

Guide to Recruiting to multi-academy trust boards

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 Academy
Ambassadors
Building better trust boards

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Introduction

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

This guide is for academy trusts – particularly growing multi academy trusts that want to attract and recruit new independent non-executive directors – members or trustees to their boards from business and the professions. It has been put together by the [Academy Ambassadors](#) programme, funded by the Department for Education which has helped trusts to fill over 1000 board roles. Academy Ambassadors is part of [New Schools Network](#).

Recruiting the right calibre of non-executives to the trust is as important as recruiting the right senior staff in the trust and its academies.

The need or desire to recruit to the members or trust board can happen at any time or stage in an academy trust’s development and is likely to have been driven by one or more triggers, such as:

- when the trust first forms and needs its first members and trustees;
- when significant change is planned or underway and new skills are needed on the boards;
- a skills audit or board review has identified new/additional skills or capacity is required;
- a review of the governance structure of the trust has led to a restructure of either or both boards;
- a vacancy arises leaving a gap in skills at non-executive level.

This guide provides practical advice on planning and running an effective recruitment process and is appropriate for use by both established academy trusts recruiting to strengthen and add capacity to their boards, and by newly forming trusts looking to create or strengthen their new trust and member boards once they have received Department for Education (DfE) approval and as they establish.

“Academy Ambassadors is an invaluable resource for new and growing trusts.”

SIR ROGER FRY, CHAIR, KING’S GROUP ACADEMIES

Getting Started

Agree who is responsible for the process

It should normally be the Chair of the board or a lead member¹ – not the executive principal or chief executive (CEO) - who oversee the process, supported by a clerk or company secretary.

When recruiting a new non-executive director (member or trustee) a short-lived informal search committee, often termed a recruitment panel, can be helpful to open up the process. The panel would typically include the chair of your board or the lead member, a second member of your trust, a trustee of your board, preferably with HR expertise, and sometimes an independent expert .

The chief executive or executive principal should have some input to the process, but not to be part of the decision. Many trusts choose to have them as part of the recruitment panel to have an initial informal conversation with and to show potential new non-executives/trustees/members around the academies, and some CEOs feed into the shortlisting and/or interview process with feedback, for example on candidates' skills in handling executive / non-executive conversations and their questions and observations.

If you are a newly forming trust you may not yet have a trust board or members 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.

Clarify who makes appointments and how many new non-executives you require

Your articles of association should say how your members and non-executive directors/trustees are to be appointed and how many you should have:

- Members are typically appointed by other members, or in some cases, such as when there is a sponsor or church diocese connection, these corporate bodies will have the right to appoint or approve members.
- For non-executives/trustees it should state how many non-executives/trustees the members can appoint, how many are appointed by the trust board or elected, how many must be appointed by a foundation or sponsor body and who makes the final decisions on appointments. If your trust is a faith-based organisation or includes faith schools it is very likely there will be additional constraints on who you can recruit and this will have been agreed with your local diocese or other appropriate body at the outset.

As set out in the [Academies Financial Handbook](#) and the [Governors Handbook](#), the DfE sets very few restrictions relating to the constitution of the members board or the board of directors/trustees of trusts into which it is prepared to enter a funding agreement. Each trust has its own rules specified in its articles of association on size and make-up of member and trust boards, however most trusts are moving towards what is now widely regarded by the DfE and others as best-practice:

¹ Refer to the trust's articles of association which should set out who appoints the members/trustees/non-executive directors. In the majority of cases the members are responsible for appointing other members and the majority of trustees/non-executive directors; it is therefore sensible for the recruitment process to be led by a member or the chair who is often also a member.

Getting Started (continued)

For members: usually five members, three as the minimum – an odd number is recommended to allow effective decision making, however an even number is often required where a trust includes faith and non-faith academies to ensure the right balance on the boards. These members should include people with corporate and/or charity governance, educational and business/commercial expertise and also audit skills, and at least one member with a connection to the local community. They should have the expertise to recognise and recruit effective trustees and to effectively hold trustees to account, to understand the business of the trust and to be able to challenge from a compliance and audit perspective. With that in mind employees must not be members of the trust, this includes the CEO/executive principal/headteacher. In addition, a maximum of 19.9% of members can be LA associated. Further details of the role of the member is given here.

Non-executives/trustees: there should be between seven and 10-12 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 trust cannot exceed 33.3% with a preference by the DfE that it is only the CEO/executive principal (accounting officer) who is a trustee on the board. Many trusts are now erring towards the model by where the CEO/executive principal attends and reports to the trust board but is not an appointed trustee. This is being seen as a more robust model for holding the executive to account.

For members and trustees, it is advised that both groups, members and trustee, should include a healthy measure of external challenge and should not be dominated by individuals who each have a link to a particular academy or previous activity.

A useful document is the [Multi Academy Trusts – Good Practice Guide](#) which helps set out design principles for academy trusts, including those establishing new trusts and existing trusts planning to grow.

Stop to check the big picture on board capability

Is a review of governance required before recruiting?

Recruiting to the members or trust board is an opportunity to take stock – don't assume you just need 'a new non-executive to fill a gap', reflect on your trust's strategy and how the current members and trustees support and enable the development of the trust and its academies.

