

CELEBRATING THE BEST IN ACADEMIES AND FREE SCHOOLS

Volume 7 Number 2 Spring 2018

# A\*cademy magazine



**THE SOCIAL MOBILITY ISSUE:**  
**SONIA BLANDFORD**  
**MARC ROWLAND**  
**BARNABY LENON**

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Governance  
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9



19



49



21



38

## AUTONOMY, STRUCTURES AND LEADERSHIP

- 8 Transforming a school community, *Anna Balson*
- 16 MATS: A wider perspective, *Tim Cook*
- 38 The ten biggest mistakes people make with a difficult conversation, *Sonia Gill*

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## GOVERNANCE, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE NATIONAL GOVERNANCE ASSOCIATION

- 27 Shall we grow?
- 30 Communication in MATS
- 32 Holding academy trust boards to account: the role of members
- 34 MAT research round-up: what can trustees learn?

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## FINANCES AND RESOURCES

- 13 A transformative pay structure, *Stuart Gardner*
- 22 Don't bury your head in the sand, *Paul Leigh*
- 40 Estate strategies for building better academies for the future, *David Smith*
- 43 The next generation of school apps
- 45 Buying Doncaster: the creation of a traded services brand, *Rebecca Rowbottom*
- 46 Embracing GDPR and the Cloud, *Tim Verlander*
- 49 Network security, the GDPR and how to privately connect multiple school sites, *Jo Malone*
- 52 Schools and the apprenticeship levy, *John Deaville*

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## LEARNING AND WELLBEING

- 5 Other People's Children, *Barnaby Lenon*
- 10 Raise literacy levels and tackle social mobility, *Sonia Blandford*
- 20 "They muck you up, your mum and dad..." *Marc Rowland*
- 24 Soft skills taught and caught, *Roy Blatchford*
- 37 Real life maths, *Craig Barton*
- 55 The (much dreaded) student interview panel, *Dan Roberts*

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CAPITA



# OTHER PEOPLE'S CHILDREN

In this extract from his new book, Barnaby Lenon writes about the state of vocational education in England and the implications of his findings for a post-Brexit economy

**I**n 2017 three members of my family enrolled with a Further Education college.

First was my 20-year-old nephew who dropped out of school when he was 17 for personal reasons but would have been capable of top grades at A-level; he has enrolled to study computer science. It is further education that has invariably given second chances to people like him. Next there was a 16-year-old nephew who suffers from autism and had struggled to cope with school, but who is clearly very intelligent and keen on engineering. These were the first members of my family not to go to university, but both are very able. Finally, I enrolled to take an adult education course in pottery at my local college. This book is about the system we found ourselves in, a system about which I knew little despite having spent my whole life in education.

The academically least successful 50% of young people in England face a number of problems. Some will have struggled at school since the day they started. They attended lessons day in day out from the age of 5 to 16, but the exams they took at the end of that eleven-year slog left them with a sense of failure. They may have passed some GCSEs, but at best their grades were modest.

The path trodden after GCSEs is clear enough for the more academically successful 50%. They go on to take A-levels and a university degree – qualifications which the whole population understand and recognise, qualifications which have been around for many years. But for the less academic the path is much less clear.

## Less straightforward

Whereas their fathers or grandfathers, and even their mothers and grandmothers, quickly picked up employment at the age of 16 or younger, for them life will be less straightforward. Jobs in manufacturing and services which supported many towns and cities in the Midlands and north of England have gone. Some of the jobs which remain, in the large construction sector for

example, have been filled by immigrants from Eastern Europe.

Their situation is made all the more difficult because of their family background. Many will have had few books at home. Some will not have had a father in the house when they were being brought up. A disproportionate number will have been of free school meals at school. Many will be boys. Some will be from minority ethnic backgrounds which, for a variety of reasons, makes the transition to a good job more difficult. Some will be disabled or have some other special needs.

They are not a small group. They are half of all young people, a group most of whose members are mentally and physically able to do a good job if trained and given the opportunity. They include the nine million adults in England who lack basic numeracy and literacy.

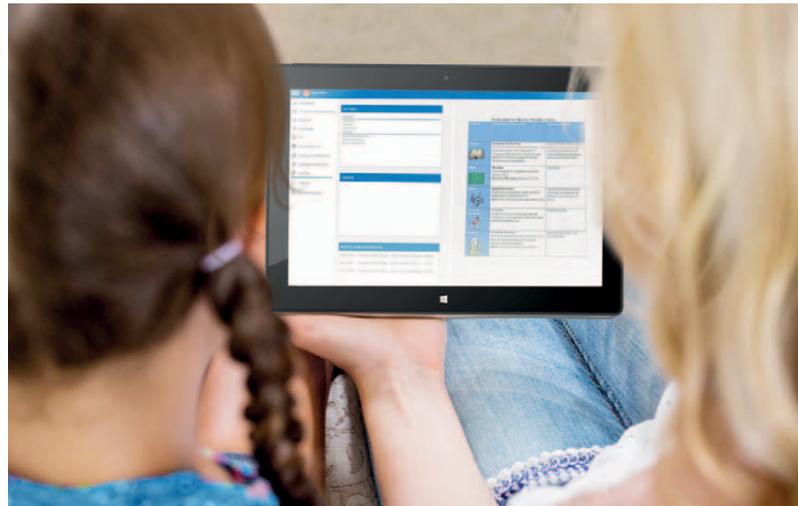
In England, our A-levels and our better universities are as good as anywhere on the planet. But every international study tells us that the gap between the top 50% and the bottom 50% of pupils is wider in England than in almost any country in the developed world. So this is where we have the greatest capacity to improve. This is where we would expect any sensible government to focus its attention. Not on grammar schools but on Further Education colleges. Not on A-levels but on apprenticeships.

## Huge asset

In the past the unskilled bottom 50% were a huge asset. They found work because there were jobs available for those who are unskilled or who could be easily trained on the job. Some of these jobs still exist, but in diminishing numbers. If we are to be a grown-up stand-alone nation then we need to become more like other stand-alone countries, like Singapore or Japan, where very few pupils are allowed to fail at school and where the less academic go onto carefully planned, high-quality training programmes which lead to work.

David Goodhart (2017) makes the point that in recent years people have been judged more and more by their exam

# SKOOLER



## Parental Engagement: How can teachers find the time to regularly update Parents?



As a Microsoft partner, Skooler has developed learning management tools integrated with Office 365, providing unique work flows & practical tools for schools, teachers & students. In addition, Skooler provides a parent portal to help build on home-school communities.

Education isn't just a teacher's job and learning doesn't just happen at school, it's a partnership between home and school. Parents can influence their child's attainment, playing an active role in their child's education can contribute to their overall achievement and behaviour.

While it's important for schools to arrange regular opportunities for parents to meet with teachers or see pupils' work, it's not always possible for this to happen as often as some parents may want. Therefore, having an online space in which data can be shared, means this doesn't weaken the relationships between parent, teacher and the school.

In EdTech we've seen a concerted effort to provide schools with technology options that can support home / school communication and the sharing of information. Sharing summative data has been a major focus of most of these kinds of services. Others have provided ways of sending messages and letters electronically to overcome the 'bottom of the book bag' scenario.

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Schools using Office365 and Skooler have several ways to use Microsoft's cloud productivity suite to communicate

with Parents. Our partnership with Microsoft goes from strength to strength and now we're the first in the world to utilise Microsoft's new OneNote Parent API's for sharing information with parents and carers.

What does this mean for Teachers?

- » Setting assignments and marking them can all be done within Office365, saving time and using applications teachers are very familiar with.
- » With just a few clicks teachers can give parents 'read only' access to their child's notebook work, through our secure web based parent portal.
- » Publishing messages to parents, providing access to assessment information and even recording parental permission can all be done within the same web application, no more moving files between applications.

It also means parents and teachers are better informed when having parent/teacher consultations.

Add this new functionality to Skooler's ability to provide attendance, homework / coursework information, recent assessments and individual learning plans and the communication between school and home can take on a whole new level and save you money at the same time.

If you would like to find out how we can help save time for teachers and parents, please contact the Skooler team [info@skooler.com](mailto:info@skooler.com)

qualifications, their cognitive ability. The ‘brightest and best’ trump the ‘decent and hardworking.’ But a good society needs to balance the three Hs – head, hand and heart. We undervalue the skills of construction workers, engineers, artisans – those who work with their hands. And we undervalue those whose emotional intelligence makes them so important to the caring professions such as nurses, early years teachers and those working in social care.

Post-Brexit it is likely that immigration flows into the UK will fall so upskilling the domestic population to fill positions that would otherwise have been taken by EU workers will become important. The current performance of many pupils at age 16 suggests that this will be difficult.

My new book, *Other People’s Children*, examines how we have got into this rather weak position and what we can do about it.

### What do the terms higher education and further education mean?

In England the term ‘higher education’ means university level, ‘further education’ means most things taught outside schools and universities to those over the age of 16. Part of what is taught in further education is vocational courses – skills needed for a job.

In recent years the government has chosen to refer to vocational courses as ‘technical education’ because they think that ‘vocational’ has got a bad name.

Further education in England is quite complicated but it helps if you know two things:

1 There is a distinction between the courses for 16-18-year-olds, which include large numbers doing basic English and maths as well as technical courses, and the courses for everyone over 18 (adults), which are mainly vocational but include academic courses and ‘developmental’ courses for the community like my pottery class.

2 There is a distinction between the qualifications on offer and the institutions who teach those courses. Both need to be good if the system is to work. Government-financed Further Education colleges are an important part of the system, but in addition many qualifications are taught by private companies. The qualifications themselves are run by private assessment companies.

### Who controls the vocational education and training system in England?

*The Department for Education* together with the Treasury determine overall policy and funding. The Education and Skills Funding Agency manages the funding of further education. The Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (2017 name) helps to provide strategic guidance on skills shortages.

*Ofsted* inspects schools, FE colleges and independent training providers and grades them. They monitor overall standards and assess the progress and impact of government reforms.

*The Further Education Commissioner* assesses FE colleges if they are rated inadequate by Ofsted or fail to meet ESFA minimum standards. He helps support colleges that appear to

be struggling, even though not yet graded inadequate.

*The Institute for Apprenticeships (and Technical Education)* manages what it says in its name. Employers have an important role in helping the Institute set up and run vocational courses and apprenticeships. The creation of the IoA resulted in the closure of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills in 2016.

*The Federation for Industry Sector Skills and Standards* represents, promotes and supports Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) across the UK. SSCs are the employer-led skills organisations and they aim to reduce skills gaps and shortages and to improve productivity. The SSCs were, in the last few years, designers, as well as first-line accreditors, of most vocational qualifications. For example, ConstructionSkills is the Sector Skills Council for the construction industry.

The Sector Skills Councils support 19 National Skills Academies which bring employers together with training organisations to develop skills training in area like construction, environmental technologies, financial services, food and drink, health, nuclear, and railway engineering. Some opt for a permanent training centre in a fixed location, whereas others prefer training that is delivered in the workplace or online.

*Local enterprise partnerships (LEPs)* are voluntary partnerships between local authorities and businesses set up in 2011 by the then Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to help determine local economic priorities and lead economic growth and job creation within the local area. Each has a strategic economic plan. Each LEP bids for money from the government’s Local Growth Fund.

LEPs often undertake skills surveys and make recommendations for areas where existing vocational training needs to be strengthened. For example, in 2016 the Thames Valley LEP published a report identifying specific skills shortages in engineering, construction and digital technology.

*Metro mayors*, some have control over the adult education budget.

*The Education and Training Foundation* helps colleges and teachers deliver vocational courses and functional skills qualifications.

*The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)* is the national trade association representing providers involved in skills and employment delivery. AELP members deliver the majority of apprenticeships, traineeships, English and maths in the workplace.

In 2017, Barnaby Lenon, previously the headmaster of Harrow School, wrote a best-selling book about high-achieving state schools in England (*Much Promise*). Later that year, he went on a tour of further education colleges and started to research the fortunes of those who do less well at school. He writes about the state of vocational education in England and the implications of his findings for a post-Brexit economy

# TRANSFORMING A SCHOOL COMMUNITY



Children only get one opportunity, explains Head Teacher Anna Balson, who moved her school from ‘requires improvement’ to ‘outstanding’ in under four years

I joined Mere Green as Head teacher in January 2009, following six years as deputy head at Christ Church CE Primary in Sparkbrook, Birmingham.

Mere Green is an affluent area of Sutton Coldfield a suburb in North Birmingham, but also has pockets of high deprivation. Mere Green Primary in 2009 was a one-form school with a resource base for speech language and communication.

The school had rapidly decreasing numbers and was not the school of choice for most people, but the neighbouring schools’ increasing waiting lists, coupled with the poor image of the school, meant we were a ‘holding place’ for most children waiting for their place at their favoured school to be available.

The high mobility that we were facing caused a wide range of problems compounding our already serious issue of potentially facing amalgamation or closure.

## Improving teaching

The problem I was faced with as a new head teacher was very simple: teaching was inadequate. Our children were blamed, but the reality was the teaching was not good enough and effective and sustained professional development had not taken place. Work started at pace to start a new belief culture. People continue to say “look what you have done

Anna,” but I can honestly say all I did was plant the seed. The seed of belief. By June of 2009, the school was ‘Requiring Improvement’ with Ofsted and Team Mere Green was born.

Our children, our staff, our families and our community were driven. Driven to be their very best selves and we began a rapid period of capability, retirement, rigorous professional development and focused recruitment. Children only get one opportunity, and we promised to give our children an amazing time during their school life. We pulled up the drawbridge and focused relentlessly and uncompromising on our goal.

That first year was the hardest year of my professional life. I had to be staff’s deputy head, head and mentor. I used honesty and my ‘why?’ from the outset and walked the walk. We refocused on what was important, we recruited

amazing people who believed and perhaps more importantly, were learners themselves who were ambitious both for our school and for themselves. We took our first step on the road less travelled.

## A likeminded partnership

We spent the ridiculously large carry forward on creating an incredible learning environment with state of the art facilities for both children and staff, we reversed the declining numbers and we never lost sight of our vision. In 2012, we were invited to join the Arthur Terry Learning Partnership (ATLP) as our morals and ethos matched that of the newly formed MAT. This was a defining moment for both Mere Green and me. Birmingham Local Authority’s support had ended following our ‘Satisfactory’ judgement with Ofsted in 2011, as we were now low risk in an ever-dwindling school

**That first year was the hardest year of my professional life. I had to be staff’s deputy head, head and mentor.**



improvement department with the LA. We were now potentially more vulnerable than ever.

My one-to-one coaching from Sir Christopher Stone, chief executive of the ATLP, made me become an even better leader, and academising and being a member of a likeminded group of schools and professionals facilitated the next growth stage of 'Team Mere Green'.

Being an active member of the Arthur Terry National Teaching School, as well as now being a member of a MAT, opened up a greater depth of school improvement support. All staff accessed bespoke professional development and from being a 'net receiver' of support in 2013 our growth, development and success has cemented our school as a 'net giver'. Co-piloting with my deputy ensured good succession planning for the MAT, as well as retention of talent. CEO Richard Gill is a real driving force

behind this success, his leadership style is one of coaching, and mentoring at all levels.

