of being a member/trustee as well as outlining you want from a member/trustee.
- Be honest and do not hide problems. If a school in your trust is in Special Measures be open about it and be clear about the challenges and rewards of doing something that makes a difference. Most high calibre business leaders thrive on challenge.
- Be clear about your vision and explain the ethos and values of the trust: senior executives making a decision to become a member/trustee need to know their time will be well spent and that they can buy into the ethos.

A more comprehensive recruitment pack sent to interested candidates could include:

- An overview of the trust – basic information on size, location, phase, type of schools;
- Core information and data on the individual academies – Ofsted summaries or an extract from the data dashboard and a prospectus or publicity materials from your academies to give a sense of what life is like as a pupil and parent;
- A summary of the trust's governance structure, how it works, who are the current members/trustees, what new members/trustees can expect by way of commitment, induction and training;
- Role specification; and
- Overview of the appointment process and time-line including clear instructions on how to apply/express an interest and date for interviews.

Widening the field of potential applicants is essential if you want to recruit the highest calibre people to your board. [Academy Ambassadors](#) offers a free service and uses a network of business leaders, major employers and partners as well as social media and executive search agencies to attract senior level professionals to academy trust boards.

Partners such as [Academy Ambassadors](#), [SGOSS Governors for Schools](#), [Inspiring Governors](#) or specialist commercial recruitment agencies will help you find talent and advise on the process – but it is your process. To get the best from an external organisation be clear about what you want from them.

“Having individuals with strong commercial skills at board level is crucial – and the importance grows when chains grow beyond 4-5 schools”

(DfE report ‘[What does a high performing academy sponsor look like](#)’, 2014).

2) RUNNING THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS (CONTINUED)

To recruit educational expertise to the board many trusts talk to [National or Local Leaders of Education](#), [National Leaders of Governance](#) and [Regional Schools Commissioners](#).



STAGE 1 - EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST AND SIFTING

As a first stage, asking for a CV and one-page expression of interest should be sufficient: don't force potential recruits to go through the extra bureaucracy of additional forms.

When sifting candidates most trusts seem to use a two or three person panel including one educationalist, one non-educationalist to help 'translate' business CVs. Previous school governor experience is not usually an essential criteria - unless you are a new trust with limited governance experience. Never include someone on the shortlist to fill space: they are volunteers and it is unfair to waste their time.



STAGE 2 - INFORMAL MEETING

A first, informal discussion is usually best to allow them to ask you questions and for you to gauge their interest and fit.

SOME QUESTIONS AND ISSUES TO THINK ABOUT:

1

Who is best placed to have the first conversation? This would usually be the chair or a senior trustee/non-executive director. Meeting face-to-face is always preferable to a telephone conversation. Holding it at an academy, allows candidates to meet pupils and staff and can help to bring the role to life - showing what you do and why it matters.

2

Set a clear timetable and stick to it: you should commit to sending holding responses to potential trustees within 24 hours, shortlist/meet potentials within 2 weeks of closing date. [See an example timeline.](#)

3

Be clear about expectations now. Don't downplay the commitment just to attract a candidate: you are looking for someone to commit to the organisation over the long term.

4

Brief candidates on the basics about structure, issues, personal liability.

5

Be clear about your ethos and values – candidates with a good understanding of these and who are in sympathy with them will be better placed to support you when facing the difficult decisions.

6

If they are unsure about the role or expectations consider inviting them to a board meeting as an observer. They should sign a non-disclosure agreement.

2) RUNNING THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS (CONTINUED)



STAGE 3 - APPOINTMENT DECISION

A formal interview involving three people (usually at least one member, the chair, possibly another non-executive or external person) is essential to check that they share your values and that you are both clear what they would bring to the trust. A fair interview process also helps ensure that the decision holds up, should it ever come under scrutiny, and is important to public trust.