Answer yes to any of the following and you may want to pause and commission an independent review of governance or board health-check before starting to recruit:

- Is the trust on the cusp of change – growth, ethos, structure, type of school/academy or locality?
- Is there a Financial Notice to Improve in place or a developing issue that requires improved board financial scrutiny?
- Does the trust need to establish trust and credibility with any key partners: the DfE, Regional Schools Commissioners, ESFA, parents, a diocese or trust sponsor, local community?
- Is the chair likely to move on in the next 1-2 years?

For existing academy trusts: 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. Alternatively, a number of independent organisations, including legal firms and specialist governance consultancy practices, offer governance reviews.

Getting Started (continued)

All boards should carry out regular reviews of their performance as a board – it is a requirement of the [Financial Handbook](#). The All-Party Parliamentary Group list of '[21 questions all trust boards should ask themselves](#)' is a good place to start. How are you performing as a board as a whole in your core duties? Are you merely complaint, improving or exemplary?

The DfE has launched the [MAT development framework](#) which focuses on school improvement, developing people, governance, risk management, finance and school resource management.

“Established trusts should also include in their annual accounts an assessment of the trust’s governance, including a review of the composition of the board in terms of skills, effectiveness, leadership and impact.”

ACADEMIES FINANCIAL HANDBOOK

Does the skills audit take into account the work of the board ahead?

Most boards carry out regular skills audits, less frequent are audits that assess skills and competences against the context of the trust and live board challenges. Be honest about capability: you may have financial skills but are they at the right level? Is your board operating as effectively as it should?

The Department for Education’s [Competency Framework for Governors](#) provides the broad areas required and a number of tools are available, including:

NGA’s Skills Audit (free) <https://www.nga.org.uk/Guidance/Workings-Of-The-Governing-Body/Governance-Tools/Skills-Audit.aspx>

“I started working with Academy Ambassadors because I am ever more convinced that business education engagement needs to happen right at the top – at board level.”

SIR DAVID CARTER, NATIONAL SCHOOLS COMMISSIONER

Getting Started (continued)

Define the ‘work of the board’ and provide a clear role description

A good role description or ‘specification’ is at the heart of all good recruitment. Before you write the advert and the detail of the person specification you should define the ‘work of the board’ – that is the key areas the board will address over the next three years.

- Where do you want to be in 3-5 years’ time? And what skills and expertise do you need on the board to take you there?
- What skills and experience will help overcome likely challenges?
- Look forward - do you need specific business growth, change management or experience consolidating performance?
- Think succession planning for the board - not just the executives - is the chair likely to move on in the next 1-2 years?
- Look back - which area does the CEO get least challenge from the board on last year?

“Academy Ambassadors does an outstanding job in securing experienced business leaders to join MAT boards in the South West. This has strengthened MATs across the region, with more than 130 non-executive directors appointed to boards so far and more in the pipeline.”

LISA MANNALL, REGIONAL SCHOOLS COMMISSIONER FOR THE SOUTH WEST

Getting Started (continued)

The ideal role specification to attract candidates:

- Use and adapt existing templates to avoid spending time re-inventing materials – examples can be found on the Academy Ambassadors website and you can access an on-line template that will take you through the key questions and help formulate a role specification. Once submitted, Academy Ambassadors will help you to develop a strong recruitment advert.
- The specification used for advertising should be short, sharp and specific – it is not the same as the standard ‘role description’ which describes all statutory duties. Examples of the latter are included in the appendix to this guide.
- Be very clear about the position: member, chair of board or committee, trustee?
- Set out the aims of the trust and work of the board over the next three years. Do not undersell the issues. High-calibre people identify with challenge and change.
- Sell the role. Identify the opportunities facing the trust, the strengths of the board and what is unique about the trust.
- The trust role. Identify the opportunities facing the trust, the strengths of the board and what is unique about the role descriptions. Trustees need to know their time will be well spent and that they can buy into the ethos.
- Specify the key skills and competencies required, keeping adverts short with links to more detailed information as required.
- Give links to your trust’s website to enable interested candidates to find out more information about the trust and access published information. Those recruited with financial skills are likely to look at the latest published accounts but it is helpful if the trust provides the link.
- 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?

Getting Started (continued)

Translate the challenge into the person specification

Some of the expertise the boards need can only be gained at sufficient calibre, depth and breadth by going out to businesses, the public sector, charities and the professions. Multi-academy trusts are in the business of education, operating as a charity, often with large revenues, multiple site operations and significant numbers of employees; and as such are facing similar challenges to traditional charities and businesses operating at similar and larger scale.

Translating your member and trust board's needs to the skills and expertise of people from a different sector can be hard: the following tables suggest specific experience you may want to stipulate is required in the person specification when you recruit.