Our community is so successful, we support each other, we achieve things together and we constantly strive for what next. We have the most incredible staff who facilitate amazing learning experiences for our children, they look after each other, and recognise how well school looks after them by giving their all each and every day.

Horizon scanning led us to approach the LA for expansion in 2014, our outcomes were outstanding, we were responding to our community growth by opening new classes and over staffing and ward data indicated a locality need.

### **Outstanding outcomes**

January 2015 saw an Outstanding Ofsted and that road less travelled had made all the difference. Our new

deputy led an impressive remodel of our building to provide outstanding facilities for our now two-form school, including a purpose built professional suite, IT suite, art room and pastoral centre. Our outcomes continue to be outstanding, our fully inclusive school is society in a nutshell, and I am proud of what that little seed grew into. We are a National Support School, our governors have achieved the National Governance award, our chair of governors is a national leader of governors, we have three Lead practitioners and four specialist leaders of education (SLEs) and I am a national leader of education (NLE) and executive head teacher (primary) within our MAT. Our community is stronger than ever, and our children... well, they only get one opportunity, and they are at the heart of our Mere Green school family.



# RAISE LITERACY LEVELS AND TACKLE SOCIAL MOBILITY

Professor Sonia Blandford, CEO at Achievement for All, explores the relationship between literacy levels and life chances, and outlines some of the ways academies can help to build brighter futures for their pupils

**R**ecently a major report by the Social Mobility Commission revealed how social mobility is getting worse for a generation of children and young people. Across the country we face a stark postcode lottery where whole communities are being left behind. Despite the challenges we face, we can continue to tackle one of the greatest drivers of social inequality – literacy levels. Last summer one in four children left primary school unable to read well. This means that over 150,000 children started secondary school in the autumn without the basic reading skills needed to access the curriculum.

For children growing up in low-income communities, the situation is worse; it is estimated that up to two in five children have difficulties with literacy. Many of these children will fall behind in their schooling, lack self-confidence and face a future with diminished opportunities.

## Raising literacy levels

With the right approach in schools and the support of parents and carers, the multiple barriers that some children and young people face to literacy can be disassembled.

We know that getting them into reading from a young age and into the habit of reading every day, will help to improve their imagination and communication skills and brighten their future prospects. So how can you embed this across your academy?

Achievement for All exists to close the unacceptable gaps in our education system

and works in partnership with early years settings, schools and colleges to ensure every child has the chance to thrive. Based on our work we've outlined five ways you can raise literacy levels and help to change the course of your pupils' futures.

## 1. Close the speech and language gap early

The gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers opens early. Toddlers and other vulnerable children from disadvantaged communities can be as much as 10 months behind their more advantaged peers in vocabulary development at age 3. They are less likely to have parents who read to them or simply talk to them.

Targeted interventions, like The Raising Early Achievement in Literacy (REAL) project carried out in Sheffield with pre-school children and their families, can help to close the gap.

But what support can schools provide?

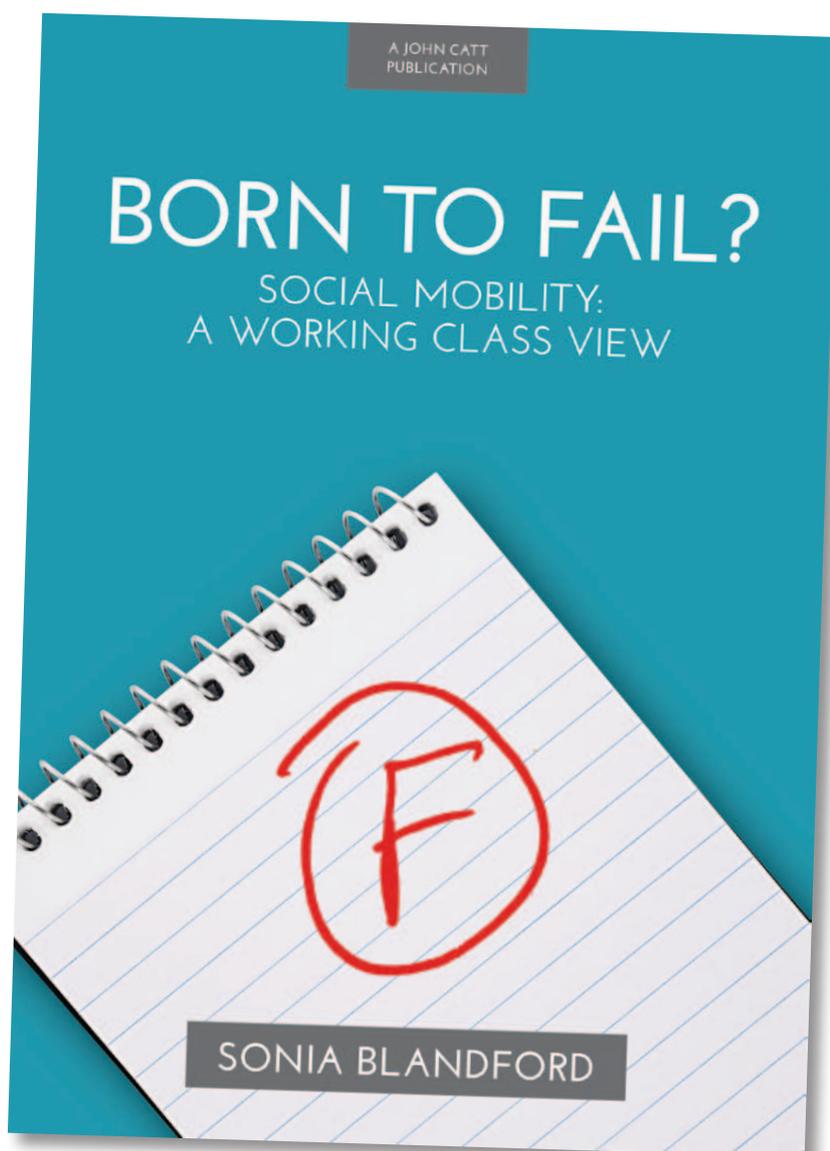
Talking with young children, reading to them and telling them stories on a daily basis can help them to construct the foundation blocks for a lifetime of reading well. Collaborating with local early years settings and the wider community can help encourage these practices further. We have also seen a welcome growth in schemes where older pupils volunteer in nearby settings and read stories. Holding reading events where pupils organise reading activities and invite families with younger children to attend can be beneficial for all.

## 2. Engage and support parents with reading

Parental engagement is still the single most important contributory factor to children's development, wellbeing and achievement.

For children and young people in some of the most disadvantaged communities, the chances are that their parents cannot read; data shows that around 35% of adults in some of the deprived wards of the UK have the reading skills of an 11 year old. Many schools are seeing the positive impact that tailored literacy support for parents and carers is having on both families and their pupils' attainment.

In one recent example, a teacher took an unconventional route to support a parent. The mother in a family of six boys was supported by her children's teacher as she embarked on a programme to improve her literacy. As direct consequence her middle four boys moved from being on the SEND register. Their mother's motivation and raised self-esteem and confidence were reflected onto her children, and her youngest has just started school with the highest expectations, loving the fact his mum is now chair of the school PTA. Another school, which had high levels of poor literacy skills amongst new year 7 pupils, decided to invite parents in for workshops on how to support their children at home. Not only did their children's attainment improve, but many parents went on to achieve NVQ qualifications in literacy.



This could entail setting up book clubs, inviting inspirational guest speakers into assemblies to tell stories about their lives, running song-writing, poetry or theatre workshops and competitions – the list is endless.

The Debate Mate core programme, which works with schools in areas of high child poverty, also enhances literacy skills. In the classroom, allow time for children and young people to work in groups, teams or in pairs, both on a formal and informal basis and allowing time for thinking, reflecting, questioning and imagining. These skills are both developed through reading and develop reading – allowing young people to cultivate their potential.

### 5. Register your Multi-academy trust or school on the 100 Million Minutes Reading Challenge

We are asking multi-academy trusts, schools, colleges, early years settings, parents and carers to sign up to our 100 Million Minutes Reading Challenge, which will see a week dedicated to engaging pupils with reading. From Thursday 1st March 2018 (World Book Day), children and young people will have a week to collectively read 100 million minutes alongside their registered settings!

It's free to register and you will have access to packs filled with ideas and materials to inspire pupils of all ages with reading across the week. There are also big prizes for the settings that achieve the highest average number of reading minutes per child and young person.

10 minutes of reading a day can have a huge impact on children and young people's development, so imagine what 100 million minutes can achieve.

Professor Sonia Blandford is CEO at Achievement for All – an award-winning charity that works with early years settings, schools and colleges to improve outcomes for all children and young people vulnerable to underachievement regardless of background, challenge or need. She is the author of 'Born to Fail'.

### 3. Empower pupils with collaboration

Buddy schemes and one-to-one mentoring can make a big difference to pupils who struggle with reading.

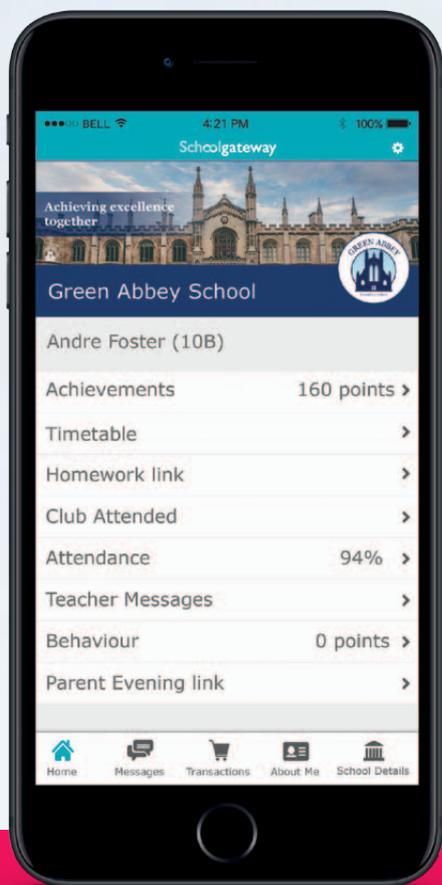
In one school we work with, an eight-year-old boy who loved reading to his little brother at home, was a reluctant reader in school, often disruptive and was at risk of not meeting his literacy targets. His teacher made him a reading mentor to other children and the impact was immediate. Acting as a reading mentor twice weekly had an immediate impact on his self-esteem - he enjoyed the responsibility, became more focused, less disruptive, proved to be a positive and supportive role model and has better attainment.

In another school, pupils with SEND engaged in one-to-one literacy extra-curricular activity with role models. The pupils developed a different outlook towards learning through raised attainment and a willingness to take part in activities.

### 4. Expand pupils' understanding of literacy

Literacy is not only about reading and writing well, but about story-telling, developing imagination and creativity. Academies, schools and early years settings have a key role in supporting children and young people in these areas. Creating a literacy culture in the broader context encourages and supports the development of good reading skills.

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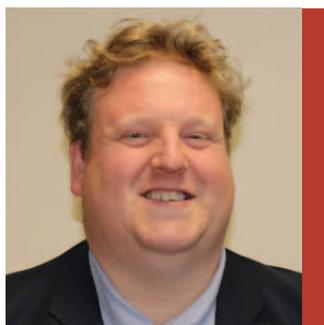
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# A TRANSFORMATIVE PAY STRUCTURE



Stuart Gardner, Chief Executive, says the Thinking Schools Academy Trust have developed a pay structure that rewards teachers, boosts retention – and delivers higher standards

It is no secret that there is a teacher recruitment and retention issue in our country at present. 31% of all teachers who qualified in 2011 had quit within five years, while over 27,500 teachers who trained between 2011 and 2015 had already left their job last year.

This is undoubtedly a complex challenge that there is no single solution to, but what will help greatly is creating an effective pay framework that incentivises teachers to enter and stay in the classroom, and produce their very best teaching for students.

When it comes to pay, teaching does not always operate like most other careers and walks of life. It is our usual assumption that employees will be rewarded for excellent work – meaning they are motivated to stay with their employer and continue to perform well, leading to even higher pay in future. This creates a virtuous circle of high performance and proper reward. But teaching often does not follow this pattern, with teachers not being properly rewarded for their great work, and facing vast bureaucracy in seeking the benefits that they deserve.

## Thinking creatively

When thinking creatively about the ways teachers can be attracted to the classroom, it is imperative that progressive pay structures are developed to reward teaching talent and hard work. The national pay framework no longer provides the path ahead.

At the Thinking Schools Academy Trust, we have developed a new pay structure to transform the way teachers are paid.

## Simple yet powerful

It will properly reward teachers for their hard work, and incentivise them stay in the profession and with us – a simple yet powerful aim. It will also have immediate benefits for students who will reap the benefits of the vibrant, engaging

classrooms that our best teachers will continue to foster. We are encouraged greatly by the National Education Union's endorsement of the new framework, after some 93.5% of its members voted in its favour earlier this term, following six months of working together to develop the details of the pay model.

So what does our new framework look like?

- Newly qualified teachers are well-remunerated from the beginning of their career, guaranteeing a minimum starting salary of at least £25,000 from September 2018 – more than £2,000 above the national average.
- Teachers only move up to the main pay scale as a result of excellent teaching, as all progress, including within the upper pay levels, is based on performance only.
- Teachers at the top of the pay scale are rewarded, as those who surpass performance objectives are recognised through a three per cent non-consolidated pay award. This is a bonus which both protects the financial viability of the structure, and creates a reward-based culture for those who would otherwise not receive any benefits for exceptional performance due their position at the top of the scale. As the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Justine Greening MP, spoke about, it is important that great teachers have an incentive to stay in the classroom rather than taking management responsibilities which come with larger salaries. It is absolutely right that teachers who want to stay in the classroom have a stretching path ahead that they can follow, and we should not be forcing teachers to choose between their love of interacting with children and helping them achieve their potential, and their desire to progress in their own career. We are therefore immensely proud that our framework allows talented and passionate teachers to continue doing what they enjoy on a day to day basis, delivering the best



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standards of education for their students and achieving their own personal goals.

- Bureaucratic barriers to teachers receiving proper rewards are being removed. While the national pay framework forces teachers to go through the arduous process of submitting an application to gain access to the upper pay scale, TSAT's high-performing teachers will be automatically entitled to these rewards from 2018. The criteria for such performance, approved by the NEU, is based on a set of objectives around pupil progress, teaching standards, and professional development – all of which are checked at performance management meetings throughout the year. We also believe it is important to recognise teacher performance in the year it has been achieved, so are introducing annual incremental increases, so that teachers on the upper pay scale do not have to wait for two years before their pay is reviewed, as they do within the national framework.

### **Different forms of support**

We recognise that teachers at different stages of their career require different forms of support and guidance, and our framework makes a particular effort to help teachers in their

first three years of teaching, at NQT +1 and NQT +2 level. Through tailored, yet still stretching, objectives, and targeted support, our framework guides these members of staff in meeting and exceeding the aims set for them.

In fostering a financially secure and motivating environment for teachers, our new pay model directly benefits students through the excellent standard of teaching they will receive. And that is ultimately what our model is all about: ensuring students enjoy the classroom experience which enables them to achieve their best, and go on to great things.