A non-executive/trustee interview is not a technical examination of their knowledge. It is an opportunity for you to test their commitment to the trust and that the skills they have will be complementary to those of your existing trustees. Your questions should be designed to draw this information out. [See an example from another trust here.](#)

You should also seek and take up references as part of the selection process.



APPOINTING TO THE BOARD

Once you have decided who you want to be your new board member you need to appoint them in line with your Articles. You will have established this at the outset but a proper record needs to be made of the appointment. A formal letter should be sent to your new board member confirming their appointment, who they have been appointed by and their term of office.

Those not appointed will expect to be informed and to receive honest, constructive feedback before the outcome is made public.

New board members should complete relevant paperwork for Companies House and undertake a DBS check. It is usually the Company Secretary or Clerk that would arrange this.

Finally, the new board appointment can be an opportunity to tell others about how the trust is improving – most trusts will announce the appointment to heads and principals, in school newsletters and inform their Regional Schools Commissioner or other local partners.

After appointment all members/trustees need a thorough introduction to key personnel, full induction and – particularly Chairs - access to a network of outstanding people in other trusts to encourage best-practice sharing and collaboration. Where members/trustees are new to academy governance it is advisable to identify appropriate training for them. More about the induction process can be found on the [Academy Ambassadors website](#).

Academy Ambassadors

FIND OUT MORE



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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: RECRUITING TO THE BOARD TYPICAL TIMELINE

APPENDIX 2: POTENTIAL MEMBER / TRUSTEE CANDIDATE INTERVIEWS

APPENDIX 1: RECRUITING TO THE BOARD - TYPICAL TIMELINE

WHEN	WHAT ACTIVITY NEEDED?	WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN THIS STEP OF THE PROCESS?
Weeks 1 and 2	<p>Assess skills gaps on current board</p> <p>Agree aims of recruitment – strategic challenges the board will face</p> <p>Agree process – who is on the panel and check Articles / key dates for shortlisting, interviews, school visits</p>	<p>Company Secretary (or Clerk) / Chair (you may also include the CEO but they would not normally lead the process)</p> <p>Members / Trustees / Chair</p> <p>Company Secretary (or Clerk) / Chair</p>
Weeks 3 and 4	Draft a clear role specification	Company Secretary (or Clerk) / Chair
Weeks 3 and 4	Checks and amend role specification ready for publication	Academy Ambassadors team (if recruiting through AA)
Week 5	Role goes live to recruit	Academy Ambassadors team
Week 11	Recruitment closes – CVs sent to trust/ shortlisting	Academy Ambassadors team / trust recruitment panel (if recruiting through AA or the Company Secretary/Clerk)
Weeks 12 and 13 (but could be longer to arrange visits)	Informal conversations/school visits/ check reference checks (may require a little longer depending on timing of visits)	Chair / CEO / Company Secretary (or Clerk)
Week 13 or 14	Formal interviews	Trust recruitment panel
Week 14/15 or next Board meeting	Formal appointment	Chair
Week 14 or 15	Feedback to unsuccessful candidates / Academy Ambassadors	Chair
Week 15 onwards	Induction starts	Company Secretary (or Clerk)

APPENDIX 2: POTENTIAL MEMBER / TRUSTEE CANDIDATE INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEWERS:

- Steering Board member
- Steering Board member
- Chair of the Steering Board
- MAT project advisor

CANDIDATES:

- 1pm – candidate 1
- 2.30pm - candidate 2

TIMINGS	AGENDA ITEM	WHO
12:45/50 - 1.00pm	MAT team arrive and set up	Names
1.00pm - 2.15pm	Candidate 1 interview	
2.15pm - 2.30pm	Recruitment team review candidate.	
2.30pm - 3.34pm	Candidate 2 interview	
3.34pm - 4pm	Recruitment team review candidate.	
4.00pm - 4.30pm	MAT team agree selection of candidates and forward plan - Feedback to candidates - Vetting (DBS/Disqualification) - Feedback to MAT board and implications on other trustees - Finalising the structure/informing DfE	
4.30pm	Close	

INTERVIEW AGENDA AND QUESTIONS PLAN:

Purpose - This is an opportunity for you to test the candidate's commitment to the trust and that the skills they have will be complementary to those of your existing trustees. You should be testing out whether the candidates share the MAT's values and understand the vision; what they see as their contribution to the trust; and ensuring that the skills and experiences they have are relevant to the role of a MAT trustee – do they understand accountability systems and how to hold senior leaders to account for instance?

This is not a technical examination of their knowledge of being a trustee.

NO.	QUESTION	LEAD INTERVIEWER	FEEDBACK POINTS DURING INTERVIEW
	<p>Welcome and introductions Offer candidate a drink</p>	Interview Name:	Candidates Name:
1	<p>Thank them for their interest, hope they received the papers ok</p> <p>Summarise the stage the Trust is at – awaiting academy orders / forming the new board / designing the structure / looking for new Trustees and Members to enhance skills on the board / hoping they can engage at this early stage to be part of the shaping and designing stage.</p> <p>Could you start by outlining - Why are you looking for a Chair / Trustee / Treasurer role at this time? / What attracted you to this role? / And what particular qualities will you bring the group and what are you looking to get from being part of the MAT?</p>		
2	<p>What are your impressions of the schools and Trust plans?</p>		
3	<p>Given the key issues the Trust needs to address over the next 5 years – forming a new leadership model / rapid school improvement / managing student growth / estates projects / reducing budgets / profile and stakeholder engagement etc.....</p> <p>What experience would you bring to the role of operating within the Trustee Board? And where do you think you could make the best contribution?</p>		

NO.	QUESTION	LEAD INTERVIEWER	FEEDBACK POINTS DURING INTERVIEW
4	<p>What experience do you have of developing, building, influencing and growing an organisation? ie, - the challenges you faced, your criteria for success, and what did you learn from the experience?</p> <p>And what do you think are the hidden risks/challenges/issues this Trust is likely to face?</p>		
5	<p>Can you tell us a little about your personal style of working and engagement in a corporate board / charitable trustee environment?</p> <p>ie, - How would colleagues or peers describe you – what adjectives would they use? / What have been your successes? And how did you evaluate the contribution that you made? / Where were the tensions? And what would you have done differently?</p>		
6	<p>Can you expand a little on your previous Trustee / Non-Exec and Education governance roles; and where are the gaps where you think you would have most to learn as an Academy Trustee?</p>		
7	<p>The Steering and Interim Board have yet to work out its model of operation and hence meeting timeframes etc.</p> <p>Could you outline the capacity / time that you would be able to commit to the Trust and/or any restrictions you may have?</p> <p>Would you be interested in taking on the Chair role if well supported by XX (as Member) and YY (as a proposed Vice-Chair)?</p>		

NO.	QUESTION	LEAD INTERVIEWER	FEEDBACK POINTS DURING INTERVIEW
8	<p>The new MAT must work within both corporate and charitable law, and is subject to DfE legislation such as the Academies Financial Handbook. The Board will need to run DBS checks on all confirmed Trustees, and trustees are required to sign a declaration that they are not 'disqualified from acting'.</p> <p>A key area of this is the 'connected parties' regulations and expectations – can you outline any areas you feel that there may be a conflict of interest with your personal or work life and the work of the Trust?</p> <p>And are you happy with DfE background checks</p>		
9	<p>Do you have any questions for us?</p>		
10	<p>Is there anything else anyone would like to cover?</p> <p>(use opportunity to explore any very specific points for the relevant candidate)</p>		
11	<p>Thank them for attending.</p> <p>Knowing what you know now, are you still interested in the role?</p> <p>And also would you be able to engage from as early as mid-late month?</p> <p>Outline the timeline for decisions and feeding back – interviewing today / feedback by date / feedback by date/ formal notification date</p>		

NOTE – anyone can ask for more detail or a supporting/supplementary question off the back of one of the above.
Aim is for about 5 mins per question