Typical areas of expertise for trust boards:

<i>Area of Expertise</i>	<i>Skills and Experience</i>
Business / Executive Leadership / Change management / Growth Management / Turnaround & Restructuring	<p>MD, COO or CEO level in a commercial or charity business with revenues in excess of a value no less than you expect your trust to be in 5-10 years.</p> <p>Business growth: managing business growth - commercial, retail or industry experience in growing a business, chain of businesses or franchises operating multiple sites, mergers and acquisitions.</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> <p>Turnaround: managing transformation, delivering sustained improvement, managing risk</p>
Governance	<p>Previous experience as chair: experience of chairing a board or a board committee, 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 for the scale and complexity of the trust. Either in a non-exec or large scale operational context.</p> <p>Charity: experience operating within a large charity/not-for-profit organisation.</p>
Risk Management	<p>Strategic Risk Manager role. The candidate could be from corporate, public sector, charity, financial, regulatory & compliance, or reputational perspectives.</p> <p>The key skill is the ability to consider the strategic risks and ensure that the impact and probability is understood and that effective mitigation and contingency strategies are in place across the trust.</p>

Getting Started (continued)

Area of Expertise	Skills and Experience
HR / Organisation Development	<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 expertise in leading/supporting significant strategic change and operational re-organisation • HR and legal expertise to handle grievance cases or where redundancies are planned • Recruitment skills at a strategic leadership level 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 / Compliance	<p>Senior legal practice: larger trusts particularly look for legal 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, regulatory challenges, complex contractual management.</p> <p>Compliance: expertise in corporate, charity or regulatory compliance. This skill set can also be linked to HR, Finance/Estates where compliance needs are specific.</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/also associated with turnaround skills • Planned for sustainable growth, developing strategic financial plans • Had experience in overseeing or managing budgets of a particular value, ie: no less than the trust expects in 5-10 years • Audit experience, typically from a corporate context and often linked to compliance and regulatory, but also from audit roles in corporate and charity governance • Procurement expertise and efficiency change programmes and financial restructuring • Experience in bidding and securing grants
IT / Estates / Asset Management	<p>Property and capital: architectural experience, building and capital development, facilities management, managing large scale, multi-site and/or disburse asset portfolios and/or change programmes.</p> <p>IT change programme: CIO roles, transforming and improving IT provision, implementing shared service models, delivering efficiency programmes through procurement and organisation wide systems integration.</p>
Marketing / PR	<p>Communications, Marketing and PR: skills to handle the stakeholder engagement challenges around large change, growth, reputational issues and improving parent and community engagement.</p>
Strategic Partnerships	<p>Developing Relationships: where trusts are looking to strengthen and/or specifically develop new strategic sector / business relationships.</p>

Getting Started (continued)

In addition to the breadth of business expertise for both trustees and members, trusts should not lose sight of the importance of these business skills sitting alongside members and trustees that bring strong external education leadership expertise as well as knowledge and understanding of the schools and the communities served by the trust. The CEO should not be the only 'education expert' in the room.

Every member or trustee must also be committed to and support the ethos and culture of the trust.

Recruiting 'Members'

Members appoint trustees, and oversee the success of the board of trustees they have appointed, as well as having an eye on the audit and compliance for the trust, members will want to understand the skills, behaviours and knowledge trustees need to be effective.

The role specification

Trusts recruiting members (rather than non-executive directors or trustees) should ensure that the role description of members aligns closely to the statutory duties of members as described in the DfE Governance Handbook. The handbook describes members as having a similar role to the shareholders in a company limited by shares. Their key role is high-level, comprising in summary the responsibility to: define and uphold the trust's charitable object and governance structure, amend the articles of association, appoint or remove trustees, appoint the trust's auditors, receive the trust's annual audited accounts and, ultimately, wind up the academy trust.

Recruiting trusts should beware of over-specifying what is a strategic, "hands-off" role, but at the same time recognise the requirements needed within a small group of people who are ultimately responsible for ensuring the appropriate accountability of the trust by considering its compliance with charity law, company law and its regulated authorities, through the appointment of appropriate non-executive directors/trustees for the trust.

The person specification

In line with the roles described above trusts should seek member candidates with the relevant competencies to fulfil these duties, usually corporate governance and/or strategic board, NED or trustee experience. Additionally, an understanding in audit, compliance, charity/corporate finance and legal are also valuable skills. Trusts are often keen to also include expert education understanding to ensure the broadest view of the trust's ethos and values. The person specification should be very broad and it is not appropriate to seek defined competencies skills such as marketing, IT or property and estates.

Trusts normally seek to have an understanding of academies, the trust and its community within the members board. Academy Ambassadors can fulfil a particular part of this mix and will focus on recruiting from business and the professions or amongst existing multi-academy trust non-executive directors. The trust should use other routes to obtain a broader mix.

Recognising the different role of a member the expertise and skill set sought will be slightly different to that of the trustee, but with many similarities.

Getting Started (continued)

<i>Area of Expertise</i>	<i>Skills and Experience</i>
Business / Executive Leadership	CEO level in a commercial, public or charity business with significant financial and people expertise and understanding of managing and leading businesses through change including growth, mergers and organisational change.
Governance	<p>Previous experience as a non-executive Chair and experience of chairing a board. Developing the people, process and committees of a board, holding colleagues to account and scrutinising board and organisation performance.</p> <p>Corporate Governance: experience in building and leading rigorous, independent board structures that are both compliant and effective for the scale and complexity of the trust. Preferably in a non-executive capacity or a charitable/not-for-profit organisation.</p>
Financial / Audit	<p>Ability at a strategic level to understand corporate and charity annual reports and financial management of a significant scale.</p> <p>Audit experience, typically from a corporate context and often linked to compliance and regulatory, but also from strategic audit roles in corporate and charity governance.</p>
Legal / Compliance	Senior legal practice: particularly at partner level and above where they are likely to have expertise in corporate, charity or regulatory compliance.