Of course, different academies face different circumstances, and TSAT's pay model may not be the exact path that other academies choose to go down. At this time of great challenge for teacher recruitment and retention, it is important that we encourage innovation and originality, and support those who propose new models for teacher pay. The right answer will not always lie with TSAT's approach, despite its many positives. But through a system which at its heart is based on the principle of fairness, and which provides both financial security and reward, teachers and students will receive immediate and tangible benefits, and our classrooms will continue to go from strength to strength.



# MATs: A WIDER

Dr Tim Cook, Principal of Liskeard Hillfort Primary School, and Mary McKeeman, Chief Operating Officer of the sister multi-academy trusts, Bright Tribe and The Adventure Learning Academy Trust

**I**n the early days of Tony Blair's landslide, with the wonderful commitment to 'Education, Education, Education', few could have predicted how the tectonic plates of the education landscape would shift over the following years. Two decades on from that night in 1997, the extensive use of the original academisation legislation has resulted in a changed educational world. Local Authorities, with some rare exceptions, have lost much influence. Those Local Authorities glaciers have largely melted, revealing a new geology: that of Multi Academy Trusts.

In the light of such significant change to the governance of schools up and down the country, it is reasonable to ask – "Are we better off as a result?". With some honourable exceptions, most notably the Harris, Ark and Outward Grange chains of academies, it is difficult to discern any significant improvement in outcomes. This is despite the emphasis placed on outcomes as the most important barometer of school improvement by Sir David Carter at the Education Select Committee (June 2016). As an example, Key Stage 2 outcomes for sponsored academies lie some way short of national averages – as evidenced by the following table.

In the light of these outcomes, it might be tempting to conclude that this was an ideological experiment that really wasn't such a cracking idea in the first place. Whilst this may be possible, it's far too early into the life cycle of MATS to take a sensible, informed view in this regard. As Carter identifies, this is an "embryonic and emerging form of structural leadership".

## Weak individuals

Alternatively, it could be perceived that individual MATs are at fault. It seems quite possible that some MATs are led by particularly weak individuals who preside over systemic failure. Experience of life tells us that this may be the case occasionally: it is a well-known cliché to say that people are promoted to the point of incompetence. However, experience of school life also tells us that nobody comes to work wanting to do a bad job and that the overwhelming majority of people in education work diligently, conscientiously, and very often brilliantly. There is no reason to consider that, as an industry, MATs are particularly susceptible to poor leaders. But, all the same, it's probably worth checking! It is to be hoped that Ofsted does take on the authority to inspect MATS in the same way as for Local Authorities, moving away from the 'batched' approach to inspection.

But those outcomes still lag behind. We can't blame the ideology (yet) and we probably can't blame the MATs. So, where should responsibility rest? This article argues that there are key structural issues when turning around a school that make comparison with other schools difficult. In the light of these handicaps, mapping the progress of school improvement needs a more measured approach to go some way to answering the question of where the responsibility for school improvement should rest. In the rest of this article, the sister trusts (Bright Tribe and the Adventure Learning Academy Trust) will be used as case study examples to illustrate key points about wider school improvement when 'failing' schools have been transferred.

## Key challenges

Schools which are transferred into a sponsored Multi Academy Trust relationship due to failure, reflected in inspection, are not easy places to work. The lack of leadership drains teaching staff's souls like dementors freshly released from Azkaban. For those skilled individuals working in failing schools, it takes a thick skin to endure the askance glances and the brickbats of public criticism. And the prospect of the instability of a 'due diligence' exercise with possible restructure by a prospective trust only leads to more anxiety. It is no wonder that good teachers soon work out that there is greener grass on adjacent school fields, inevitably contributing to a vicious circle of decline in the original school.

Just as inevitable is the decline in reputation. No parent actively wants to send their children to schools placed in Special Measures. School rolls drop, and stay low. The financial impact is significant – the school still has fixed costs it needs to cover so it's the investment in the library that slips. As does the number of avid readers in the community.

With a lighter roll, the school is exposed to the challenges of accepting 'in-year' entries. Professor Hattie identifies only seven strategies as having a negative impact on outcomes. These include domestic violence and corporal punishment. The 'not-so-magnificent seven' list also includes children moving in-year. As well as coping with the trauma of making new friends, children who move in-year often come with additional 'baggage' – from Child

# PERSPECTIVE

Protection issues to SEND difficulties.

Typically, these are not children who are going to enhance the outcome measures, and may need to be offered much more support to give them the opportunities that they rightly deserve.

In order to provide that support, schools have to access their notional £6000 SEND budget in order to complete their statutory commitment and their moral duty. Again, a further pressure on an already declining budget. To add a further financial liability, some authorities then charge the first £6000 of any Education and Health Care Plan to the school. Their argument is that as schools have that notional liability, they should meet the first tranche of cost. Every time our Special Needs co-ordinator successfully gets a plan past panel (a feat in itself), the school bears a £6000 bill per annum, typically for 1:2:1 in class support. This obvious financial liability, well above the notional SEND budget, creates a perverse financial disincentive for schools to apply for Education and Health Care Plans in the first place.

## Steps forward

It is commonly acknowledged that a good Principal can lead school 'turn around'. They can rally the troops, possibly remove the dead wood, and certainly turn the tide. I like to think that I'm one of those heads – my current Ofsted report suggests that, at least. However, the risk in taking on such a school is significant. Without more than a slice of luck, it would be easy to join the long line of 'failing' Heads whose low expectations have let the school down. For no additional financial premium, why should Heads/Principals

School type	Number of schools	Number of eligible pupils <sup>4</sup>	Percentage of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics <sup>5</sup>	
			2016	2017
<b>Sponsored academies<sup>4</sup></b>	984	41,368	43	52
Open for one academic year	123	4,666	37	49
Open for two academic years	179	7,117	44	53
Open for three academic years	270	10,958	44	52
Open for four academic years	268	11,768	44	53
Open for five academic years	107	4,845	43	50
Open for six or more academic years	37	2,014	48	55

take on these challenges? As a Principal, it's the moral integrity and the joy of working with disadvantaged learners that comes with this particular top job. As a Chief Operating Officer, there is the same motivation – with the added bonus of seeing achievement across a range of settings. But it would be a lot easier to take on school in more affluent and favourable circumstances, and this cannot be helpful in terms of recruiting the best talent to more challenging schools.

An esteemed ex-Head once remarked that being a Head was "easy". As I spluttered into my coffee as a naive NQT, he argued the point that Headship was easy...if you could recruit really good teachers. This may be easier said than done in challenging contexts. The search for great teachers is critical for an outstanding Head/Principal. Sadly, the queue of outstanding teachers knocking on the door is short. It's even shorter as so many early career teachers flee the profession and as Teaching Schools have already got to the best training teachers for their own school. The onus on creating a CPD programme that grows and then retains teachers becomes key.

Even for MATs which adopt schools

in challenging circumstances, even for Heads and Principals who seek and face these challenges, and even for the utterly committed teaching staff who work with profound professionalism, the task can be Herculean and, at times, desperate. Rightly, we have moved away from the model of one trust adopting only failing schools – but that was not always the case. The experience of the Bright Tribe/Adventure Learning trusts is that, even in the face of schools transferred in in failing categories, school improvement can and does happen. It is absolutely not a straight trajectory: due to the challenges of turning round failing schools and, at times, human error the winding road has had nadirs where children have been let down. This weighs heavy on conscience. However, with the humility to learn from mistakes we now have schools which are improving. Where schools which entered at 'Special Measures' have progressed to 'Requiring Improvement'. Where schools which entered at 'Special Measures' are now 'Good with Outstanding features'. And where school leaders are utterly committed to improving the lives of the children they serve, in the face of challenging odds at times.

**Spielman herself argues that “schools with more disadvantaged intakes had more to do to reach the same levels of progress for pupils so that, if you put staff teams of identical size and calibre into schools with relatively disadvantaged and advantaged intakes, and keep other things constant, the absolute quality of education experienced by a given child will likely be higher in the advantaged school.”**

### Light at the end of the tunnel

And, nationally, there may be light at the end of the tunnel. In recent weeks, there has been a remarkable acknowledgement by Amanda Spielman, HMCI, of the challenges of working in less affluent areas. In her Festival of Education speech (Spielman, June 2017) she notes the research of the Education Policy Institute which released a study on Ofsted judgements, finding “a systematic negative correlation between school intakes with more disadvantaged children... and with favorable Ofsted judgements.” Spielman herself argues that “schools with more disadvantaged intakes had more to do to reach the same levels of progress for pupils so that, if you put staff teams of identical size and calibre into schools with relatively disadvantaged and advantaged intakes, and keep other things constant, the absolute quality of education experienced by a given child will likely be higher in the advantaged school.” Spielman may simply be articulating what many practising teachers and

headteachers have always known.

So, perhaps, in the light of the structural issues described here that are all too common, Spielman’s acknowledgement reflects a more nuanced understanding of school improvement. However unlikely, we cannot dismiss the possibility that MATs are an ill-fated, ideological experiment, led at times by weak leaders, who preside over systemic failure that will cost our society dear. But, we can’t know that yet! We need a measured view over time, supported by the insight of Ofsted as the national inspectorate. Without this, we might continue in something of a fog of gut feelings led by our own political philosophies. This seems unsatisfactory.

### Recommendation one: employ an inspection framework that is fit-for-purpose.

The suggestion of Sir David Carter, National Schools Commissioner, to have an eight-stage model of school improvement that recognises the

complexity of school improvement is refreshing. Carter’s model should be adopted urgently. The four-stage model currently employed offers the potential for oversimplified judgements.

As part of this change, outstanding schools will inevitably come back within a regular framework of inspection. Schools which are genuinely Centres of Excellence will be lauded as such. For the other schools which masquerade, unchecked for year after year as ‘Outstanding’ in the same way as the Emperor wore his new clothes, their children will benefit from a mirror being held up.

Similarly, a more graduated approach to inspection would facilitate better parental choice and competition. Parental insight must not be blurred by a lack of clarity or transparency. This could be addressed in a constructive fashion by employing a more graduated approach to inspection.

And with the wider remit of Ofsted inspecting MATs, a clearer view on governance can be identified. This will help ensure that schools themselves are not being undermined through weak governance. In turn, published lists of MAT performance seem an inevitable, and welcome, result.

### Recommendation two: for MATs to recognise the potential dividends of cross MAT/LA collaboration.

The current preferred model of brokering schools from Local Authority control into MATs is to create local hubs. This absolutely makes sense in order to benefit from those ‘backroom’ economies of scale, whilst remaining sufficiently geographically localised so that support can be offered between schools. However, that wasn’t always the model – many schools do not have that tier of support easily available. Where schools were brokered without that geographical centrism, MATs should have sufficient flex within their approach to work closely with schools that are not part of their trusts. My own school, for example, has entered into agreements with a Teaching School to support with leadership and pedagogy, whilst entering separately into an SLA for the provision of Educational



Welfare Services. We benefit both from support networks: from our nearby ‘hubbed’ trust schools and from high quality, local providers external to the MAT.

For some MATS, this may represent a cultural shift. Whilst many MATs offer collaboration opportunities internally (and the best ones collaborate precisely for impact), it is vitally important that MATs recognise that sharing pedagogical practice, engaging school support and entering into a variety of SLAs with schools outside of the particular MAT network offers opportunity. This flexibility is one of the key arguments advanced for academisation: that Principals can react quickly to ensure bespoke provision for the needs of the children they serve so that significant impact can occur. By holding Principals within an overly tight framework, MATs run the risk of returning to the darker

days of Local Authorities where, on occasion, the monopoly of the ‘top slice’ led to pretty weak support.

### **Recommendation three: for the approach to the Headteacher Boards to be reviewed**

As a point of principal, the Headteacher Boards are to be welcomed. They represent a sincere attempt to garner insight. However, in the light of the above quotation from Spielman, it is likely that the leaders who are elected to RSC Headteacher Boards will hail from more advantaged backgrounds. The RSC commissioners should ensure, by invitation or by changed regulation, that membership is offered to outstanding leaders who are actively engaged in the business of school improvement. Their schools won’t have an ‘Outstanding’ rating for Leadership and Management, meaning that under current rules they

cannot stand, but their perspectives at Headteacher Board level would be invaluable. It might just be that outstanding leaders happen to work in schools and academies that aren’t judged as such – yet.

In the light of the educational landscape changes over the last twenty years, it is absolutely appropriate to be asking questions about the relative effectiveness of MATs. In this, Ofsted should be granted the powers to explore those MATs which soar and those MATs which slip, albeit with a more subtle set of marking criteria. More widely, the DfE and all those involved in school governance should reflect on how to encourage the most able, the most inspirational and the most effective teachers, into the most challenging contexts. Not to do so might doom another generation to yet another trip around that vicious circle of deprivation.



# “THEY MUCK YOU UP, YOUR MUM AND DAD...”

The impact of parents and family cannot be overstated in pupil achievement, says Marc Rowland

**W**hen I started secondary school, some time ago, I was hauled into the headteacher’s office (for a crime I obviously didn’t commit). The head promptly told me ‘your mother was just as bad’.

As far as Mr Colin Evans was concerned, my mother may not have meant to muck me up, but she had. She’d filled me with the faults she had. And added some extra, to ensure I was equally as bad.

Such lazy attitudes may be less explicit in today’s schools. There are some excellent examples of good practice which are exemplified in this little known report from the Department for Education. But there is some way to go before we can claim our education system works effectively for all parents. And it really matters. Research from the University of Missouri shows that where teachers have positive perceptions of parents, their pupils are more likely to be successful. So how we talk about parents, how we perceive them matters. How teachers work with parents matters. Some quick wins:

- Don’t delegate relationship building with families from less fortunate backgrounds to Teaching Assistants ‘because they know the community’;
- Family Support workers should pay a proactive role in school life, not simply be the go to person for families facing the challenging circumstances. These families should have relationships with teachers too;
- Don’t overcomplicate home learning. Every young person, regardless of background will learn more through an extended vocabulary through reading for pleasure. Homework at primary school has been the biggest source of arguments between my daughters and I. Which is all the more galling when it has no impact on learning;
- Consider what training teachers have had in building and sustaining good relations with parents;
- Consider what parents of all backgrounds can bring to enrich and improve school life, rather than focus on a deficit model;

- Don’t make assumptions about families. It may be true that some families have had a difficult experience of education themselves, but such statements are often made without any robust evidence. It is important to talk to parents, invite them in to talk, find out about their lives. This harrowing article from the FT describes the lives of families where the cold wind of poverty blows through their home every day. Insecure employment, insecure housing, reduced community services, limited open spaces to play, community tensions, insecure futures, insecure lives. Let’s show these families some apricity. Show them they belong. One teacher I met recently told me how she was exasperated by one pupil who’d never do his homework. She then realised that he sat on a washing machine in a launderette until 8.00pm each night waiting for mum to finish work.

A cursory look at some Pupil Premium website statements illustrates the point about the perceptions of vulnerable families and how they are perceived. Barriers to learning are listed as:

- Drug and alcohol abuse in the family;
- Mental health issues in the family including the pupils;
- Domestic Violence.

Firstly, these can be features of any family. Secondly, there are possible issues around confidentiality from such statements. Thirdly, it risks embedding negative perceptions and stereotypes of families. The next link on from the statement says ‘if you think your child may be eligible for free school meals...’. Such statements illustrate the unexpected consequences of good intentions. Is it surprising that some families will not engage?

