MAT Development Programme 2018: resource

Developmental questions for multi-academy trusts

July 2018

Contents

Summary

About this document

1. This document shares material produced to support the 2018 MAT Development Programme with a wider audience. It is intended as a resource that senior leadership teams of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) of any size or stage of development can use as a tool to help them further develop and improve.

   This resource is provided for MAT leaders, trustees, and others to use should they wish to and should they find it useful.

   The resource consists of suggested questions to consider in relation to the key aspects of a MAT's operations:

   - School improvement and developing people,
   - Governance and risk management, and
   - Finance and school resource management.

Expiry or review date

2. The next review date for this resource is December 2018. If you would like to provide any comments on the resource, please send them to mat.developmentprogramme@education.gov.uk and we will take account of any feedback from MATs in reviewing the questions.

Main points

3. The Department developed the questions in partnership with MAT CEOs. Participants in the 2018 MAT Development Programme are using them as part of the programme. As this programme is currently for a small group of MATs only, we are publishing the questions to give other MATs the opportunity to use them if they wish to do so. Since the launch of the programme, we have added a few extra questions in response to feedback.

4. **The questions are on pages 5-13.** These questions are for MATs to use flexibly as a tool to help facilitate developmental discussions and the sharing of good practice within and between trusts. There is, however, no requirement or expectation for MATs to use the questions: it is entirely their decision whether, how and when to do so.

5. The questions are suggested areas of focus to help MATs reflect on their practices and they are not a definitive list. MATs choosing to use these questions will wish to consider how best to incorporate them in a complementary way,

within their current practices. In order to benefit from using the questions, it will inevitably mean some investment of time by the senior leadership team and other staff. MATs will, therefore wish to decide who from the trust should be involved in using the questions and how much resource overall they want to devote to this, bearing in mind their existing commitments and workload. MATs should feel free to adapt and tailor the questions, according to their specific circumstances and can use them alongside other supporting resources, such as '*Multi-Academy Trusts: good practice guidance and expectations for growth'* and others published on the Department's website at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/multi-academy-trusts-establishing-and-developing-your-trust

Possibilities for using the development questions

6. MATs can use the questions in a number of ways, for example:

    - Within their own MAT – where trustees, senior leaders, headteachers and others undertake a self-assessment to identify trust-level development priorities;
    - In partnership with another MAT as a peer review process. Two (or more) MATs could work through the questions together to support the development of one or both of the MATs. Working with another MAT can bring an external view and challenge and give additional validity to a MAT's own self-assessment. Both trusts stand to gain the most from discussing the questions in an open and collaborative way. This process can be equally beneficial for both the trusts involved in the partnership. For example, this can be an opportunity for a two-way exchange of key documents, experiences and learning.

7. MATs could use the questions in an existing partnership they have already formed with another MAT. Any MATs not in an existing partnership that would like to collaborate with another trust over using the questions can contact their Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC). The RSC may be able, in some cases, to help facilitate a partnership with another trust. RSCs can be contacted via the following link:
    https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/schools-commissioners-group

8. **Annex A** summarises the process followed by MATs taking part in the MAT Development Programme where pairs of trusts work together in a partnership. This is one example of using the questions in practice.

Developmental questions for key themes

> The Department developed these questions in partnership with the sector. The questions are not a definitive list and are suggested areas of focus only, to stimulate discussion, and to help MATs identify areas of focus as they seek to develop. The relevance of some themes or questions may vary, depending on the size/stage of development of the MAT. Trusts may choose to tailor them, according to their specific circumstances. If you would like to provide any comments on the resource, please send them to mat.developmentprogramme@education.gov.uk and we will refine the questions further in the light of any feedback we receive from MATs.

THEME 1: School improvement and developing people

1. **How well does the MAT know its schools and have a sufficiently honest self-evaluation that reflects performance, progress and need - taking into account the point of schools joining the MAT?**

   a. How well do individual school development plans reflect inspection findings, the school's performance profile against national averages over time, comparisons with other similar schools and variations within the school? Have these plans been costed and prioritised?
   b. Does the MAT have a thorough understanding of the full spectrum of the needs and progress of pupils in its schools (e.g. SEND, pupil premium, low and high prior attainment, EAL pupils and Looked After Children [LAC]) and how well is this linked to the MAT's priorities?
   c. Do senior leaders and non-executive board members understand the principles of integrated curriculum and financial planning? What are the key metrics it uses to ensure that the resources within its schools and across the trust are being used well, to get the best outcomes for pupils?[1]

2. **Does the MAT have a clear vision and shared strategy for what excellent education (in terms of its approach to the curriculum and teaching and learning) looks like in practice?**

   a. Does the MAT know *how* it will improve the schools in its trust at different points of their improvement journey to deliver its shared vision for excellent education?
   b. Can it articulate the distinctive roles of the MAT, clusters and individual schools? Is it clear about non-negotiables for school improvement and where schools have autonomy to decide for themselves?

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[1] This an additional question to the resource used for the MAT Development Programme.

    c. Are these reflected in the MAT's scheme of delegation and the ways that leaders exercise accountability?

3. **How well does the MAT identify and deploy expertise and tackle weaknesses in its staff?**

    a. Does the MAT have a clear system for identifying who are its best leaders and teaching staff and which schools have strength in specific phases or subjects?

    b. Does the MAT know where its areas of weakness are in its curriculum and its teaching performance? How well does it tackle its improvement areas?

    c. Are system leaders and lead practitioners being used strategically to support other schools, model good practice, and coach their peers across the MAT?

4. **Does the MAT have a clear approach to recruiting and developing staff at all levels - teaching assistants, teachers and leaders? How will it structure and locate capacity for school improvement, now and if the MAT grows?**

    a. Is there a well-developed and understood strategy for developing teaching staff throughout their careers from ITT to expert?

    b. Does the MAT have a common model for appraising staff and identifying priorities for development and improvement?

    c. Is there a succession planning and talent management strategy across the MAT, supported by formal development programmes?

    d. Does the MAT fully use opportunities to deploy teaching staff to where they can make the biggest difference across all of its schools? [2]

5. **Does the MAT have a model for professional learning and development that combines deepening subject and pedagogical knowledge with coaching, classroom practice, and engagement in research?**

    a. Does the MAT invest in developing the skills and capacity of leaders to lead and facilitate teacher training and development?

6. **Is there a shared understanding across the MAT about what great teaching and learning looks like based on research and evidence?**

    a. Does the MAT designate phase/subject experts who are responsible for deepening subject knowledge and developing the curriculum and schemes of work?

    b. Is there a coherent approach to evaluating the impact of specific pedagogies and interventions within the MAT? Are systems for teachers to

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[2] This an additional question to the resource used for the MAT Development Programme.

observe and develop aspects of classroom practice together linked to the MAT's priorities for improvement?

c. Does the MAT have clear expectations and systems for a well-ordered learning environment and addressing the needs of pupils with behaviour issues?

7. Is curriculum content and design informed by the age-related expectations and the principles that underpin the MAT's vision?

a. Have subject leaders discussed and compared common age-related expectations for each year group across the MAT? (e.g. do all staff agree on what represents a year's worth of progress?)

b. How far are schools and subject leaders sharing and co-designing schemes of work and curriculum materials?

8. Is the MAT clear about the purposes of the different forms of assessment and how they inform conversations about progress in relation to the agreed age-related expectations?

a. Do staff/schools across the MAT follow a broadly consistent approach to assessment based on shared training and peer review?

b. Does the MAT have systems in place for shared moderation?

c. Does the MAT use a common exam board? [3]

9. How well does the MAT use quantitative data in evaluating performance?

a. Does the MAT have a well-developed approach to the use of data and Key Performance Indicators, which is embedded as routine in all schools? Does the MAT have the data systems to know and understand the strengths and react in real time to the weaknesses of different subjects and pupil groups within its schools?

b. Is overview performance data presented in a way that empowers the MAT board and local governing bodies to ask the right questions about school/MAT performance and exercise their respective accountability functions?

c. Do performance and appraisal conversations of school and MAT leaders reflect the progress being made and capture the future focus of improvement?

10. How well do MAT and cluster leaders use and evaluate qualitative information?

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[3] This an additional question to the resource used for the MAT Development Programme.

a. Do MAT and cluster leaders regularly meet school leaders to review progress? Are they conducting joint learning walks, book inspections and lesson observations across the schools in the MAT in order to triangulate KPIs with the daily lived experience in schools?

b. Is the MAT systematically building parental and pupil feedback into its assessment of how well schools are progressing?

c. Is the MAT using a formal peer-review model for themes including governance (involving schools within and/or beyond the MAT) to help schools identify development needs?

THEME 2: Governance and risk management

Structures and leadership

1. Does the trust structure reflect the requirements and expectations set out in the Governance Handbook and Academies Financial Handbook? Does everyone on the board understand the legal, regulatory and financial requirements of the board and the way in which the structures and vision of the trust facilitate this? Does the board have sufficient diversity within its structure to ensure internal challenge that contributes to effective working?[4]

2. Is there a shared understanding of the values, mission and ethos of the trust and the ways in which they inform the operation of the MAT? Is governance focused on improving outcomes for children and providing robust oversight across the breadth of the MAT's operations?

Accountability & compliance

3. Does the frequency of board meetings allow the trustees to undertake their accountability role effectively?[5]

4. Are trustees able to describe how the scheme of delegation contributes to the MAT fulfilling its obligations as the single legal entity accountable for all of the academies within the trust? Are the academies within the trust clear on their role and their relationship with the trust board?

5. How does the board *know* what is happening in the MAT*?* Are board members clear about the evidence and audit processes in place to give them confidence that the MAT is operating effectively the following areas?

   • compliance – statutory responsibilities,

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[4] This an additional question to the resource used for the MAT Development Programme.
[5] This an additional question to the resource used for the MAT Development Programme.

- pupil (and staff) performance data and key duties such as inclusion, SEND, safeguarding and monitoring and oversight of pupil premium impact, and
- finance and school resource management.

6. Has the trust discussed and taken a position on the [schools financial efficiency top 10 planning checks for governors](#)? Do trustees demonstrate sufficient rigour in their questioning to know if enough is being done to drive excellent resource management and align the use of resources to the trust's priorities? Does the trust regularly review its financial information of both its schools and the trust as a whole and undertake relevant benchmarking comparisons?[6]

7. Is there evidence of effective risk management at SLT and board level? Are the risks of growth identified and dealt with effectively and does this translate into a consistent approach to due diligence of new projects? Are trustees able to articulate the 3 or 5 greatest risks to the MAT, and the mitigations in place? Is a crisis management plan in place?

Evaluation and challenge

8. Does the culture of the board meeting facilitate open challenge? How is challenge made and met? Is the board meeting led appropriately by the chair? Is it clear that board members are sufficiently skilled and knowledgeable to contribute fully to the meeting? Do all board members contribute to discussions?

9. Does the board have robust arrangements for receiving reports on and monitoring of school improvement and pupil progress/outcomes with standardised management information in a format that supports board oversight and decision-making? Does the board use this to hold senior leaders to account for education performance to support them to identify way to improve further?

10. Is all the documentation for and of the board and its committees fit for purpose?

Financial governance

11. Is there evidence that the trust takes an integrated approach to curriculum and financial planning? Is there evidence of a clear rationale for the chosen curriculum? Is financial management and monitoring robust and appropriate?

12. Does the trust produce management accounts monthly and take appropriate action? Does the board consider these when it meets?[7]

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[6] This an additional question to the resource used for the MAT Development Programme.
[7] This an additional question to the resource used for the MAT Development Programme.

13. Does the board implement recommendations from Auditor's Management Letters and internal audit reports?[8]

People

14. Is there evidence of appropriate recruitment and appointment practices, induction of board members and ongoing training, professional development and self-evaluation for trustees and those who sit on its committees and/or LGBs?

15. Does the clerk to the trust board provide expert advice on governance procedures and compliance that directly contributes to the board's conduct and enables efficient and effective discussion and decision-making?[9]

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[8] This an additional question to the resource used for the MAT Development Programme.
[9] This an additional question to the resource used for the MAT Development Programme.

THEME 3: Finance and school resource management

Strategy, vision and planning

1. Does the trust have a long-term financial plan (and a broader business plan), covering at least the next 3 years? Do they have a plan for scaling up their model, including managing the financial risks of taking on more academies, an awareness of what the challenges might be and how to approach them, and an awareness of what might be different if they grow?

2. Does the trust have a clear, coherent medium term strategy, paying due regard to financial risks and linked to the educational aspirations of the school development plans?

3. Does the trust have a centralised common financial function with standard processes across the trust? What are the assumptions being used for planning?

4. What is the current number on roll for each school and what percentage of total capacity is this?

5. What approaches does the trust use for the management and planning of its capital and other assets?

6. How does the trust use key metrics (such as those set out in the top ten planning checks for governors) to support decision-making?

7. What kind of analytical tools does the trust use to support its integrated curriculum and financial planning?

Oversight

8. What is the trustees' role in finance? How do they support join-up between the trust's strategic plans and its finances? What role do the local governing bodies have in scrutinising school-level finances and how does the trust assess their effectiveness?

9. How does the trust manage trustees' interests and potential conflicts of interest?

10. Does the board of trustees ensure that their decisions about levels of salary and reward for trust staff follow a robust evidence-based process and are reflective of the individual's role and responsibilities?

Skills

11. What financial skills/qualifications are there across the team?

12. What is the expertise of the FD/Business Manager/Accountant? What professional qualifications do they have? Are they members of professional associations e.g. ISBL (previously NASBM)?

13. What is the minimum requirement of expertise for those in key financial posts? Does the trust's accountant, for example, have the skills to identify potential efficiencies and support audit preparation?

Curriculum and staffing

14. What does the trust's curriculum modelling look like, and are they considering staff costs now and in the future? Are they ensuring their member schools do the same? Who is the Chief Financial Officer and what are their qualifications?

15. Is there a curriculum-driven financial model in place that looks at staff and pupil ratios, class sizes and contact time across the MAT?

Allocation of funding across trust schools

16. How is funding allocated across the trust and its academies? Does the trust use GAG pooling and, if so, how does the trust identify where funds are needed the most and how they should be allocated? [10]Is there a top-slice strategy? What is the top-slice used for? How is impact and value for money assessed, including of any spend on a central trust team?

17. Do the trust's schools believe they get value for money? How do the trust's schools know?

Budget autonomy/ devolution

18. How much budget autonomy is devolved to the principal(s) and local school business manager(s)?

19. Are the controls within the trust's financial model robust enough to ensure that an academy could not create a deficit in the trust's budget without challenge?

Procurement strategy

20. Does the trust have shared procurement? What evidence is there that the MAT benefits from economies of scale?

21. Is it appropriate for the trust to have a procurement manager, and if so and they do not have one, are they considering this in the future?

22. Is the trust planning an expansion or contraction of the central back office team, and if so, how does this relate to any planned growth?

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[10] This an additional question to the resource used for the MAT Development Programme

Managing change

23. If the trust plans to take on more schools, does it have a sound rationale for reaching that decision?

24. How does the trust assess financial risk? (best practice would suggest having a checklist to ensure standardisation and avoid omission)

25. How does the trust undertake financial due diligence of all future schools joining it? What reports are presented to the board to ensure trustees know of the risks, financial, governance, assets and liabilities being taken on? Does the trust undertake buildings due diligence of all future schools joining it?

26. How would the trust support a school with a deficit? And would it be prepared to take on schools with significant financial issues? How would it balance supporting those schools against schools with educational and/or performance issues?

27. How would the trust integrate a school into its cycle of curriculum and financial planning?

28. What contingency planning does the trust have in place, for example to cover fluctuations in pupil numbers/income?

29. What is the trust's thinking about crisis management? Does the trust have a reserves strategy for this? If so, are they able to justify why they are doing this?

30. What levels of reserves has the trust accumulated? How will this be allocated across the academies?
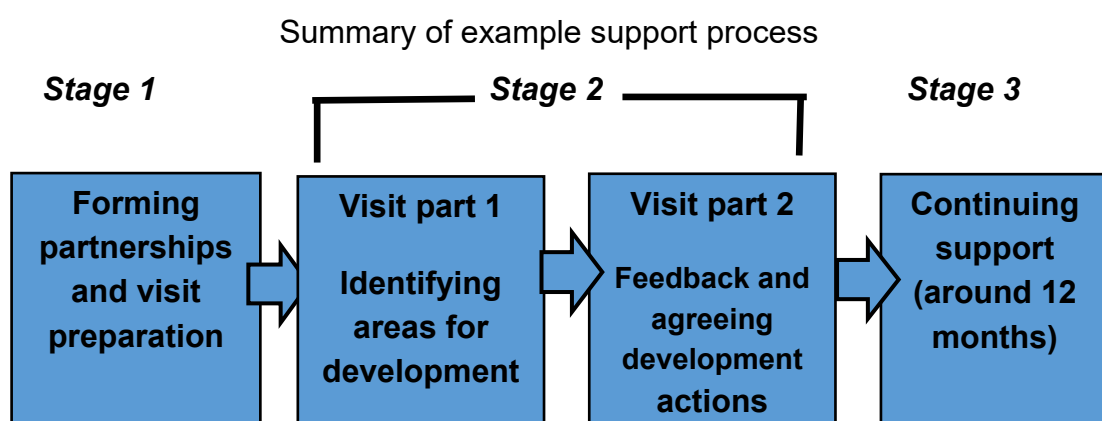
Financial accountability and auditing

31. Does the trust have lines of financial accountability that can be articulated by everyone, with roles and responsibilities that are fully understood?

32. What are the trust's lines of financial accountability? How are they delegated? Does the practice accurately replicate the scheme of delegation? Are there delegated spending approval limits for different members at different levels in the MAT? (e.g. CTO, FD, principal etc.)

33. How does the trust use IT systems to monitor its financial performance? Who has access to them?

34. Does the trust adopt a centralised approach to benchmarking and financial controls, and internal or external audit (audit committee and reporting), and accountability? Does the trust have clear and consistent financial policies and procedures across all academies?

35. How does the trust ensure that its financial controls are working?

Annex A: Example of using the development questions in a partnership between two MATs

This example summarises the process followed by MATs taking part in the Department's 2018 MAT Development Programme. MATs are working collaboratively in pairs, from different RSC regions, and using the questions as a developmental tool. The MAT Development Programme operates on the basis of a more experienced trust ('supporting trust') offering help to another trust ('supported trust') to help that trust develop. *This is an example only*: trusts that choose to use the questions can adopt whatever approach is most suitable in their circumstances.

1. The MATs follow a support process that involves the following stages:
   - The trusts develop a good understanding of each other and agree objectives for the support offered by the supporting trust (Stage 1);
   - The supporting trust visits their partner trust (i.e. the supported trust) to help identify development priorities and offer feedback based on those (Stage 2);
   - The trusts work together to agree actions, co-create an action plan and identify any support needed to address the development priorities. (Stage 2); and
   - The two trusts continue to work together, with the supporting trust helping their partner implement the development actions (Stage 3).

2. The diagram gives an overview of the support process with more detail in paragraphs **3 to 7** below.

Summary of example support process

Stage 1   *Stage 2*   *Stage 3*

| **Forming partnerships and visit preparation** | **Visit part 1**

Identifying areas for development | **Visit part 2**

Feedback and agreeing development actions | **Continuing support (around 12 months)** |

Stage 1: Forming partnerships and visit preparation

3. The CEOs of the two trusts take time to talk to each other – first and foremost so that the supporting trust can gain a good understanding of the ethos and context of the supported trust. Ideally, the chair of the supported trust is also involved in these discussions. The supported trust shares contextual information along with any key documents that are useful to help familiarise the CEO of the supporting trust with their trust. The CEO and chair of the supported trust talk through their trust's current development plans.

4. The two trusts agree objectives for the trust receiving support. Consideration of the developmental questions (pages 4-11) may help shape objectives for this support and inform the visit stage (see 'Stage 2' below). The trusts agree a schedule for the visit, including the 'diagnostic' stage and feedback discussion. Sufficient time is set aside for both stages and for meeting key people during the visit. The CEO of the supporting trust also decides who from their trust will accompany them on the visit so that all the main aspects of the supported trust's operations are covered. This is usually at least one member of their executive team and potentially the chair of the trust. The supported trust's development priorities, in part, inform the composition of the CEO-led team from the supporting trust.

Stage 2: The visit

Visit part 1 – identifying areas for development (diagnostic)

5. The CEO and other relevant experts from the supporting trust visit the supported trust to gain an informed understanding of the key themes in the developmental questions. The CEO-led team (from the trust giving support) will talk to key people from the supported trust, such as the CEO, the chair and chief financial officer for the trust, headteachers and other staff, as well as learning about the trust's plans, challenges and current processes. The visit may also include seeing one or more of the trust's schools. Wherever possible, the supporting trust spends some of the visit time observing a trust board meeting to help give an informed view of the supporting trust's governance arrangements as a key aspect of a trust's operations.

Visit part 2 - feedback and agreeing development actions

6. The supporting trust spends a further day with the supported trust to offer their perspective, based on the team's observations from the visit and their own experience. The supporting trust offers constructive feedback on strengths as well as making recommendations for areas for development. Where possible, the CEO and the chair, or at least one non-executive member from the supported trust, are present to hear the feedback. Working together, the trusts co-create a simple action plan. This identifies the supported trust's main areas to strengthen over 12 months, with practical actions and any support that would help. The supported trust owns the plan. At this point, MATs taking part in the MAT Development Programme arrange a discussion with their RSC to share their development priorities and talk about how the RSC and team can support their development, along with their partner trust.

Stage 3: Continuing support

7. Over the subsequent 12 months, the supporting trust continues working with the supported trust to review and update the action plan at agreed points so it remains relevant and useful. The trusts engage in a range of activities such as conversations by telephone or email, as well as considering further opportunities for meeting face-to-face or a reciprocal visit. In addition to the supporting trust acting as a sounding board and peer mentor, the trusts may wish to build on-going links between their team members that are beneficial to both.

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