Getting Started (continued)

Consider your board's diversity

Appropriate diversity increases the effectiveness of boards and brings value to the trust. The business case for diversity and equality in board recruitment is well documented. A combination of demographics, skills, experience, race, age, gender, disability, religion, nationality, educational and professional background and other relevant personal attributes on the board is important in providing a range of perspectives, insights and challenge needed to support good decision making.

“Boards should welcome and thrive on having a sufficiently diverse range of viewpoints – since open debate leads to good decisions in the interests of the whole school community.”

[DFE GOVERNANCE HANDBOOK 2017](#)

When planning and defining their role specifications, trusts should ensure that significant weight is given to relevant skills, underlying competencies and personal capabilities. During the shortlisting, interview and selection processes, trusts should ensure that they actively model and demonstrate the required rigour, transparency and professionalism and reduce the impact of unconscious biases.

Whilst a board should actively seek to recruit a broad and diverse range of non-executives, the trust must treat everyone equally irrespective of sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, disability, colour, race, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, political beliefs or membership or non-membership of a Trade Union and should place an obligation upon all trust personnel to respect and act in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.

Three ways in which boards can improve their diversity -

1. Work with an independent, external partner who can bring through candidates with no connection to the existing boards. That could be Academy Ambassadors or another partner but the externality is the key. External partners provide an independent, open recruitment, free from unconscious bias.
2. The role specification is where good recruitment can be won or lost. A good role specification that is engaging, clearly states the challenge and the competencies required to deliver the role allows good candidates from all backgrounds to step forward. Giving weight to underlying competencies and personal capabilities alongside proven non-executive career experience can be helpful to bring in a wider range of talent.
3. The selection panel and the process that the trust uses will retain or lose good candidates. People with different backgrounds and mind-sets on the selection panel will provide a rounded view of the candidates and may identify weaknesses and strengths more readily, and formalised evaluation and scoring mechanisms can allow for weighting of all factors such as in-depth community understanding alongside executive business skills.

Running the Recruitment Process

The recruitment pack

- You may wish to send interested candidates a more complete recruitment pack, or simply a list of links to the information that should already be on the trust website;
- An overview of the trust – basic information on size, location, phase, type of schools;
- Core information and data on the performance s or an extract from the data dashboard;
- A prospectus or publicity materials/newsletters 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 and who are the current members/trustees
- What new members / trustees can expect by way of commitment, induction and training and links to the trust's key governance documents (articles of association, funding agreements etc.) and to the published key documents such as the Academies Financial Handbook, the Governors Handbook and The 7 Principles of Public Life;
- A more in depth role and person specification; and
- An overview of the appointment process and time-line including clear instructions on how to apply/express an interest and date for interviews.

Stage 1: Select a recruitment method and partner

Widening the field of potential applicants is essential if you want to recruit the highest calibre people to your member and trustee boards. Consider where to advertise – locally, nationally, sector networks etc. Academy Ambassadors offers a free service to multi academy trusts 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. Academy Ambassadors only provides a service to multi-academy trusts with three or more academies/schools, other partners such as Inspiring Governance offer a service for single and smaller academy trusts and local governing bodies, 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.

To recruit educational expertise to the board many trusts talk to National or Local Leaders of Education, National Leaders of Governance and their local Regional Schools Commissioners office. Academy Ambassadors focuses on business and the professions but please inform us if you also need education experience.

When recruiting members a good place to start can often be to look at your own existing trust board. Do you have trustees who are time constrained or looking to step down? Could they take up a members role enabling you to recruit a new trustee? Some trusts look to other high-performing trust boards. Recruiting externally can also be used. However, it is not normally recommended to recruit the majority externally.

Running the Recruitment Process (continued)

Stage 2: Decide the timing of the advertisements, shortlisting, interviews and school visits

When recruiting business professionals, it is helpful to set out a clear timeline and process for potential candidates. The calibre of individuals you are looking to attract will very likely be employed and will have a well-structured schedule; they will be keen to have an initial discussion or meeting to understand more about the requirements and meet with key individuals from your trust to ensure that they can contribute their time in a worthwhile way. Therefore, being clear on the stages of the process, key dates and start date for the role will be important.

Stage 3: Expression of interest and sifting

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

Using your role specification, the recruitment panel should agree the key criteria that you will evaluate candidates against. This will be especially useful if there is high interest in your trust or if you are looking to appoint a number of new members, non-executives/trustees at the same time and hence need to create new strength from across a group of people.

When sifting candidates never include someone on the shortlist to fill space: they are volunteers and it is unfair to waste their time. It can often be useful to instigate a brief internet search to explore online information about the candidates to both validate their CVs and seek out any other supporting information or any negative connections that may make a candidate unsuitable for your trust.

Ensure that those you do include, meet the required eligibility criteria within your articles of association.