A consistent feature of schools that struggle to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils is a sense of blaming parents for what they don’t do. The most effective schools recognize that some families find parenting challenging and support them. But primarily they focus on overcoming children’s barriers to learning in the classrooms by maximising access to great

teaching, building their oral language, their self-regulation skills, their social skills, their vocabulary, their metacognitive skills, their life experiences, their access to knowledge and cultural capital. This is all underpinned by strong relationships.

It is right to recognise that some people find parenting difficult. A lack of boundaries, poor role models, a lack of access to books, poor social skills and a low value put on education can have an impact on the educational achievement of children. But it is fundamentally important that this is not used as an excuse. It's how schools tackle these issues that matters. If parents are held in unconditional positive regard, then a culture of high expectations, difficult conversations with families and non-negotiables are easier to implement. So, let's change the language we use about parents. And as Jim Davies from the children's society says in his talk 'Leaving Poverty at the School Gates', whatever you might think of parents, it's not the child's fault.

So what does great parental engagement look like? Lee Abbott from Hillside Primary School in Ipswich says that he'll know he's got it right when more parents of disadvantaged families are challenging him for having a supply teacher in the way that many of his professional families do. I love this comment from Lee because he's not simply demanding his vulnerable families do

more at home. He's trying to empower them.

Scalby School in Scarborough has transformed outcomes for disadvantaged pupils through better relationships with pupils and families within an opportunity area. A whole school approach (that includes professional development) has improved attendance, reduced exclusions, improved progress, improved attainment.

Everything is possible. The solutions are there. They start with positive relationships. Let's prove Larkin's (and Colin Evans') cynicism wrong.

Marc Rowland is Head of the Research School based at Rosendale Primary School, and former Director of Policy and Research for the National Education Trust from 2007 to 2017. The second edition of his book "An Updated Practical Guide to the Pupil Premium" was published in December 2015 (John Catt Educational). His latest book "Learning without Labels" was also published by John Catt in March 2017.



# DON'T BURY YOUR HEAD IN THE SAND...

Paul Leigh, Chief Financial Officer at Focus-Trust, explains how schools can meet the resources challenge in light of recent budgetary constraints



On Wednesday 22nd November, Cllr Phillip Hammond gave his first autumn budget announcement.

With regards to education, this largely focused on a raft of measures aimed at getting Britain fit for a science and technology-based future - including a £600 boost to schools and colleges for every extra sixth-former who takes A-level or core maths.

Public sector spending on education will amount to £102 billion in 2018-19, according to data from the Office for Budget Responsibility and HM Treasury, which represents 12.6 per cent of the predicted £809 billion of public expenditure due to be spent next year.

There is little doubt that school funding is high on the priority list of the school management team. The pressures on budgets are bound to present schools with real challenges, while national education funding reform will bring a degree of uncertainty - all at a time of rising expectations in education standards.

Despite Cllr Hammond honouring the protection of the national schools budget, schools will still have to manage cost pressures from the following:

- Increases in pay costs (eg. Annual pay awards and incremental rises)
- Increases in non-pay inflation (eg. Energy costs)
- Increases in employer pension contributions
- Any changes in funding resulting from the new national funding formula
- Reductions in the education service grant rate and removal of the general funding rate.

Given the potential scale of these pressures, it is crucial that school leaders engage with these challenges, now. Indeed, the full role of finance has to be understood if it is to help meet the challenges schools are

facing and the increasing cost pressures mentioned above.

As with many courses of action, there has to be a strategic approach if longer-term goals and financial sustainability are to be achieved. From a financial perspective, this starts with a clear finance vision and an understanding of how the finance team can help support school leaders.

The finance function in schools has moved on from its budget control roots and now encompasses more of a business partnering approach, where finance team members work alongside managers, supporting them in decision-making. This ensures the most effective use of resources by helping managers to identify and evaluate the financial implications of options and decide on the optimum solution.

**Public sector spending on education will amount to £102 billion in 2018-19, according to data from the Office for Budget Responsibility and HM Treasury, which represents 12.6 per cent of the predicted £809 billion of public expenditure due to be spent next year**



That said, accounting and compliance are the bread and butter of finance and must be maintained to a high standard regardless of the financial pressures.

Other key management accounting activities include resource allocation, budgetary planning and control, analysis of trends and data to bring insight. These areas are crucial in dealing with financial pressures and future uncertainties, as they help with the management of limited resources at strategic, tactical and operational levels.

In the school context, the role of finance is to enable educational objectives to be delivered efficiently and effectively, and providing value for money and delivering efficiency are key elements in managing an organisation, whether there are financial pressures or not.

Resource efficiency is good practice and should run through every aspect of school management. This will help release more resources to frontline activities, such as teaching, books, classroom materials and classroom technology, so it really

helps organisations facing budgetary pressures.

Resource allocation, however, consists of more than assigning amounts to particular activities or programmes. Equally, if not more important, is the examination of the ways in which those funds are translated into actions that address expressed educational goals at various educational levels. This integration of educational outcomes into financial decision making is essential.

This, therefore, lends itself to the rethinking of priorities and ultimately, the reallocation of resource.

It's important to stay positive in the face of budget pressures and financial challenges, not least because it opens the mind to new opportunities. An efficiency review might open up entirely new ways of doing things.

Resource allocation is about choices and allocating funding to priorities for maximum impact. If you accept that better allocation of resources can improve educational impact, then more money is

not necessarily the only answer. And in a time of increasing financial pressures in schools, this can be a liberating insight.

Paul Leigh is a Chartered Accountant and is the Chief Financial Officer at Focus-Trust. He qualified in public practice and has worked in education for a number of years. He is passionate about how the role of finance can support school leaders in delivering higher levels of educational impact.

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# SOFT SKILLS CAUGHT AND TAUGHT

Roy Blatchford asks whether the so-called 'soft skills' can be taught successfully by schools

**C**onfidence, resilience, independence - these companion attributes have become a rallying cry for the many commentators on social mobility in our schools. The argument runs: get all young people to feel more confident about themselves, to develop their resilience and to hone their independent skills - then so-called 'achievement gaps' will be closed.

Is this the elusive recipe for enhancing social mobility? Is it that easy? And what realistic part can schools play?

The subject of character and soft skills is firmly on the political agenda. While in office Prime Minister David Cameron got Whitehall thinking carefully about measuring happiness in society. The Department for Education produced a well argued report in August 2017 titled 'Developing character skills in schools'; the Education Policy Institute studied employability and soft skills in its excellent research paper 'Educating for our Economic Future', published in October 2017.

And two recent and insightful books on the same subject are well worth dipping into: 'Taught Not Caught' by former Secretary of State for Education Nicky Morgan, and 'The Character Conundrum' by Matt Lloyd-Rose.

What are we talking about here in practice?

Take the following extract from a thoughtfully worded advertisement for new employees to join a five-star international hotel:

*The type of person we are looking for can demonstrate:*

- *A desire to improve themselves in terms of skills, knowledge and experience*
- *Good organisational skills and high service standards*
- *Patience, a sense of humour and an ability to accept and act on constructive feedback*
- *An ability to work on their own initiative and also to be a good team player*
- *Excellent and pro-active communication skills*
- *An eye for detail and a willingness to improve all aspects of the service we offer*
- *A positive attitude to all aspects of the job including enthusiasm, a professional and common sense approach and a dedication to the interests of the business.*

If most eighteen year-olds were to feel confident enough to apply for such a position, we would probably hail that their parents and

their teachers had done a pretty fine job, caught and/or taught.

Take another scenario. Imagine meeting one of your pupils, now aged 11, when they are 25. You meet by chance in a cafe and open a conversation. What do you wish to hear? You may well hope to hear that they continued to enjoy a good education beyond your classroom. More important, you probably want to find out that they are healthy in body and mind, confident, happy and fulfilled - a realisation of many of the soft skills that matter in life.

I have posed this scenario to hundreds of audiences around the world. Irrespective of culture and context, teachers comment on the 'character stuff' and rarely on, say, the young adult's higher education qualifications. I recall the principal of an international school affirming that by age 25 he expected all his former students to be active and honest citizens, entrepreneurial in their chosen fields, and global in outlook.

It is rare to enter a school or college which does not - intellectually at least - value 'soft skills'. Whether the school actually teaches the following, implicitly or explicitly, varies markedly: people skills, etiquette, attitudes, social and emotional intelligence, problem-solving, conflict resolution, time management, etc.

Some school leaders contest that these skills and attributes are largely innate, that they are 'caught' from parents, peers, teachers and social media models, and cannot be 'taught'. Others argue that while the nature and nurture elements are strong, it is eminently possible to design courses through which soft skills can be taught - indeed, must be taught in order that many pupils can enhance their self-esteem and employability.

From years of teaching and observing a range of personal and social education classes, I conclude that, whilst often fun, engaging and containing valuable learning points, such courses do not contribute significantly to the broader soft skills agenda.

Rather, the best schools develop pupils' innate character through carefully designed and implemented whole-school values, through their daily ethos, through the dignity of positive relationships between adults and students, through the consistency of high expectations. And not forgetting: 'the school's curriculum provides memorable experiences and rich opportunities for high quality learning and wider personal development and well-being' (Ofsted 2009).

A couple of concluding reflections to start the New Year. Try them in assembly!

First, I came across the following agenda in an outdoor adventure centre. It made me reflect that perhaps soft skills are most effectively addressed away from formal classrooms. The centre judges its own success on the extent to which visiting students leave having absorbed and demonstrated these during their stay.

#### *10 Things That Require Zero Talent*

- *Being on time*
- *Work ethic*
- *Effort*
- *Body language*
- *Energy*
- *Attitude*
- *Passion*
- *Being coachable*
- *Doing extra*
- *Being prepared*

Second, may there always be space for the originals and mavericks of this world! They might have been inspired by loving or dysfunctional parents, by poor or accomplished teachers, but in the end they shape hard and soft skills to their own inimitable ends. Steve Jobs captured these people best, in relaunching Apple in 1997 (see YouTube):

#### *Think Different*

*'Here's to the crazy ones.*

*The misfits.*

*The rebels. The troublemakers.*

*The round pegs in the square holes.*

*The ones who see things differently.*

*They're not fond of rules.*

*And they have no respect for the status quo.*

*You can quote them, disagree with them,*

*glorify or vilify them.*

*About the only thing you can't do is ignore them.*

*Because they change things.*

*They push the human race forward.*

*While some may see them as the crazy ones,*  
*we see genius.*

*Because the people who are crazy enough to think*  
*they can change the world, are the ones who do.'*

Roy Blatchford is currently working internationally on education system reform. His new book 'Success Is A Journey' will be published by John Catt later in the year



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# ALL THINGS GOVERNANCE

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## SHALL WE GROW?

Gillian Allcroft, Deputy Chief Executive, discusses issues for academy trustees to consider when contemplating expansion



It seems a long time since the Academies Act of 2010 and Michael Gove encouraging all ‘good’ and ‘outstanding’ schools to become academies: any children entering Year 7 in those early converters will now have left. In those early days the focus was very much on single academy trusts (SATs) and as part of their application they had to say how they would help other schools but in honesty the requirement was a tad vague. It is still legally possible to convert as a SAT but probably rather trickier in practice.

As far as academies go, multi-academy trusts (MATs) are now the Department for Education’s (DfE’s) preferred type of organisation. If you are still a SAT you are likely being asked about your plans for forming or joining a MAT and if you are a MAT about your plans for growth.

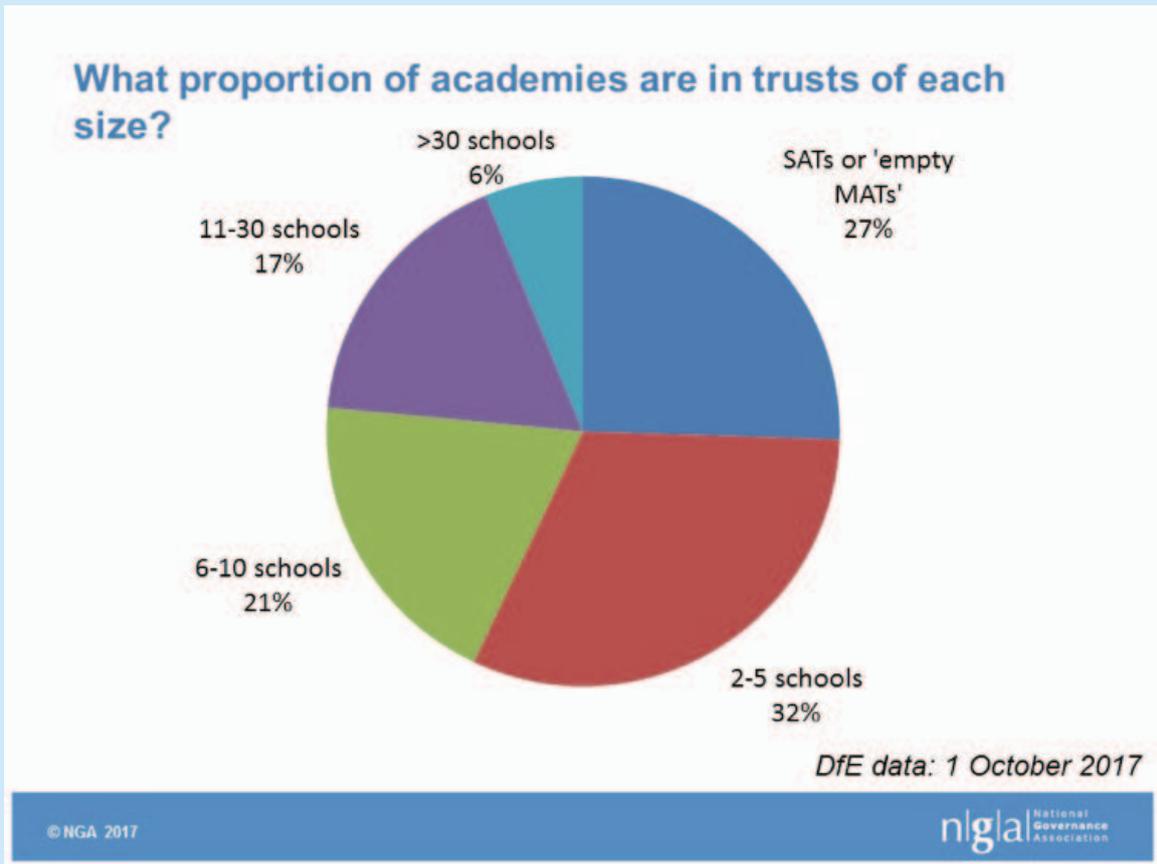
Of course, MATs existed in 2010, even if they were largely referred to as ‘chains’ in those days, but they were very much the exception not the norm. Even in those early days some had their expansion ‘halted’ because of concerns about their capacity to improve their schools. That didn’t stop the DfE, largely post-2012, from opening the flood gates and allowing many more MATs to expand rapidly – with some fairly predictable outcomes for pupils’ progress.

Given the length of time MATs have been with us, it is perhaps surprising that there is still no hard and fast evidence about the best size for a MAT (or indeed whether there is one). In its 2016 publication, Multi-academy trusts: Good practice guidance and expectations for growth, the DfE states that:

“Trusts that are sufficiently large (at least 1,200 pupils for primary trusts and 2,000 pupils for mixed or secondary trusts) will be better able to absorb costs pressures relating to the central overheads, drive value for money and be financially sustainable in the long term.”

More recently, Lord Agnew (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State with responsibility for both academies and governance) said in a speech to the North Academies Conference (31/10/17) that based on this own experience the ‘sweet-spot’ for MATs was between 12-20 schools and 5,000-10,000 pupils. He felt that this enabled financial economies of scale which in turn provided opportunities to spend more money on shared educational resources (people and things).

As it stands, most MATs are not large entities – the graph above shows the picture as at 1 October 2017 (the latest figures available when this went to print). This is why NGA set up our community MATs network (covered in the Autumn edition), because so much of the focus had



been on large MATs.

All organisations need to have vision for the future, describing where they want to be in 3-5 years' time, and a strategy for getting there. All boards should have an annual discussion where they review the vision and strategy. For single academy trusts (SATs) that discussion might be about whether you want to form a multi-academy trust (MAT) or indeed join an existing one. For MATs it should be whether you want to grow further and going forwards whether you have a maximum size in mind.

All academy trusts are charities and as charity trustees you must ensure that you act in accordance with and to further your charitable objects. At the same time you must ensure that your organisation is financially secure and sustainable. While expanding will almost certainly fit in with your charitable objects, since those will be about providing education, that doesn't necessarily mean it will be in the best interests of the charity. Expansion is not a charitable object in its own right and the starting point for any discussion about whether to grow should be why, not how.

There may be a number of eminently sensible reasons to grow but, unless you have considered them carefully, your vision will be at best cloudy and your strategy unclear. As with any sensible discussion about the way forward, the barriers and risks need to be considered as well as the opportunities (often these are the same in reverse).

The key considerations are likely to include:

### 1. Ethos and identity

The governing board is responsible for setting the vision and ethos and this will be a critical factor for schools considering joining your group.

“What matters most is identity and that is what will make other schools want to join the MAT. There needs to be a sense of what the MAT stands for which is not solely driven by a personality. The mission, vision and values must drive everything”

DfE - Multi-academy trusts: Good practice guidance and expectations for growth

### 2. Capacity

Do you have the governance and management capacity to take on an additional school or schools(s)? Will you need extra staffing capacity to provide good school improvement, financial and management support? As you grow both your governance and staffing structures will need to evolve, so build that evolution into the process. How will governance at academy level operate? Be honest with those thinking of joining you about what the MAT looks like now and that it may change over-time.

### 3. Finance

Growing the trust may bring economies of scale but expansion is not cost free; there will almost certainly be short-term additional costs for the trust in centralising services.

### 4. Geography

A MAT is a single organisation and the governing board need to ensure that it provides the best possible support for all the pupils and staff across the trust. Being geographically disparate will make

it harder to share resources, particularly staff. While a number of MATs continue to have schools across the country, they are now more likely to be gathered in regional hubs, enabling the sharing of educational resources which is one of the great benefits of coming together in a formal group.

## 5. Phase

Do you plan to be single phase or include a range of primary, secondary, special and alternative provision? Clearly, different phases and types of school bring different challenges and potentially the need for additional expertise.

## 6. Communication

Don't forget the other stakeholders in your trust – how will you keep them

informed about the rationale for growth and indeed any concrete plans for bringing new schools in? (See also Sam Henson's article about communication in MATs.)

Inevitably in a magazine article there is a limit to how much detail can be included, but for more information, as well as the DfE document referred to above, see the joint NGA, ASCL and BrowneJacobson set of guidance papers:

Staying in Control of your School's Destiny:

- considering forming or joining a group of schools
- joining a multi-academy trust
- forming a multi-academy trust

These can all be downloaded from the NGA's website: [www.nga.org.uk/destinydocs](http://www.nga.org.uk/destinydocs)

If you are a successful MAT you may well be approached by the regional schools commissioner to take on a school needing support. While no strategy should be set in stone, if have decided that you are in consolidation rather than expansion mode then you need to think very carefully before deciding to change tack. The final decision rests with the governing board.

Finally, if you do decide that expansion is for you, make sure that you undertake robust due diligence on the school(s) that are seeking to join you; surprises in this context are rarely good.



# COMMUNICATION IN MATS

Sam Henson, Head of Information, says good communication is vital for MATs to thrive



One of the biggest challenges for developing MATs is learning how to communicate effectively. New MAT trust boards face a fresh challenge attempting to keep the picture clear for not just one school but multiple schools, multiple leaders and local academy committees.

The sheer scale of MATs, and the complexities involved in running numerous locations, means that MAT governance is more complicated. As a result, communication channels sometimes suffer. If MATs grow, communication lines can, over time, become stretched and outdated. If they are not reinforced, they wear thin - becoming prone to breakage. Without clear communication channels the danger is that Chinese whispers start, potentially leading to distrust and dysfunctionality. As a MAT changes, its communication strategy must be reviewed regularly to ensure stakeholders voices remain heard and taken into account.

The starting point is ensuring that you have clear vision and values, asking the question: what does your MAT stand for?

## Why is communication hard in MATs?

Through our Community MAT network we are regularly being told by MATs that

developing communication across every governance tier, while engaging effectively with all stakeholders, is one of the main challenges faced.

This is unsurprising as even where organisations choose to come together, it is still a huge cultural change and it takes time for the 'one organisation' mentality to become embedded. The more sites and stakeholders there are to consider, the harder it becomes to manage. At an early stage of your process, it is vital to ensure meaningful two-way communication between all those involved in your trust including parents, pupils, staff and those governing at academy level.

## Common Communication problems: Crystal clear Roles and Responsibilities

Perhaps the biggest communication culprit is lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities. Misunderstanding surrounding the governance structure, accompanied by a poor or outdated scheme of delegation, has been a feature of the MAT sector thus far. Enhanced communication needs to be facilitated by a clear and simple framework which is specific about who is responsible for what and how players work together across the organisation as a whole.

Where roles and responsibilities are not clear, confusion reigns and mistrust can quickly develop at local level. Academy committees start to question their value to the trust. The worst case scenario is that this disgruntlement leads to public criticism and a full-blown reputational firestorm for the trust.

## Low visibility of the trust board or CEO

'Invisible' trust boards or CEO's will hinder strong connections being made across the trust. If either the trust board or executive are seen as inaccessible, those at

academy level are less likely to think of themselves as part of one organisation.

There should be some mechanism for trustees and those governing at academy level to meet and discuss. In smaller MATs there should be arrangements for trustees to visit individual schools.

As well as providing the MAT board with greater visibility within its schools, school visits will also give trustees valuable insight into the implementation of the MAT wide vision and strategy. They will also provide assurances that governance arrangements are effective, while striking up local conversations and gathering intelligence. In larger MATs it almost certainly won't be feasible for every school to receive an individual visit from a trustee, so other mechanisms need to be found to connect trust boards to those at local level.

## Reporting

The approach to reporting will differ in each trust, depending on its size, location and governance structure. But the reporting must work both ways; too many MATs have slipped up by expecting comprehensive reporting upwards from academy level to the board, but not reciprocating with reports back to local level, leaving those at academy level in the dark and often feeling unappreciated. Whatever communication channels are in place, those at local level must retain the ability to influence board policy and decisions. Without such mechanisms, your stakeholders will not feel valued and those at local governance level are likely to walk away. Minutes can be a useful tool for sharing MAT thinking - but it is only one mechanism and should never be a substitute for human interaction.

## Improving communication in multi-tiered governance

To help avoid these scenarios, there are a number of simple practical steps that



can aid MATs in developing trust wide communication channels that really work.

### **Ensure each tier has a voice that is heard**

Making sure that those within the trust have assurances that they are not speaking to a brick wall is the first key step. We have heard numerous stories from those at a local level within MATs who feel very disengaged from the trust as there is simply no way of connecting to the trust board. Do those at local level know who to get hold of on the trust board and how? Have they ever met anyone from either the trust board or the executive team? Experience teaches us that a “no” to both of these questions can cause issues later on.

### **Simplicity is key**

Simply retaining a focus on building, promoting and maintaining a culture of trust, engagement and confidence at every level will aid the board in getting communication right. Just because MATs are complex organisations, the way the board communicates does not have to be. The trust should have its own website that is fresh, easy to use, and most importantly, up to date. This can be a highly effective platform for sharing news as long as stakeholders know it is there.

Our most recent round of Community MAT networks have shown that trusts which make progress on the communication front stick to some simplistic but effective methods. One simple approach is to produce a brief one

page document after board meetings, which includes important board updates and decisions which is then cascaded to those at a local level. It does not take long to produce, being communicated quickly compared to minutes subject to approval.

### **Maximise technology**

There are various systems that MATs have tried and tested, so it is important that you really do the research to see which ones actually help and which ones are just pricey gimmicks. There are individual apps out there which can help keep players informed of the wider work of the trust. These apps can be used locally for academy committees or parents, or utilised for the whole trust. Some trusts have used social media to great effect, and while it is important to set the ground rules for use, it can be done well. Internal intranet platforms purchased centrally will be more expensive but may offer far more in terms of keeping everyone in the picture and delivering consistent reporting and documentation including minutes and agendas, headteacher reports and board updates, all regularly uploaded and easily accessible. Whichever the system you use, people should be inducted in how to use them.

### **Enable an exchange of ideas and local influence**

One of the benefits of being in a MAT is that you have the opportunity to spread the best bits of practice from across the organisation. But you can only do this if stakeholders from across the organisation

have an opportunity to share their ideas. Some MATs have gone down the route of creating MAT wide forums for sharing such practice, sometimes targeted at individual roles such as clerks or chairs, or perhaps there are regular gatherings of a number of schools on a regional or cluster basis. Local voice should be harnessed as a valuable resource, with the board remaining committed to separation of governance layers. While you want to facilitate learning from each layer/stakeholder, the lines of accountability must remain crystal clear and it is important not to lose sight of individual roles. Joint training sessions help to ensure everyone is starting at the same point, providing an opportunity for expectations to be clearly explained.

### **Celebrate trust success together**

Surprisingly, many MATs view this simply as a “nice to do if there is time”, but it can be a powerful way of creating a sense of joint ownership. It is a simple way of reminding everyone they are not acting in isolation, but are part of a wider organisation. Some trusts hold annual conferences, where the trust board, executive team, headteachers and academy committee members all attend. If this is not feasible due to the size of the trust, it may just be the chair from each academy committee who attends. Some MATs even hold trust wide awards, celebrating the success of each respective school and using it as an opportunity to reinforce the trusts vision.

# HOLDING ACADEMY TRUST BOARDS TO ACCOUNT - THE ROLE OF MEMBERS



Clive Lees, Chair of trustees at the Spring Partnership Trust winners of the NGA Award for Outstanding Governance in a Multi-Academy Trust explains how members carry out their role

Much is written about what Boards of Trustees should be doing and how to do it but I have not seen a lot about holding those same Boards to account for their effectiveness. This has been an area of development for The Spring Partnership Trust of which I am the Chairman of the Board of Directors (Trustees) and also a Member, and possibly this is an area for other Trusts to revisit as well.

Holding Academy Trust boards to account is, of course, the role of the Members of a Trust but when I review the minutes of a meeting of our Members from 2013, I notice that at that time, an appropriate level of challenge by the Members of the Trustees was still to be developed. Not only that, but the three Members were all Trustees and therefore in the position of holding themselves to account. In the circumstances of the time, that was fair enough but things have changed now as I'll explain below.

Over the last few years, we have been continually developing our Membership Body and its activities. We now have five Members with only a minority (two) being Trustees as well and the three independent Members have a diverse range of skills and experience capable of holding the Trustees and in particular the Chair of Trustees (me) to account.

How might Members go about challenging Trustees? The Governance Handbook 2017 is not very helpful merely stating (section 6.2.1 Para 26):

*"Members will want to be well informed of the skills the board needs to be effective and to have confidence in the board at all times, with sufficient arrangements in place for them to know when they may need to exercise their powers – particularly to appoint or remove one or more Trustees."*

The starting point for holding Trustees to account is for Members to have a clear understanding of what the Trustees are responsible for. The Governance Handbook (January 2017) states that effective governance involves the following 6 key areas:-

1. Strategic leadership that sets and champions vision, ethos and strategy.
2. Accountability that drives up educational standards and financial performance.
3. People with the right skills, experience, qualities and capacity.
4. Structures that reinforce clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
5. Compliance with statutory and contractual requirements.
6. Evaluation to monitor and improve the quality and impact of governance

So the first question for Members to consider at their meetings is whether directors can supply evidence that they, the directors, have been effective in all these areas and if not, why not, and in extreme cases, Members may need to consider removing Trustees from post.

To ensure Members hold Trustees to account, our Members' meetings now have a clear agenda that tackles each of the above six areas. There is of course a distinction to be made: Members need to ensure that Trustees have fulfilled the Trustees' role effectively and not do it for them nor simply duplicate what Trustees have already done. For example, with regard to strategic leadership, Members are looking for evidence that the strategy is being effectively determined and developed by Trustees (probably very much hand in hand with, in our case, the Executive Headteacher) whilst it is for Trustees to ensure the strategy is being implemented by the Senior Leadership Team. Members will want assurance that the strategic plan isn't just a document that sits in a drawer.

A crucial focus for Members is to ensure that Trustees are taking effective action to improve outcomes for children. Our Members are looking for evidence that Trustees have effectively held the Trust senior leaders to account. For example, Members



will want to know that Trustees are reviewing performance data from a variety of sources and taking appropriate action. Sources include SATs results, OFSTED inspections, other external assessments and the Trustees own visits to schools.

Our Members are also concerned with the personal contributions that Trustees make. Clearly, the personal circumstances of Trustees are very relevant in terms of the time they have available but, making allowances for this, Members need to be content with the contribution that Trustees are

making. To this end, Members regularly ask the directors to detail their activities and what difference those activities have made.

As Chairman of Trustees of The Spring Partnership Trust, I certainly feel challenged by Members' meetings – and rightly so. I have formal legal responsibilities as a Trustee and as Leader of the Board I have an additional responsibility to administer the Board so it is effective in fulfilling its duties. It is right that the Members provide significant challenge and oversight.

# MAT RESEARCH ROUND-UP: WHAT CAN TRUSTEES LEARN?

Fay Holland, Policy and Information Officer, reveals the findings from the latest NGA governance survey



The subject of MAT effectiveness has been approached from different angles by a range of researchers and stakeholders in education. While only a small amount of the currently available research deals specifically with the how MATs are governed, much of it relates to the key decisions trust boards must make about their organisations.

## What do we know about MAT governance?

This year NGA's school governance survey, carried out jointly with Tes, asked a wider range of questions than previously about the governance of MATs. It was striking that 82% of trustees said that there are plans to expand the number of academies in their MAT (see Gillian Allcroft's article on MAT growth). This may reflect the fact that the majority of MATs responding to the survey, like the majority of MATs nationally, were fairly small.

We found that the majority (84%) have academy committees, sometimes referred to as local governing bodies or similar, for every school and 76% of MAT trustees told us that there are trustees who also sit on academy committees.

Those sitting on academy committees

tended to be fairly content with their organisations, with 85% of those with a view agreeing that the MAT adds value to the work of the academy. The majority had significant responsibilities delegated to them, such as monitoring pupil progress and attainment and engagement with stakeholders. Almost two-thirds had a role in managing the school's budget.

## What are the challenges?

In some senses, it is more straightforward to identify the pitfalls that MATs encounter than the keys to success. When a large group of schools runs into trouble, failings in leadership and financial management are often well publicised.

The latest Ofsted annual report highlighted common problems in the weaker MATs that had been subject to focused inspections in 2016/17: under-developed middle and subject leadership, variable arrangements for professional development and training, inconsistent quality of teaching, reactive leadership and lack of clarity in the governance structure.

Challenges frequently cited by attendees at our Community MATs network include managing communication across the organisation, shifting the mentality from a focus on 'my school' to a 'one organisation' culture, and getting the right balance of power between the trust board, executive leaders and those at school or hub level. While MAT trustee boards need a clear picture of what is going on in their schools, as a group expands, obtaining the right level of information and sharing it effectively becomes more difficult.

## What does the research say?

Establishing an objective measure of MAT effectiveness is difficult as most are fairly new and evolving organisations.

Each organisation will have a unique vision and strategy related to the particular challenges it is addressing for its schools, and therefore no single success criteria will provide a satisfying measure of performance across the board.

The majority of research has focused on the academic performance of pupils in MATs; this is at least in part because it is the most easily measured aspect of performance but also because ensuring good attainment and progress is a goal common to all education providers.

The Sutton Trust have produced a report every year since 2014 on the effectiveness of what it terms "academy chains" (sponsors of multiple schools, which are usually coterminous with MATs) at raising attainment for disadvantaged pupils. The latest Chain Effects publication was based on the 2016 exam results and found that a small number of "chains" are achieving positive outcomes for disadvantaged pupils but a larger group are not improving results and there was significant variation in performance within and between the "chains". While the first chain effects report identified a pattern of steady expansion and a focus on a specific geographical areas as common features of successful sponsors, this year's research does not look at structures or strategies in depth.

In contrast, an analysis for Ambition School Leadership published last November found few clear relationships between the geographic spread of schools within a MAT and outcomes for pupils. The same was true of the mix of phases within a MAT. It found that larger trusts, with 12,000 pupils or more, and trusts that had expanded rapidly were somewhat more likely to be driving improvements in primary schools than others but there was

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little difference when it came to GCSE outcomes.

The impact of trust size has also been looked at by the Department for Education in its MAT performance measures (using data for the 2015/16 academic year). It found that larger MATs were to be found across the performance distribution, suggesting that the size of a MAT is not a barrier to high performance on academic measures.

Achieving financial efficiencies through economies of scale are frequently cited as a driver for schools joining MATs. A study for Stone by the Education Policy Institute compared the spending in MATs to those in single-academy trusts and local authority schools. It found that being part of a MAT is particularly beneficial for primary schools when it comes to reducing expenditure on back office functions. It found that the geographical dispersion of schools was the factor most consistently associated with achieving economies of scale. Size was also a factor, with larger MATs tending to spend less on back office functions but there was variation among MATs with the same number of academies which suggests that some are managing resources more effectively than others. More established groups were also making greater savings but these did not appear to be invested back into spending on teaching staff, which was also lower.

Variation in the performance of MATs was a common thread in all the research, so it is pertinent to consider how this compares to other structures. In July 2016, the Education Policy Institute published a comparison of the performance of MATs and local authorities. While this is in many ways a false equivalence, as the two have markedly different relationships with schools, it demonstrates that there are high and low performers across the sector.

### What can MAT trustees learn?

Overall, the evidence from research and experience alike suggests that the effectiveness of MATs is mixed. Some trust boards are employing highly successful strategies while others are struggling to combat the challenges that come with governing complex groups of schools.

There is little conclusive evidence on the relationship between the size of a MAT and its performance. This underlines the need for MAT trustees to look carefully at the needs of their organisation and whether careful growth will strengthen its offer to pupils. Where MATs have grown too rapidly, this has been associated with cases of declining performance or even collapse.

When it comes to finances, the research suggests that it is possible to realise benefits, such as economies of scale, from being part of a MAT but these do not come automatically. There is a significant amount of work involved in changing the culture so that the group operates genuinely as one organisation. It is also the case that economies of scale are not linear, expanding by one school doesn't necessarily bring cost benefits, indeed it can add to costs because the additional income is exceeded by the need to provide additional support.

Those hoping for a single "best" model for a MAT may be disappointed but the variation in performance, both academic

and financial, underlines the importance of strong trust boards making informed decisions. There is a continuing need for more detailed research into the strategies that MATs employ to raise performance in their schools and the characteristics of strong governance.

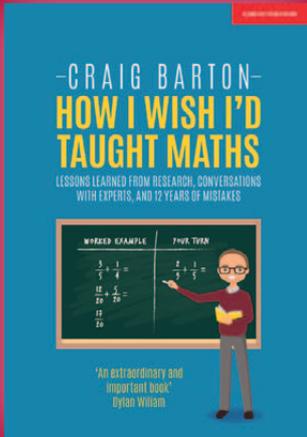
### Take part in research

NGA is currently conducting our own research on the subject, putting together rich case studies of the governance of a range of MATs. The aim is not to comment on so-called "good practice" or judge effectiveness but to uncover the stories that trustees and leaders have to tell which add to the sum of governance knowledge. We intend to include both successes and mistakes, how MATs have learned from these and the strategies employed to overcome obstacles. Keep an eye out for the first case study which will be published in early 2018. If your MAT might be open to participating in this research, email [tom.fellows@nga.org.uk](mailto:tom.fellows@nga.org.uk) for more details and an initial conversation.

**Those sitting on academy committees tended to be fairly content with their organisations, with 85% of those with a view agreeing that the MAT adds value to the work of the academy. The majority had significant responsibilities delegated to them, such as monitoring pupil progress and attainment and engagement with stakeholders.**



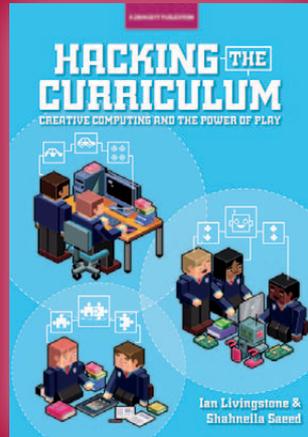
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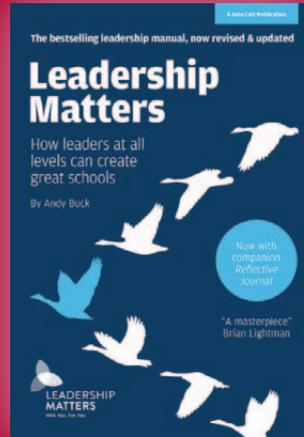
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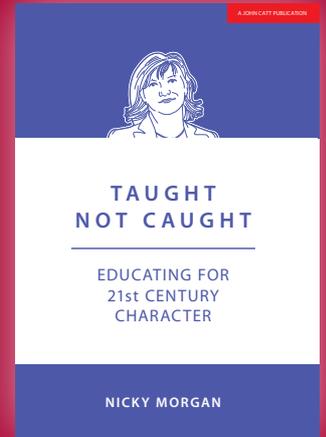
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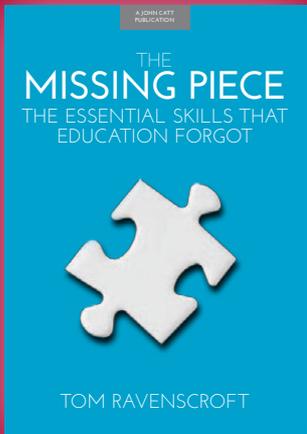
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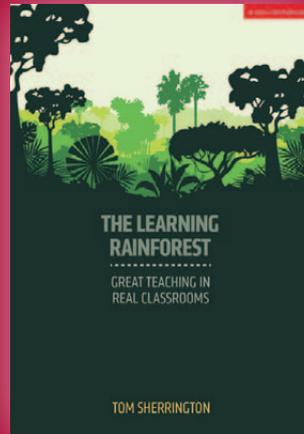
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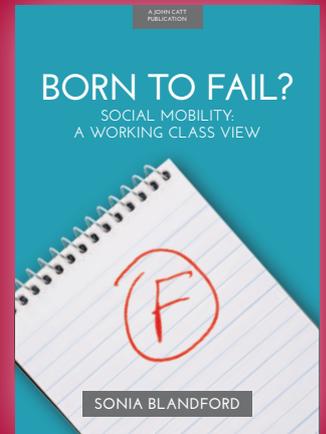
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# REAL LIFE MATHS

Make maths more relevant to the lives of modern students, argues Craig Barton

“Sir, when will I ever use this in real-life?”

If there are ten more painful words to intrude upon the ears of a maths teacher, I am yet to hear them.

When asked how do you make maths more interesting to students, the answer is a simple one: you make it more relevant to their lives, of course. Next question, please.

So, for many, many years, I would spend ages thinking of ways to shoehorn real-life contexts into my classroom. Could I use David Beckham’s last minute free kick against Greece in 2001 to help convey the principles of quadratic equations? Of course! Something happened on the news tonight - let’s find a way to work it into tomorrow’s lesson. And based on the amount of maths topics I managed to extract from the 2012 London Olympics, I am probably due a gold medal myself.

## Little resemblance

The problem was, very rarely did these context lend themselves perfectly to the maths I wanted to teach. Often I would need to present a modified, simplified version that bore little resemblance to the original context.

Little and Jones (2010) summarise the dilemma perfectly: On the one hand, by making a connection between the abstract world of mathematics and everyday contexts, we are reinforcing the utility of mathematics as a language for explaining the patterns and symmetries of the ‘real’ world. On the other hand, if we manipulate and ‘sanitise’ real-world experiences to enable them to be modeled by a preordained set of mathematical techniques, then the result can appear to be artificial and contrived.

Nuthall (2007) puts it more succinctly: Students are constantly on their guard against being conned into being interested.

Indeed, that has been my experience. Students are not stupid - and when I

am standing there claiming that David Beckham considers the properties of the resultant quadratic curve when lining up his free-kick, I am fooling no-one apart from myself.

## Dangerous

Real life contexts can also be dangerous. By attempting to appeal to students’ interests we risk excluding those students who do not share those interests. Hence, the groan that would (quite rightly) resonate around the room, from both girls and boys, when I lazily fell back on yet another football related example.

However, the very opposite can be true. In attempting to appeal to students’ interests we are, by definition, moving the content of the learning into a domain which they have more knowledge of. This sounds like it must be a good thing. However, as I have already indicated, often when using a real-life context we need to modify and simplify it. Hence, our representation of the context may be at odds with that of our more knowledgeable students. Furthermore, they may bring their existing knowledge and experiences to bear in a way that we had not intended.

## Fascinating example

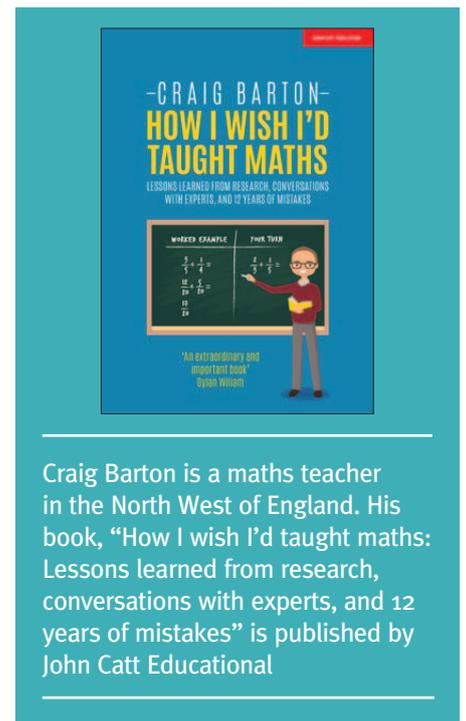
A fascinating example of this is provided by Boaler (1994). The title says it all: When do girls prefer football to fashion? An analysis of female underachievement in relation to ‘realistic’ mathematical contexts. Boaler found that girls may seek to relate incontext problems to their existing knowledge, while boys are often content to tackle the problem in isolation from their previous experience. This results in boys tending to be more successful on questions set in a context than girls. So, by trying to appeal to a subset of students’ special interest in order to motivate and engage them, we could well end up doing them more harm than good.

So now I tend to leave out any phony real-life contexts and just be honest with my students: okay, so you are probably not going to use this exact skill in real life, but that doesn’t mean we cannot find excitement, challenge and enjoyment when studying it.

## Theory

Likewise, I have a theory about the question “when will we ever use this in real-life?”. What I really think students are saying is “I don’t understand this”. This is based solely on my observation that a student who has just got a load of questions correct - regardless of the topic and context - has never once asked me that question. And yet I have heard it many a time following a ropey explanation by me, or an ill-planned activity.

If I teach my students well so that they can achieve success, that rather annoying question seems to disappear.



Craig Barton is a maths teacher in the North West of England. His book, “How I wish I’d taught maths: Lessons learned from research, conversations with experts, and 12 years of mistakes” is published by John Catt Educational

# THE 10 BIGGEST MISTAKES PEOPLE MAKE WITH A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION



Sonia Gill has trained hundreds of school leaders on how to have successful difficult conversations

**D**ifficult conversations are commonplace in the school environment. Here are the 10 biggest mistakes people make and tips to overcome them so you can avoid them.

## 1. Waiting too long to raise the issue

Who likes conflict? Pretty much no-one! So it's no surprise that most of us will avoid having a difficult conversation. But when we wait too long it usually makes the conversation harder.

*Tip: When this happens, be honest and tell them why you didn't raise it*

*before. For example: you didn't want to hurt their feelings; you thought it was a one-off but now a pattern has emerged; you hoped the issue would fix itself but it hasn't.*

## 2. Making excuses for needing to talk

Almost everyone avoids difficult conversations by making excuses. But are your excuses really valid?

*Tip: Discuss these excuses with your team or someone else you trust and hold each other accountable when you might be using them.*

## 3. Thinking you can't raise an issue about behaviour

Talking about performance is one thing, but talking to a member of your team about their behaviour feels far more personal. Yet we do this all the time with our pupils.

*Tip: If you're not ready to start addressing behaviour issues with your staff then ask them for feedback on your behaviour, this helps break down the barrier of discomfort.*

## 4. Not having specific examples

Whatever issue you are tackling, you have to make sure you have examples of it. If you don't, then simply don't have the conversation until you do. If you never have examples then either you're focused on the wrong issue or there is no issue.

*Tip: If you think someone is lazy or rude, or some other behaviour you need to address, work out what makes you think this and find three really good examples that will illustrate this to the other person.*

## 5. Not being clear on the issue

It's important that we're clear in our own mind what the issue is. If we're not clear,

how can we expect the other person to be? It's unfair on the other person who is left guessing, possibly incorrectly.

*Tip: Clarity is king. Sound out a colleague to check if the issue is clear to them.*

## 6. Not telling people what outcome you want

This relates to #5 in that we need to tell people what we want to happen using specific language and examples.

*Tip: When facing a difficult conversation, try to answer this question: If they were to make the change you wanted tomorrow, what would be different? Describe this in detail.*

## 7. Thinking you know the best solution

Most of us like to solve problems by offering solutions, we want to help. But the problem is we don't know all of the reasons behind the issue, so there's a good chance our solution won't solve the problem in a way that works for the other person.

*Tip: If you think you have a solution, try to wait until the other person has shared their thoughts on solving the issue before offering your suggestion. If you find this hard (lots of people do), try writing it on a piece of paper to help you manage your desire to tell them. It sounds simple but it works.*

## 8. Not thinking about how you deliver the message

Most people don't think about their non-verbal communication. Body language sends powerful messages and can be the difference between a bad difficult conversation and a successful one.

*Tip: Try mirroring body language, for example copy how the other person*



sits. This simple technique creates a rapport to help you both relax and engage better.

### 9. Worrying about damaging a relationship

Will critical feedback break a relationship? Actually, these conversations often make relationships stronger as you make challenge and feedback acceptable.

*Tip: You can explain your concern about damaging your relationship and why this tough conversation is so important; this will help you both have a better perspective.*

### 10. Discussing the important stuff with the wrong people

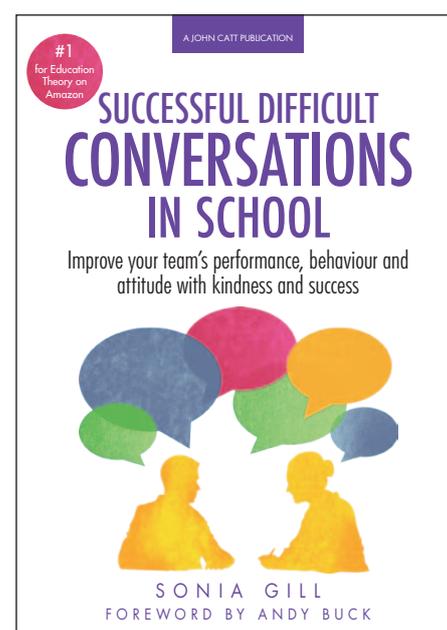
We've all had a tough conversation and not said something on our mind in the moment. Instead we fume to a friend later!

Sadly this doesn't move things forward. *Tip: Speak the unspoken. If you feel something during a conversation, simply say so. For instance, 'I feel upset at what you have said and I would like to explain why...' Or if the other person looks upset, 'Your face has dropped, will you tell me how you're feeling?'*

You need to talk openly with the person in the moment, not with others later.

I hope these tips help you have more successful difficult conversations.

Successful difficult conversations in schools was published by John Catt Educational on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2018  
[ukheadsupt.com/sdcis](http://ukheadsupt.com/sdcis)



# ESTATE STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING BETTER ACADEMIES FOR THE FUTURE

David Smith, CEO Bellrock

**B**eing part of the management team for an Academy or a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) is so much more than teaching.

For the average size MAT the income could be as much as £100m per year. Compare that to the size of a £100m business and it gives everyone an idea of the magnitude and what MATs have to manage. Understanding finance and HR are two of the key skills that many leaders now need, along with real estate and facilities management. The biggest assets that any school has are the buildings and the land. For many how to realise value from that asset and align it to the school's mission is difficult to visualise. But creating educational improvement from the built environment is not a pipe dream.

There are certainly operational aspects such as meeting the compliance and regulatory requirements for health and safety, and end customer expectations for education standards and results to consider. These all have to be funded, along with adapting the school environment to an evolving market, be that in terms of demographic or changing curriculum.

No matter how small the academy, a simple estate strategy review cycle is essential. This includes assessing the existing physical condition and space utilisation and overlaying that with the projected changes that will require new service specification requirements. Some of these changes may deliver better efficiencies particularly for energy consumption. For example changing lighting to LEDs may be an initial capital cost that is paid back in energy savings. The estates' strategy document becomes the plan that highlights the priorities for change, along with the budget and funding options.

## The estates strategy framework

The estates strategy is a continuous cycle that is regularly reviewed and altered to reflect changing requirements. It contains five key stages, discovery (where are we now), assessment (where do we want to be), planning (how do we get there), implementation (delivery) and control (review).

## Where to start?

Assessing the condition of the estate is a broad exercise that includes reviewing the valuations, leases of the land and the age of the buildings. A five facet appraisal is conducted including how suitable the spaces are for the curriculum. Teaching methods may have changed, as well as a shifting emphasis on

different subjects and the introduction of new subjects from when the school was designed. A review of how the space is being used can quickly identify under-utilised areas along with spaces that are no longer fit for purpose. This can create tactical opportunities to reconfigure within the existing footprint, for example changing an office in to a study room.

Other factors that are considered include an assessment of the fire and health and safety requirements, and environmental management. Other aspects that are included in this assessment are the assets such as the boiler and alarm systems, as well as the condition of the superstructure (roof, external walls and windows), the internal finishes and external parts of the site such as paths and playgrounds.

Capturing the data during this process in a consistent manner so that it can be accessed and analysed effectively is a critical aspect for building a working document to support the academy's goals. At the end of this process different life-cycle profiles are created that estimate where budgets should be allocated in the future for maintenance or replacement.

## Forecasting changes

Preparing for change is fundamental. Comparing current numbers on roll against capacity and predictions for future Year Seven intakes helps to build a picture of how the spaces could perform in the future.

These capacity calculations should be considered alongside any new subjects that the school may wish to introduce, as well as existing curriculum subjects where the focus may change. Of course certain subjects particularly sport or sciences have very particular requirements that will need to be factored in to the overall plan.

The results of the survey will demonstrate how the spaces are being utilised and the availability categorised by the types of spaces that currently exist, for example ICT suites, art studios, group work rooms or music rooms. This type of data helps to inform the future estates plan. In particular whether consideration should be given to capital works projects.

A recent project undertaken by the Bellrock Group merged two undersubscribed secondary schools that were constructed in the 1960s into a modern purpose built facility on part of one of the schools sites. The new school has, amongst other facilities, a fully equipped gymnasium and an all-weather play and sports area. The project was fully funded by the development of a multi-storey residential development on the vacant land.

Although this is a specific case it does illustrate the opportunities that exist to transform a school environment with a carefully constructed estates strategy, releasing spare capacity for redevelopment and reinvestment.

### Taking facilities management into account

Developing and adapting facilities management and property services to ensure a safe and secure environment is an essential component of an estates strategy. Using a mix of local, central and third party resources is a means of minimising risk and managing costs. For some MATs with a critical mass it makes sense to centralise aspects such as procurement, leaving the local academies to manage on site activities such as cleaning and site management.

Having robust key performance indicators (KPIs) for assessing suppliers ensures not only an audit for tracking legal compliance but good budgetary control. This is particularly important because as the academy estate ages, the on-site team are having to work harder not only to provide “business as usual” services and manage on-site teams, but also source and manage specialist external contractor services.

### Allocating spend

The eligibility for school condition allocation (SCA) from the Education Funding Agency (EFA) can help Academies boost their budgets. In the case of MAT’s, there is a requirement to use the funding to ensure that academies with the greatest needs are prioritised. Allocations are derived from information gathered by the EFA’s Property Data Survey Programme (PDSP). These PDSPs assessed how closely the building condition per pupil matches the average and also compares it to other MATs. The results are categorised to assess the amount that would be allocated on a fixed term of more than a year to enable an MAT to undertake a long-term view of condition improvement.

The terms and conditions of SCA funding have recently changed and now funding does not have to be spent within the allocated funding year enabling MATs to save funding for larger capital projects. Precise planning is essential, not only to maximize the budget but as this, alongside details of key priorities, are requirements for the funding allocation.

Other funding options are now available to Academies and MAT through Salix Energy Efficiency Fund (SEEF). The fund is for energy efficiency projects that require capital to invest in order to realise savings, but that may not meet the Condition Improvement Fund’s (CIF) condition need criteria.

Projects such as lighting or heating controls, LED lighting, insulation or boiler and heating system upgrades may be suitable.

The estates strategy plays a crucial role in contributing to the overall ambitions of any strategic plan and objectives. It will build on what has been achieved so far by the Executive Team, helping them to gain more control and improved value for the investments made to the estate portfolio. Any on-going rationalisation or enhancement can contribute, as a result, to the overall financial and educational performance of the MAT or academy.



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# THE NEXT GENERATION OF SCHOOL APPS

92% of UK adults aged 25 to 44 own a smartphone and are used to having information at their fingertips.

Schools that embrace this trend have more engaged parents and higher performing students but, there is a huge difference between having an app and having a good app. The new generation of school apps are truly school gateways and are up to the task, whatever that may be.

## What do parents want from a school gateway?

With such a wide range of information to get to parents, schools have adopted several gateways to achieve this. Parents love having the information but have become frustrated and confused about which gateway to use and are pushing schools to provide everything in a single school app. They also want the ability to not only view, but respond to the information given about their child.

Having several systems is a headache for all involved. The new generation

of school gateways focus on all-in-one solutions and are ever evolving. For example, Schoolcomms offers the usual text and email communication, but also offers reporting, achievement and behaviours, attendance management, online payments and an online facility for booking and managing clubs - to mention a few key areas.

We spoke to Mark Haddleton (below left), ICT Coordinator and Support Manager at St Thomas à Becket School in Wakefield, to get his view on how using a system like Schoolcomms has revolutionised the way they communicate with parents:

“The all-in-one School Gateway app eliminates the need for separate systems for parents to have to remember passwords for; every bit of the information they need is there on their phone in one place.”

Parents want to be able to access information at a time to suit them. 66% of parents would rather pay via mobile phone and 36% of school gateway payments are made between 7pm and 10pm on a Sunday - not even during the school week. Parents are looking for performance and reliability and they are more likely to sign up to an app they value.

## What do you want from your school gateway?

Identifying what your school needs from their school gateway is the easy part, implementing that change can be more difficult. Nearly all schools have a text and email service and a good majority also already have online payments. The key element that schools are looking for is the part that engages parents with their child's learning and this is where most gateways are sadly lacking. Find one that

caters for that and they will undoubtedly cater for everything else. Look for packages that allow you to add on functionality at your own pace. That way if you've taken an engagement package to start with, you can add on a cashless package, then a communication package etc as your current contracts expire, helping you to bring everything into one school gateway, bit by bit.

A school gateway is an investment, one that pays dividends in pupil performance and long-term savings as Mark Haddleton found: “One of the best things is that here at St Thomas à Becket we have managed to recover the cost of using Schoolcomms and more; I have started to think of it as free, because as well as saving on costly text messaging to parents, (all app messages and longer emails don't cost anything), we also managed to identify many extra Pupil Premium qualifying families through parents taking the in-app test, which has brought quite a sum of money into school to provide extra facilities.”

Your parents are used to having the world in their pockets and their children's school is an important part of their world. By investing in technology that can perform to the standard that your parents expect you are giving them the tools to be fully engaged in school activity and their child's learning. Simply having an app and ticking the box is not enough. The new generation of school gateways are here, with more functionality for your staff and your parents. And if knowledge is power, then a good school gateway doesn't just engage parents, it empowers them.

To find out more about Schoolcomms call 03333327147 or visit [schoolcomms.com](http://schoolcomms.com)



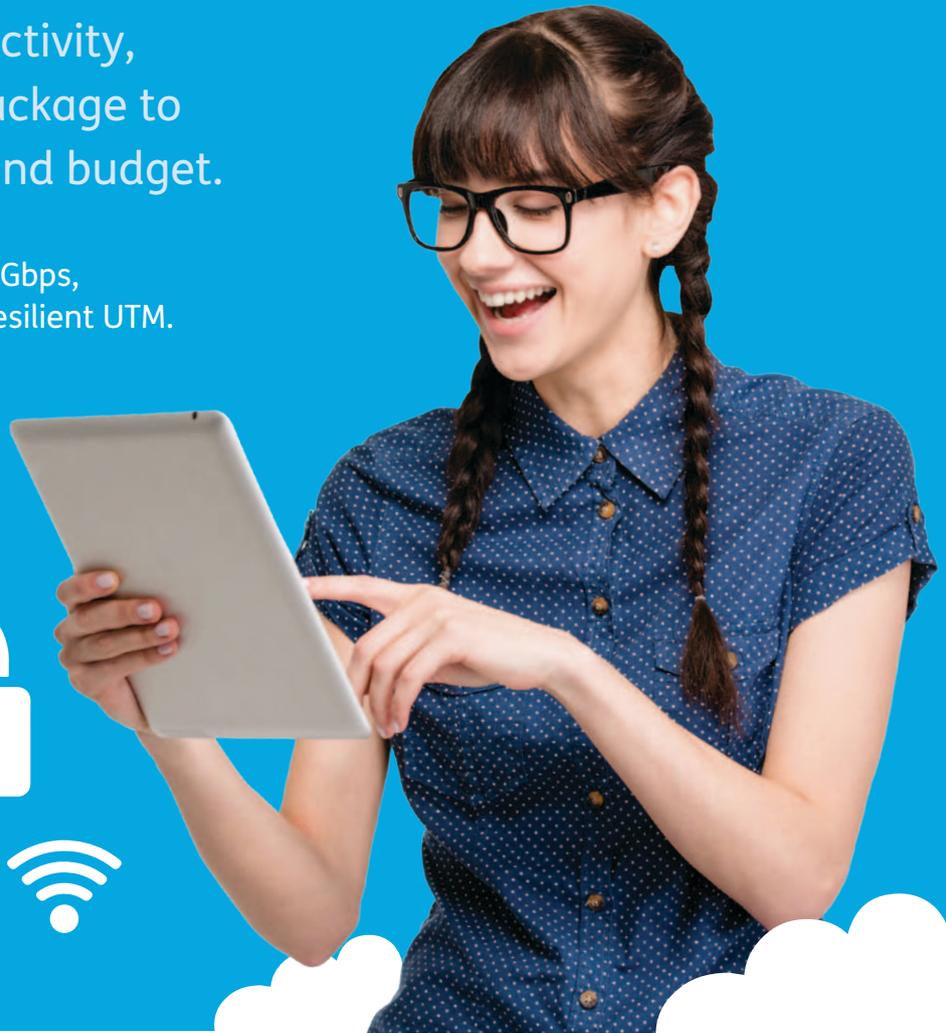


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# BUYING DONCASTER: THE CREATION AND FUTURE OF A TRADED SERVICES BRAND

Rebecca Rowbottom, Market Development Officer for Buy Doncaster, on the overhaul of Doncaster's traded services in the last 12 months

The Doncaster Council traded services offer has undergone a vast transformation in the last 12 months. The Buy Doncaster team was formed in January 2017 as a result of feedback from the borough's Schools and Academies that the previous traded services offer was disjointed and inconsistent in approach. The Traded Service teams were completely re-designed and re-branded; leading to the creation of 'Buy Doncaster'.

The aim was to completely change the perception of traded services and create a more streamline, efficient offer from Doncaster Council; An offer which provides high quality, value for money services to over 500 different sites including over 60 academies. We constantly work with our customers to improve the service and promote a 'no wrong door' approach, meaning that every team member can confidently advertise and cross-sell every traded service within Doncaster Council, giving our customers a far more hassle-free experience. The changes have been so successful we are now looking to trade with Academies outside of Doncaster, offering new customers exactly the same level of service.

Our new approach starts with regular meetings as a larger team, allowing every service an opportunity to present information about their area; this means the knowledge across the Buy Doncaster team is constantly growing. We also work in partnership to develop consistent and streamlined packaging across all of our traded services. Our annual packages use a levelled approach, with Level 1 being the

standard package and higher numbered packages including more add-on elements. A number of services also offer 'pay-as-you-use services', which customers can purchase at any point throughout the year.

We developed the 2017/18 brochure in partnership with all of our services, ensuring that customers could view everything in one place, adhere to one set of Terms and Conditions and have one central contact for any queries. One school commented that "It's always good to see some re-branding as it shows that people are looking at ways to improve service to schools".

We were invited to advertise our services at the Partners in Learning first 'Regional School Improvement and Learning Innovation Show' in January 2017; working together as the Buy Doncaster Team with a member of every single traded service present, the day was a real success. We were able to drum up a lot of interest, with our Attendance and Pupil Welfare Service mascots 'Sam and Sammie' catching the eye of every child at the event and the alchemy workshop put on by the Museum Education Service bringing a real sense excitement and awe. Our marketing team also ensured that every delegate attending the event had all their queries answered and left with a Buy Doncaster carrier bag.

Since June 2017 the Buy Doncaster Team has grown in size from 38 Traded Services in 2017/18 financial year to 54 for the 2018/19 financial year, offering a much more comprehensive selection of services and training to Schools, Academies, Nurseries, Child-minders and

a number of other Partnership Agencies.

In September 2017 Buy Doncaster Online went live to all Schools and Academies within Doncaster. Buy Doncaster Online is a website which enables our customers to view and purchase our services and training online. It is also a platform through which our traded services can share news and resources with customers plus send their own messages and updates. Schools and Academies have commented that the website acts as a great 'one stop shop' for all their traded services needs and is much more convenient than the previous systems and processes.

Looking ahead to the future, we will be releasing our new service offer for the 2018/19 financial year at the end of January 2018. We are now a paperless service, with a digital brochure being produced now that the Buy Doncaster online platform is in place. With this in mind, we have invested the money we would typically spend on printing to get engaging photographs taken of each of our traded service teams doing what they do best; creating a real, engaging alternative to stock photos featuring the people working each day in their specialist service.

Over the past 12 months, I believe the changes we've made have significantly improved the service we deliver to customers and with further developments to come, 2018 definitely looks bright for Buy Doncaster.

Come and visit us at:  
<http://buy.doncaster.gov.uk> or  
email: [buy@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:buy@doncaster.gov.uk).

# EMBRACING GDPR AND THE CLOUD

Groupcall's Tim Verlander explains why it is important for schools to embrace the Cloud

**M**ost articles about Cloud Computing in education start off talking about funding and reducing the cost of service delivery, and there is a lot to talk about here for both schools and Multi-Academy Trusts .

However, there is another strong business driver towards embracing cloud computing that you should be thinking about as an IT professional in your school or trust.

## What is 'cloud computing'?

The 'cloud' is a term used for servers and services held off-site which can be accessed remotely via any compatible device connected to the Internet. This means that data isn't stored on site and everything is managed externally. It replaces dusty overheating server rooms, iffy padlocks and aircon failures, and promises no need to buzz support technicians every time something goes wrong with a hard disk. The cloud services are all accessed through the web and mobile apps.

## Why is 'cloud computing' important now?

The security and reliability of cloud services have improved in recent years and the lesser technical requirements to using them mean that the barriers to getting started are much lower too, it's much easier now to sign up and use cloud-based services than even five years ago. School broadband services are also improving in quality and reliability, meaning cloud services in teaching as well as administration are far more viable.

For suppliers, the landscape has

improved too. Developers can respond to customer requirements quickly and deploy multiple service updates in a single day, removing the need to visit each site to apply updates. Software quality is improved as a result and suppliers benefit from economies of scale, which drive the cost of service delivery down, enabling free access for education to services like Google G-Suite and Microsoft Office 365. Groupcall provide our cloud services using Microsoft's Azure Cloud Services, the only public cloud platform in the UK rated G-Cloud OFFICIAL .

The evolution of cloud computing over the past decade has seen the introduction of powerful tools for monitoring and improving pupil attainment and attendance, cloud services to support school administration and cut operating costs, and many exciting and innovative services that most of us haven't even thought about yet.

## So, why is it important to embrace cloud services?

Recently it was revealed that NHS workers routinely use the WhatsApp messaging service to communicate anonymous patient information quickly between each other rather than using 'archaic' NHS systems .

This phenomenon is called 'Shadow IT', where external IT services are used in your organisation without the knowledge or support of your centralised IT function. These are often free services that might be used by teaching staff or managers to work around the shortcomings of the official services provided. Examples for schools might include document sharing

services like DropBox, survey tools like SurveyMonkey, and free learning resources.

Some of these services operate outside of the European data border. Imagine the personal data that could be uploaded to these services – without central IT functions even knowing – and how the lifecycle of that data and administrative access to it would be left dangling if a staff member left, maybe even the service subscription itself!

With GDPR replacing existing data protection legislation in May 2018, the onus on your school or Trust to control and track the movement of personal data is vastly increased, and new financial penalties encourage a proactive approach. While the potential fines are sizeable, being able to demonstrate good practice shows that your organisation is in control and will be considered favourably.

Where the centralised IT services in your school can provide secure and simple managed access to 'best of breed' cloud services, empowering your staff and students with easy access to productive technology, the chances of personal data sneaking around via CSV files in the shadows reduces significantly. Having tools that make it easy to safely enable data sharing helps your organisation demonstrate governance and controls around personal data. As evidence shows, if you don't empower people then you risk it happening without you!

## How can Groupcall help?

Groupcall is ISO 27001 accredited and is taking an active lead to help the education sector be fully GDPR compliant by



early 2018. Within the Groupcall suite of products, our Xporter on Demand service already provides safe GDPR aligned data sharing. Our cloud-native IDaaS automated identity management helps manage user life cycle and access to personal data by students, parents and staff. Messenger and our Xpressions app help provide audited communications to parents, and our Emerge app and web portal provide safe and secure access to student MIS data wherever your work takes you.

Groupcall helps your technical compliance with GDPR by not only securely integrating with leading cloud services like Microsoft Office 365 and Google G-Suite, but also with almost 100 leading education partners

including CPOMS, MyConcern, ShowMyHomework and many more. Using Xporter and Xporter on Demand to integrate the products in your school or trust ensures that there are audits and controls in place and guarantees data flows to the right places and is only accessible by those who should be accessing it.

However, compliance is not just technical. Groupcall have partnered with GDPR in Schools to provide an all-in-one compliance monitoring solution that encompasses data movement, training records, incident management, auditing and more.

To find out more about how Groupcall can help your school or MAT achieve compliance, visit [www.groupcall.com](http://www.groupcall.com).

Tim joined Groupcall in 2010 and spent 5 years prior to that at Warwickshire County Council architecting and implementing school-facing services. Specialising in areas including identity management, designing for the Cloud and mobile, web services, solution architecture, practical software development, data and Internet security, and teaching exciting ICT with gifted and talented students. Tim sat as an active co-chair of Systems Interoperability Framework (SIF) Association UK until April 2015.

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# NETWORK SECURITY, THE GDPR AND HOW TO PRIVATELY CONNECT MULTIPLE SCHOOL SITES

Jo Malone urges schools not to bury their heads in the sand in the light of new cyber security threats

Since the Wannacry and Petya Ransomware attacks on the NHS and Westminster last summer, and the introduction of the new General Data Protection Requirement (GDPR) in May, network managers and head teachers will understandably be reviewing their network security. Avoiding a disastrous and disruptive network attack will be one thing; (not worth contemplating) avoiding a GDPR potential fine of €20M or 4% of your revenue, whichever is the greater, for a security breach or lack of GDPR compliance is another.

From May 25th GDPR replaces the current Data Protection Act. That means big changes for schools in the way they process and protect staff and pupil personal data. Most schools should be well underway with their compliance plans by now. If you're not, you have no time to waste. David Tindall of Schools Broadband advises: "You will also need to consider your network security. At the very least network managers should be looking at an integrated Unified Threat Management (UTM) system to fend off the growing avalanche of Advanced Persistent Threats and data breaches." Given this increase in breaches, it's worth asking your broadband provider just how robust their firewalls and security are. Gartner, the world's leading research and advisory company, shows network security solutions offered by some well-known broadband providers to schools, don't feature on their firewall or Unified Threat Management (UTM)



capability charts. Somewhat worrying if your security set-up falls into that camp. Review your security now, and if it's not up to the job, change it. Don't leave it until it's too late.

Choose an ISP who can offer a full suite of UTM applications and who can take care of your end-point security and perimeter protection. Some ISPs such as Schools Broadband can also offer something called Data Leak Prevention (DLP). This is a feature that enables data types and files to be tagged, meaning if anyone

accidentally or maliciously tries to send information externally, the file is blocked. This will be a big step towards fulfilling the security element of GDPR criteria.

## Security for Multi Academy Trusts

If you're responsible for looking after multiple schools within an Academy Trust, a Managed Wide Area Network or WAN, allows trusts to centralise their services using high speed high capacity, private connectivity.

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Schools Broadband's David Tindall explains the benefits of a Managed WAN: "To manage multiple servers on single sites is totally inefficient, not to mention a logistical nightmare. A Managed WAN privately connects multiple school sites all on the same network. Best described as an extended Local Area Network, you can manage networks, servers and devices across multiple schools from one central point. It makes managing estates so much easier and provides a significant reduction in time and cost."

The Schools Broadband Managed WAN service was awarded the UK's Best Security ISP by the Internet Service Providers Association. David Tindall added: "Our award-winning security is central to every network we provide. We work in partnership with Fortinet and our hosted security provides affordable, high grade solutions that wouldn't otherwise be in financial reach of schools and Trusts. Because our service is hosted, network managers can easily add schools into the WAN, taking advantage of the centralised security and virtualised content filtering. As schools move to Multi Academy

Trusts, they need to share resource and reduce management costs. If existing or multiple schools already use our virtualised firewall and filtering service, this can easily be moved to a MAT dedicated High Availability, virtualised firewall cluster, meaning many schools can have a single pain of glass view for all their security and filtering needs. The Managed WAN reduces the need to have multiple firewalls across estate sites, and the requirement to manage multiple service contracts. One simple managed services contract, with the ability to increase capacity using virtualised large-scale hardware, rather than dedicated small units, reduces costs significantly. As well as providing critical security, a Managed WAN allows schools to use IT in the way they want to, allowing Trusts to get the most out of their IT investments and cloud based services. For example, a Microsoft express route provides a direct connection to Microsoft but behaves as a simple extension to the Managed WAN." Schools Broadband protects and reports on over 1 million staff and pupils at UK educational establishments and hosts 80

schools as their largest Managed WAN client using this method. Their solution is flexible, allowing you to add more power whenever it is needed, without the need to add more hardware. Schools Broadband say they are enablers of IT and make it their job to find individual solutions for individual Academies and Trusts. They are leaders in the field of pioneering technology for education, providing DfE compliant web filtering, award winning security and money saving telephony. Their motto is to "keep it safe and keep it secure."

For more information on the General Data Protection Requirement visit: [www.schoolsbroadband.co.uk/assets/GDPR-Booklet.pdf](http://www.schoolsbroadband.co.uk/assets/GDPR-Booklet.pdf)  
For more information about Network Security and Managed WANs visit [www.schoolsbroadband.co.uk/vpls-services](http://www.schoolsbroadband.co.uk/vpls-services)

# SCHOOLS AND THE APPRENTICESHIP LEVY

John Deaville of Key Schools Academy discusses the impact

**T**he Apprenticeship Levy was introduced in April 2017, and is a 0.5% payroll tax to fund apprenticeship training, paid by any organisation with a payroll bill of more than £3 Million per annum. So does this mean that the majority of schools will be unaffected? No, in fact ALL schools will be affected by the Apprenticeship Levy; how they will be affected depends on their size and status.

## Size and Scale

For those schools who are Grant maintained, the Levy will be paid by the Local Authority, and therefore, as every Local Authority has a payroll bill of over £3M p.a., the Levy will be another tax deduction from the school payroll costs. So there will be a direct financial hit on every school that is Grant Maintained. Most Local Authorities are starting to plan how they can get some value from the Apprenticeship Levy that they will pay, many will turn to schools, who for many Authorities are a major part of the headcount and payroll.

It's a similar story for Multi Academy Trusts, the majority of whom will have a combined payroll bill of more than £3M per annum. MATs will be assessed as a single entity for the Levy, and hence even though individual schools may have a payroll below £3M, the overall MAT will be subject to the Apprenticeship Levy and the 0.5% tax deducted. So many MATs are busy planning how they can use the Levy to get maximum value and return in investment.

Small MATs or single Academy Schools (along with Free & Independent Schools) may not pay the Levy if they are below the £3M payroll bill. However, the introduction of the Apprenticeship

Levy is being accompanied by a new Apprenticeship funding model for smaller organisations, such as these schools. Under present funding arrangement most apprenticeship training, regardless of learners age or whether the learner is a new apprentice of staff or existing member of staff, is free of charge for the school. From April 2017 these schools will need to "co-invest", or in other words "pay" for a proportion of the apprenticeship training; this is currently proposed to be a 10% payment; which whilst not a huge contribution; moving from free to any payment will be troublesome for already stretched school budgets.

The only employers who will not have to either pay the Levy or co-invest in Apprenticeship training costs; are employers employing a new 16-18-year-old apprentice with less than 50 employees. So some small schools, probably rural primary schools may still get free apprenticeship training. There are changes even for these schools however. Under present arrangements these schools can often claim a £1,500 Grant from the Government; this will be replaced by a £1,000 contribution from April 2017.

## Enterprise Bill – a double “whammy”

There is another piece of legislation that is coming into force in April 2017 called the Enterprise Bill; this a double “whammy” for many schools. The Enterprise Bill contains new requirements for all public sector employers; including schools of all types, to employ a minimum of 2.3% of apprentices as part of their staffing establishment. The only exceptions will be schools with less than 250 employees; but again for grant maintained and academy

groups it is the bigger entity that will be used to assess whether you are in scope, so only independent or academy schools with less than 250 staff will be exempt. Organisations who do not comply with this regulation will be named and shamed and be required to submit a plan to bring their organisation up to the required levels.

## So what should schools do?

There are many misconceptions regarding apprenticeships. Long gone are the days when apprenticeships were solely for young people learning craft trades. Apprenticeships are now increasingly for white collar occupations; increasingly available at higher levels and even to degree and professional status levels: did you know for example you can become a qualified lawyer through an apprenticeship pathway? Indeed, there is work underway for an apprenticeship routeway to become a QTS!

Apprenticeship training is also no longer the sole domain for young people placed into new apprenticeship roles; apprenticeship training is available for existing staff, providing that they are in need of new skills and training. The majority of apprenticeship growth, and the government need 30% growth to hit their manifesto pledge of 3 Million apprenticeships, will come from existing staff rather than new, young apprenticeships. There are simply not enough young people to provide for such growth; and for many schools employing 16-18 year-olds is not appropriate.

As mentioned earlier there is work underway for an apprenticeship pathway through the QTS, although this is likely to be 2-3 years in development. There is however no shortage of other apprenticeship programmes that school



based staff can undertake. The most common is the Supporting Teaching and Learning qualification for Teaching Assistants; with over 4,000 learners per annum being trained in school each year. More specialist frameworks are available in PE (Activity Leadership), