



Department
for Education

Characteristics of successful multi-academy trusts

**A tool developed by the Regional Schools Commissioner for
the South West for multi-academy trusts, their boards and
senior leaders**

August 2015

The Characteristics of Successful Multi-Academy Trusts

The creation of new multi-academy trusts (MATs) has been a highly visible element of the regional landscape since the Regional Schools Commissioners came into their posts in September 2014. During 2014/15, increasing work has been undertaken to help academies¹ that are creating MATs to understand better the expectations we have. It is also helpful to create a definition of success for those MATs that have been in operation for some time, as we support them to become strong, improvement-focused and sustainable. The system is maturing and we need to recognise that maturity is not just about doing more of the same better. It is about recognising that the smallest MATs as well as the largest can self-evaluate in the same way; an expectation of a maturing MAT is that they begin to play a role in the system beyond their own Trust. This document seeks to establish a working definition that categorises the development of each characteristic against four possible stages of maturity.

- **Beginning** – this early stage is an indicator that the Trust is new and that whilst the characteristic has been identified as being important, the progress within the characteristic is embryonic and developmental. Trust activity is focused on oversight and structures as the culture and ethos is established in the schools.
- **Developing** – this moves beyond the embryonic and it is clear that the Trust has started to drive improvement and strategy to embed stronger practice in the schools to sustain their improvement. Key improvements are shared across the Trust.
- **Embedding** – this moves to a more concise model of Trust influence where some of the systems and structures that the Trust wants to embed are now in place and making a difference. Staff work together through Trust co-ordinated work and independent collaborative groups that staff set up themselves.
- **Leading** – A MAT that is leading will be influencing practice beyond its own organisation. Momentum towards collaboration is now significantly beyond the act of working together to the common understanding and ability to articulate exactly how collaboration works and enables change to be sustained.

Note: This document is a working document designed to support the development and growth of MATs. It is not intended to supercede or replace the specific requirements for financial management, reporting and control outlined in the [Academies Financial Handbook](#). Additional information on this topic and others can be found in the accompanying document 'A Tool for MATs and sponsors', available from the [RSC SW office](#).

¹ The term 'academies' is used, in this document, to refer to academies, free schools, University Technical Colleges and Studio Schools.

MAT Characteristic	Beginning	Developing	Embedding	Leading
<p style="text-align: center;">OVERALL PERFORMANCE SELF ASSESSMENT</p> <p>There is clear evidence that the outcomes for young people who are educated within the MAT are exceeding previous performance and national expectations</p>	<p><i>The Trust outcomes for young people in terms of the progress they are making from KS1 to 2 or KS2 to 4 are not yet at national averages in more than half of the academies in the Trust</i></p>	<p><i>The Trust outcomes for young people in terms of the progress they are making from KS1 to 2 or KS2 to 4 are in line with national averages in more than half of the academies in the Trust</i></p>	<p><i>The Trust outcomes for young people in terms of the progress they are making from KS1 to 2 or KS2 to 4 are above national averages in more than half of the academies in the Trust</i></p>	<p><i>The Trust outcomes for young people in terms of the progress they are making from KS1 to 2 or KS2 to 4 are significantly above national averages in all of the academies in the Trust</i></p>
<p>Step 1 - there is a well communicated strategic vision and plan that moves seamlessly from implementation into impact. The school improvement plan can only be delivered through support from the Trust and the Trust priorities can only be delivered through the academies</p>	<p><i>The Trust has identified their key priorities & there is a strategic plan but it is too soon to see evidence of impact. The academies are not yet using the plan to inform their own improvement planning</i></p>	<p><i>Each academy has links in their improvement plan to the Trust strategic plan showing the contribution they make to the Trust and the academy priorities</i></p>	<p><i>The academy can provide some evidence that through their delivery of their academy-based plan at least 2-3 of the Trust priorities are also being delivered</i></p>	<p><i>The Trust has a strategic plan that seamlessly sits within the academy plans. There is clear evidence that all of the Trust priorities are being delivered by the academy. It is impossible to tell who takes the credit as the delivery and quality assurance (QA) is united and done by both</i></p>

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<p>Step 2 - there is a clear accountability framework for the performance of the Trust that all staff understand, including what happens when key staff under-perform</p>	<p><i>Accountability is linked to line management at academy level and does not rise through the Trust effectively. Local governing bodies may hold the Principal(s) to account but the Chief Executive Officer² (CEO) and Trust Board are not directly involved. The CEO is not fully held to account. Performance Management is embryonic at Trust level</i></p>	<p><i>The CEO holds the Principals to account and is held to account by the Board for the performance of the Trust. The CEO is accountable for standards in the academies. Performance Management of the CEO is emerging as a strength</i></p>	<p><i>The Chair of Board and the CEO hold the Principals and the chairs of academy boards to account. There is a collective responsibility for standards across the Trust. Performance across the academies is not as strong as it is at senior level where it is excellent</i></p>	<p><i>There is a clear path of accountability that enables discussions to take place from the Trust Board Chair to the CEO, the Trust Board Chair to Chair(s) of any local governing bodies, the CEO to Principals and Principals to their team members that improves standards. Performance Management is excellent Trust-wide</i></p>

² The Chief Executive Officer is assumed to be the Accounting Officer.

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<p>Step 3 - there are clear quality assurance systems in place to improve consistency and performance</p>	<p><i>The Trust has started to explore the elements of common practice that it believes will lead to greater consistency across the Trust. Examples include shared CPD and agreed data collection points and common educational policies across the Trust</i></p>	<p><i>The Trust has moved towards a stronger commitment to shared approaches that are improving practice. Shared CPD and data collection points are extended by peer reviews with frequent inclusion of external challenge</i></p>	<p><i>The Trust has ensured that there is a pattern of consistent practice that is now recognised as more efficient than each academy working independently. Academies are suggesting new areas of common working practice of their own for the Trust</i></p>	<p><i>The Trust has a common understanding of what outstanding performance is. All of the chief operating systems are consistently applied by the academies, who welcome this level of effective practice development</i></p>

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<p>Step 4 - there is a clear delegated framework for governance at Trust Board and local governing body level that makes the responsibilities of both the Board and any LGBs explicit</p>	<p><i>Members and Trustees fully understand their responsibilities and are clear about the legal framework in which the Trust operates but the overall governance structure lacks clarity, and information flow from academy level to Board may be restricted as a result. The Trust may be considering an LGB structure but this is not yet in place. All decisions for all schools are taken at Board level</i></p>	<p><i>There is a MAT board where the distinction between the role of members and directors is clear and understood by all staff. A skills audit enables the board to recruit skilled professionals capable of fulfilling their roles. There is clarity in terms of the roles of both boards but the structure is at an early stage of development. The values of the organisation are driven by the uniqueness of the schools, not the Trust</i></p>	<p><i>The MAT board is a strength of the organisation and has been developed over time following review into a stronger unit that reflects the scale and development of the Trust. The delegated authority is clear and both boards understand their responsibilities. The MAT board protects and extends the values of the organisation</i></p>	<p><i>The board has a clear plan for delegated authority and regularly checks that it is fit for purpose. Local governing bodies are effective at quality assuring standards at their school and the CEO and central team are subject to the same scrutiny. The Trust is successful as a result of the school's performance and the schools are good because of the Trust. There is top-down and bottom-up accountability</i></p>

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Step 5 - there is a Trust-wide school improvement strategy that recognises the different interventions needed at different stages of the improvement journey that a school undertakes.	<i>There is an embryonic Trust wide school improvement strategy that is focused on performance improvement in schools in significant difficulties. The Trust may have embedded effective attendance, behaviour and performance tracking systems, for example to rapidly improve the schools in the early years of membership</i>	<i>The Trust has a school improvement strategy that is becoming embedded and has progressed beyond the day to day core improvement needs. Systems to track data, the collection of regular KPI and a stronger performance management system are sustaining improvement in the schools</i>	<i>The school improvement strategy is sustaining improved performance, standards are rising and improvement is rapid. The self-evaluation of the academies is maturing so that they have greater ownership of their own requirements and make more bespoke support demands of the Trust</i>	<i>The Trust has improved the majority of its schools to the point at which those that were once weak now have capacity and strength to support new schools joining the MAT or schools beyond the Trust. They can also peer review with confidence other schools in the Trust. MAT leaders can articulate their school improvement repertoire</i>
Step 6 - there is a systematic programme of school to school support that is focused on the need of individual academies	<i>The Trust is starting to develop a school to school support strategy. Support is delivered by talented teachers and leaders in their own schools and is framed around core improvement themes and the skills of the staff</i>	<i>The Trust ensures that more teachers and leaders are making a contribution to school to school support beyond their own schools. The practice is good but there needs to be more impact driven classroom support</i>	<i>The Trust's school improvement strategy balances the generic needs of the schools with the facilitation of smaller learning communities of teaching leaders, who develop coaching groups with colleagues needing help</i>	<i>The Trust's school improvement strategy is built around an emerging pool of talented teachers and leaders who know the impact of their work and can name it and describe it</i>

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Step 7 - there is evidence of skilled management of Trust Risk indicators	<i>There is a contingency and business continuity plan in place but there is little evidence that risk management is structured in the Trust. Risks are managed on an individual basis and whilst successfully mitigated, do not enable the Board to prevent them re-occurring</i>	<i>The Trust has a risk register in place and it is used to monitor risks that the Trust has identified as possible threats to the organisation. There is some as yet unstructured relationship between the Trust's risk plan and those in the academies</i>	<i>The Board risk register is used to drive all improvement priorities and is the framework for agenda setting across the Trust. Each academy has its own register which indicates the risks that are linked to their academy as well as the ways in which board risks are mitigated</i>	<i>The Board risk is managed well and there is a clear relationship between risk and mitigation. The board has a structure in place that ensures that not only current risks are managed well but that there is a 3-5 year risk anticipation plan in place that is under regular review</i>
Step 8 - there is a clear succession plan for the key posts within the MAT (CEO, Director of Finance, HR, Chair of Board, members and directors, Principals and Vice Principals)	<i>The Trust knows there are posts in the organisation that require a succession plan. It has not yet grown enough capacity from within the organisation to address this. The Trust would rely on external recruitment or some internal secondments to resolve succession issues</i>	<i>The Trust has a talent management programme that supports and develops talented teachers and leaders and equips them to work effectively across the Trust in different academies and roles. These blend CPD opportunities with wider leadership experience</i>	<i>The Trust has a talent management plan for emerging and senior leaders in the organisation that means the Trust can deploy its most talented staff to work in more than one school on secondments or permanent transfers, creating career development and succession solutions</i>	<i>The Trust has a talent management plan that has matured and now includes staff at all levels across the Trust. Senior leaders have worked in more than one Trust academy and middle leaders and the best teachers are deployed across the Trust to sustain and deepen impact</i>

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Step 9 - there is a Trust wide commitment to making a contribution to local, regional and national educational networks beyond the MAT	<i>The academies in the Trust continue to participate in local and national networks but these are the continuation of previous practice and there is little evidence that these relationships contribute to Trust improvement or support for other academies</i>	<i>The Trust has developed partnerships with external groups beyond those that the academies have sustained. These partnerships enable the Trust to be better connected to regional and national networks that benefit children and staff</i>	<i>The Trust and the academies play a key role in wider system leadership through membership of Teaching School Alliances, supporting other schools, leading and participating in local partnerships and sharing expertise widely. The Trust learns from and contributes to the practice of other MATs in their region</i>	<i>The Trust has a Teaching School Alliance, NLE, NLG and SLE who provide support across the Trust but also to schools beyond the Trust. The Trust is a key part of the regional system leadership capacity to improve standards for all and works to support and challenges new and experienced MATs</i>

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