Stage 4: 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 issue to think about:

1. Who is best placed to have the first conversation? This would usually be a member, the Chair or a senior trustee/non-executive director, but you could also involve the CEO or Executive Principal who can show candidates around the academies. Meeting face-to-face is often preferable to a telephone conversation. However your candidates are likely to be busy people and so a phone call may be more appropriate. Holding an initial meeting 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. Be ready to ask those from a different sector to 'translate' their strengths and experience. If you do not understand their CV you must ask.
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.

Running the Recruitment Process (continued)

4. Brief candidates on the basics about structure, issues, personal liability and the importance of statutory documents such as the Academies Financial Handbook.
 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 members or trust board meeting, if one is within the timeline, as an observer. They should sign a non-disclosure agreement.
 7. Have a clear process for how information learnt during this stage is fed into a final shortlist / interview stage for evaluation of candidates.
 8. This is a useful stage to discuss and explore any potential conflicts of interest that the candidate would need to disclose if appointed, to ensure the candidates are aware of the public duty and that of the trust's.
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Stage 5: Interview and appointment decision

A formal interview involving two or three people from the recruitment panel (usually at least one member, the chair (who will also often be a member), 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 member or 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 in the appendix to this guide.

The 'person you meet in the process' is a good indicator of the NED you will get on the board: their timeliness, preparation and behaviours. You may want to see candidates in action by sharing and asking for reflections on some board papers, a performance or financial report. However, this is not an exam and appropriate rather than in-depth preparation should be expected.

You can also seek and take up references as part of the selection process. This can be pre-interview or post appointment decision. You may want to call the referees to understand how the candidate is likely to contribute to the board based on past behaviours.

Stage 6: Appointing to the board

Once you have decided who you want to be your new board member(s), trustee(s)/non-executive director(s) you need to appoint them in line with your articles of association. 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(s), trustee(s)/non-executive director(s) confirming their appointment, who they have been appointed by and their term of office.

Running the Recruitment Process (continued)

Those not appointed will expect to be informed and often request feedback. You should be prepared to provide honest, constructive, timely, feedback before the outcome is made public.

New board members should complete relevant paperwork for Companies House and undertake an enhanced Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) check. It is usually the Company Secretary or Clerk that would arrange this, along with ensuring that appropriate updates are recorded with the Education and Skills Funding Agency and that the statutory information is gathered (such as register of interests) and published on the trust's website. Those taking up trust board Chair roles are required to complete enhanced checks countersigned by the Secretary of State.

Finally, the new board appointment(s) 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. There is also a statutory duty trusts to inform the Education and Skills Funding Agency of a change of members and trustees.

After appointment, all new members/trustees need a thorough introduction to key personnel, a full induction to the trust and its academies 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.

When you need to recruit a Chair for the board

In many academy trusts, when a Chair steps down from the role the appointment of a new Chair for the board will have been planned in advance through trustee development and succession planning.

Where succession planning has not been possible, or often for a new academy trust in its formation stage, an academy trust may need to look to a formal recruitment approach to attract and identify a new chair for the board.

Recruiting for a Chair for the trust board can be handled in much the same way as recruiting for a trustee. However, you should be mindful of how your articles of association set out the appointment of the Chair as this is typically worded 'The Trustees shall elect a Chairman from among their number', and as such means that you would need to recruit and appoint a non-executive/trustee through the trustee recruitment and appointment process for your trust and then for that new trustee/non-executive to stand for election as Chair by the board of trustees.

The key differences you might adopt when the trustee recruitment process needs to attract candidates willing to stand for the role of Chair either immediately upon taking up a trustee / non-executive role or with a view to taking on the role through succession planning in say 6-18 months, would be:

- To allow more time for the recruitment process in order to reach wider networks of potential candidates and potentially engage specific headhunting or high calibre trustee/non-executive recruitment services;
- Depending on the situation with the incumbent Chair for your trust, it may not be appropriate for them to be involved in the recruitment panel. If this is the case it is often valuable to bring in an experienced multi academy trust Chair to support your selection approach;

Running the Recruitment Process (continued)

- Candidates open to being considered for future Chair roles, especially where they have not been a Chair or taken a key role in a multi academy trust board before, will very likely be looking for a higher degree of pre-recruitment engagement with the trust, such as more face-to-face time with representatives of the trust, to sit in and observe a board meeting, to meet other multi-academy trust Chairs to understand more about the role, or to meet with key stakeholders such as the Regional Schools Commissioner. This level of due diligence on their part should be welcomed and time allowed.
- Consider engaging with external recruitment support for the trust to guide and support you through the process, help you to reach out to wider networks and candidates, and provide your recruitment panel with an external perspective to the recruitment. Many multi academy trusts have accessed the specific tailored Chair recruitment services offered by Academy Ambassadors.

“Through Academy Ambassadors, we were introduced to several capable individuals from a variety of backgrounds. The work that Academy Ambassadors did ensured that they all had something to offer. Introductions were professional, and we now have a full board. The make-up of our board, and the directors we now have is a real asset of the trust. The support, challenge and vision that they collectively have is very strong, and it has made me ‘up my game’! A large part of this is the quality of people that Academy Ambassadors introduced to us.”

STUART LOCK, EXECUTIVE PRINCIPAL, ADVANTAGE SCHOOLS, BEDFORD

Academy Ambassadors

Building better trust boards



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Appendices

Appendix 1: Example role description - non-executive/trustee/Chair/member

Appendix 2: Recruiting to the board typical timeline

Appendix 3: Potential member/trustee candidate interview

Appendix 1

Example Role Descriptions

The role description is a more formal document than the role specification used in advertising for candidates. The role description should be a complete and standardised description of the role non executives/trustees sign up to when they join the board. Below are examples, set out in a fairly simple style, of role descriptions for a non-executive/trustee, the Chair of a multi-academy trust, and a trust member, which you can use to tailor to your trust's own needs.

Non-executive/Trustee

Trustees of an academy trust are both trustees of the trust as a charity and directors of the trust as a Company limited by guarantee. The Charities Act 2011 defines charity trustees as the people responsible under the charity's governing document for controlling the administration and management of the charity, regardless of what they are called. They are known collectively as the trustee board.

Under charity law the trustees have the ultimate responsibility for directing the affairs of the trust, and ensuring that it is solvent, well run and delivering the charitable outcomes for which it has been set up. In law trustees have several legal duties, which are often described as those of compliance, care and prudence.

Non-executive directors work in partnership with the Chair of directors, other directors and the trust's leadership team to provide clarity clear vision, mission and strategic direction for the trust to:

- Contribute to the development of the trust's future strategic goals, ensuring that the best interests of pupils and local communities are always top of the agenda and that they are fully engaged throughout this period of change for the trust;
- Ensure the highest standards of educational provision across all academies within the trust, and that the leaders of the trust and all academies are held to account to deliver outstanding outcomes for pupils;
- Ensure the highest levels of transparency, audit, governance and accountability in the education, corporate and financial affairs of the trust;
- Provide strategic leadership and direction to the trust through oversight of and contribution to key strategy documents as well as by setting the strategic priorities;
- Have an awareness and understanding of the national policy context and of local needs for education;
- Develop and review the trust's internal controls and an audit regime to ensure that these identify the risks and opportunities to enable the trust to be sustainable and relevant for all of the stakeholders;
- Work with other directors in a supportive, helpful and constructive way to ensure the board is effective when it meets;
- Ensure that effective arrangements are in place to provide assurance on risk management, governance and internal control whilst ensuring openness and transparency in decision making;
- Ensure the trust establishes key objectives and control and management frameworks to deliver the agreed plans, identifies and assesses the risk of achieving them and regularly monitors performance to ensure appropriate corrective action can be taken;
- Ensure consistent focus upon what is best for the trust's schools and their students by providing challenge and advice to the trust's executive leadership team;

Appendix 1 (continued)

- Be familiar with the articles of association of the trust and awareness of its powers, duties and objectives;
- Be familiar with and ensure compliance with the trust's funding agreements and the Academies Financial Handbook published from time to time by the Education and Skills Funding Agency or its successor organisation;
- Be familiar with the directors' code of conduct and any standing orders of the trust;
- Represent the trust in a positive manner with national, regional or local bodies or individuals in order to enhance the position of the trust;
- Lead or participate in relevant board committees or task groups of the trust;
- Contribute to the appointment and, if necessary, removal of the chair as well as participation in the recruitment and selection of future non-executive directors;
- Work as part of a team, and to accept shared responsibility and accountability, as well as to commit to undergoing a personal annual appraisal, reviewing own performance and that of board members, then to abide by its outcome in terms of personal development.

Non-executive directors are subject to company legislation and are obliged to:

- Act within your powers (for example in accordance with the constitution and any agreements with the DfE);
- Promote the success of the trust;
- Exercise independent judgment;
- Exercise reasonable skill, care and diligence;
- Avoid conflicts of interest;
- Not to accept benefits from third parties; and
- Declare any interest in transactions.

Further information relating to the personal liabilities of non-executives/trustees can be found [here](#).

Chair of the board

The Chair of the board gives direction to the board of directors/trustees and enables the board to fulfil its responsibilities for the overall governance and strategic direction of the trust.

The Chair of the board plays a vital leading role in setting the direction and structures for the trust. He/she supports the development of positive working relationships between the board, the executive leaders and the trust staff.

The role holder will be:

- An effective Chair with the ability to fulfil strategic non-executive leadership roles
- Mindful of their responsibilities under equality legislation and to the role of governing boards in contributing to the wider education system in an increasingly diverse society

The role of Chair of the trustees is typically an ex-officio member of the trust and also acts as Chair of the members (this will depend on your articles of association).

Appendix 1 (continued)

Role Summary

- Provides leadership and direction to the board of trustees and enables the board to fulfil their responsibilities for the overall governance and strategic direction of the trust;
- Ensures that the trust pursues its Objects as defined in its articles of association, charity law, company law, public law and other relevant legislation/regulations determined by the Education and Skills Funding Agency;
- Works in partnership with the CEO/Executive Principal to support the employees, helping them achieve the aims of the trust; and to optimise the relationship between the board of trustees and the staff;
- Facilitates the board of trustees in stimulating excellent, well-rounded and carefully considered strategic decision making.

Main Responsibilities of the Chair

In relation to the board, the Chair will:

- Lead board meetings in a way which embodies the culture, values and ethos of the trust.
- Facilitate the formulation of strategic plans and regular reviews of long-term strategic aims of the trust;
- Ensure the development of trust's policies, defining of goals and targets and the evaluation of performance against agreed targets;
- Leads the board and challenges leaders appropriately in setting risk appetite and tolerance, and ensures that the board has sight of, and understands, the trust's risks and undertakes scrutiny of risk management plans;
- Approve the annual cycle of the board meetings, meeting agendas, chair and facilitate meetings, monitor decisions taken at meetings and ensure they are implemented;
- Assume guardianship of the legal and financial integrity of the trust;
- Maintain careful oversight of any risk to reputation and/or financial standing of the trust;
- Liaise regularly with the CEO/Executive Principal to maintain a clear grasp of the trust's financial position and to ensure full and timely financial transparency and information disclosure to the board;
- Lead and mentor other board members to fulfil their responsibilities and enable access to training/coaching/information to enhance the overall contribution of the board, meeting annually with each trustee to discuss the role and assess any training needs and develop succession planning;
- Annually lead the review of the board structure, role, staff relationships and ensure implementation of agreed changes/developments are carried out;
- Create a strong, profitable and fulfilling working relationship with trustees and the CEO/Executive Principal through review and self-reflective evaluation of contributions and effectiveness of the board;
- Encourage team working among board members and encourage them to identify and support the recruitment of new trustees as required.

Appendix 1 (continued)

In relation to the CEO/Executive Principal, the Chair will:

- In participation with the board, lead the appointment of the CEO/Executive Principal, oversee their activities in the context of the implementation of the board's strategy and policies and lead the process of appraising and constructively guiding the performance of the CEO/Executive Principal;
- Consult with the CEO/Executive Principal on matters of strategy, governance, finance and HR;
- Receive regular informal progress reports of the trust's work and financial performance through the CEO/Executive Principal.

In relation to the community and code of conduct, the Chair will:

- Represent the trust as a spokesperson at appropriate events, meetings or functions;
- Facilitates and in partnership with the CEO/Executive Principal and trust board, pro-actively seeks opportunities for partnership working that support the agreed strategic goals;
- Ensure the protection and management of the assets of the trust;
- Lead the board and work alongside the CEO/Executive Principal in fostering relations with the sector's regulators and key strategic stakeholders;
- Act as final stage adjudicator for disciplinary and grievance procedures, if required;
- Facilitate change and address conflict within the board of trustees and within the trust, and liaise with the CEO/Executive Principal to achieve this;
- Undertake review of external complaints as defined by the trust's complaints procedure;
- Ensuring adherence and compliance with the trust's articles and policies, and in all decisions and discussions of the board and its sub-committees;
- Attend and be a member of other committees or working groups when appropriate in their role as Chair.

Essential Qualities of a Chair

- Understanding and acceptance of the legal duties, responsibilities and liabilities of trusteeship and adhering to Nolan's seven principles of public life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership;
- Commitment to the trust's objects, aims and values and willingness to devote time to carry out responsibilities;
- Strategic and forward looking vision in relation to the trust's objects and aims;
- Good, independent judgement, political impartiality and the ability to think creatively in the context of the trust's and external environment;
- Good communication and interpersonal skills and the ability to respect the confidences of colleagues;
- Balancing tact and diplomacy with willingness to challenge and constructively criticise.

Further information relating to the competencies required for both non-executives/ trustees and the Chair of the board can be found here.

Appendix 1 (continued)

Academy Trust Member

The members board provides oversight and scrutiny of the work of the trust board. Members ensure accountability for the decision-making and strategy of the trust. The role is high-level, comprising in summary the duties: to define and uphold the trust's charitable object and governance structure; as the only body able to amend the Articles, to consider, alongside the board of trustees, the appropriate development of the trust board and its governance model; to appoint or remove trustees; to appoint the trust's auditors and receive the trust's annual audited accounts and, ultimately, to wind up the academy trust.

Desirable competencies

- Non-executive/trustee
- Corporate Governance
- Audit
- Compliance/legal
- Corporate/charity finance

Members are expected to carry out their business effectively, including induction of new members, a commitment to the continued professional development of members and, as the only body able to amend the articles, to consider the appropriate development of the trust board and its governance model.

Members may also be asked to act as an advocate for the trust and to support the trust board's role of giving clear strategic direction to its academies.

Person specification

Members should have an outstanding understanding of the role of governance in public life. This may have been gained in a wide range of senior leadership roles. They are likely to have previous experience in a NED (non-executive director) or trustee role. However, the key competencies required are the ability to take a strategic view of the trust and the board, and to act in the long-term interest of the pupils. Members must ensure that they demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to the trust's articles of association, ethos and values. They should bring effective communication and good independent judgement skills and an ability and willingness to hold others to account for their professional practice. The need to have an understanding and acceptance of the legal duties, responsibilities and liabilities of members within company and charitable law and are expected to demonstrate the Nolan principles of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, leadership.

Time commitment

The members board typically meets at least once and up to three times per year with preparation time required, and as required to recruit trustees.

Appendix 2

Recruiting to the board - Typical Timeline

<i>When</i>	<i>What activity needed?</i>	<i>Who should be involved in this step of the process?</i>
Weeks 1 & 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>Led by the Chair with support from the Company Secretary (or Clerk)</p> <p>Members/trustees/Chair</p> <p>Led by the Chair, supported by the Company Secretary (or Clerk)</p>
Weeks 3 & 4	Draft a clear role and person specification	Led by the Chair, supported by the Company Secretary (or Clerk)
Weeks 3 & 4	Check and amend role specification ready for publication of advertisement – decide where to advertise/have recruitment pack ready	Company Secretary (or Clerk)/Chair or Academy Ambassadors team
Week 5	Role goes live to recruit	Company Secretary (or Clerk)/Chair via agreed routes or Academy Ambassadors team
Week 6 to Week 11	<p>You may opt to receive CVs as they arrive to enable informal conversations to run in parallel</p> <p>Recruitment closes – CVs sent to trust/shortlisting panel</p>	Academy Ambassadors team/trust recruitment panel or the Company Secretary/Clerk
Week 6 to Week 13	<p>Informal conversations/school visits/check references (may require a little longer depending on timing of CVs / visits)</p> <p>If there is not time for candidates to visits the trust / once of its' schools at this pre-interview stage, you can combine a visit on the interview day</p>	Chair/CEO/Company Secretary (or Clerk)
Week 13 or 14	<p>Formal interviews/feedback to selected candidate(s) – check references if not done earlier</p> <p>Can include a school visit at this time</p>	Trust recruitment panel
Week 14/15 or next Board meeting	Formal appointment	Members and/or Chair and trust board depending on appointment process within articles
Week 14 or 15	Feedback to unsuccessful candidates/and Academy Ambassadors	Member from recruitment panel – usually the Chair
Week 15 onwards	Induction starts	Company Secretary (or Clerk)/Chair and agreed trust representatives based on trust's induction process

Appendix 3

Potential Member/Trustee Candidate Interviews

This is an example used by a newly forming trust:

Interviewers:

- Board member
- Board member
- Chair of the Board
- Academy Partnership and Governance Adviser

Candidates:

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

<i>Timings</i>	<i>Agenda Item</i>	<i>Who?</i>
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 - 3.35pm	Candidate 2 interview	
3.34pm - 4pm	Recruitment team review candidate.	
4.00pm - 4.30pm	MAT team agree selection of candidates and forward plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback to candidates • Vetting (DBS / Disqualification) • Feedback to MAT board and implications on other trustees • Finalising the structure / informing DfE 	
4.30pm	Close	

Appendix 3 (continued)

Or this model can be used where a school visit is scheduled as part of the interview day

Times	Brief site tour (max 30mins)	Interview Discussion	Panel Preparations /
	Headteacher	Panel	Time-out / Discussion
9am - 9.15am			Arrive / setup
9.15am - 9.30am	Candidate 1		
9.30am - 9.45am			
9.45am - 10am		Candidate 1	
10am - 10.15am			
10.15am - 10.30am			
10.30am - 10.45am	Candidate 2		Discussion
10.45am - 11am			
11am - 11.15am		Candidate 2	
11.15am - 11.30am			
11.30am - 11.45am			
11.45am - 12noon			Discussion
12noon - 12.15pm			
12.15pm - 12.30am			Break / Lunch / Reflection
12.30pm - 12.45pm	Candidate 3		
12.45pm - 1pm			
1pm - 1.15pm		Candidate 3	
1.15pm - 1.30pm			
1.30pm - 1.45pm			
1.45pm - 2pm	Candidate 4		Discussion
2pm - 2.15pm			
2.15pm - 2.30pm		Candidate 4	
2.30pm - 2.45pm			
2.45pm - 3pm			
3pm - 3.15pm	Candidate 5		Discussion
3.15pm - 3.30pm			
3.30pm - 3.45pm		Candidate 5	
3.45pm - 4pm			
4pm - 4.15pm			
4.15pm - 4.30pm			Discussion
4.30pm - 4.45pm			
4.45pm - 5pm			Final reflections
5pm - 5.15pm			
5.15pm - 5.30pm			

Appendix 3 (continued)

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.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Question</i>	<i>Lead Interviewer</i>	<i>Feedback points during interview</i>
	Welcome and introductions Offer candidate a drink	Interviewer Name:	Candidate 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/non-executives and members to enhance skills on the board and support growth and change/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 role at this time?/ What attracted you to this role?/And what particular qualities will you bring the trust and what are you looking to get from being part of the trust?</p>		
2	What are your impressions of the schools and trust's plans?		
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>Q - What experience would you bring to the role within the trust board? And where do you think you could make the best contribution?</p>		

Appendix 3 (continued)

No.	Question	Lead Interviewer	Feedback points during interview
4	<p>Q - Can you share an example of your experience 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 and how this could help our trust?</p>		
5	<p>Q - 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>Q - Can you expand a little on your previous trustee/non-executive 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>Q - 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>		
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</p> <p>Q - 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>		

Appendix 3 (continued)

<i>No.</i>	<i>Question</i>	<i>Lead Interviewer</i>	<i>Feedback points during interview</i>
9	Do you have any questions for us?		
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/ 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

Academy Ambassadors

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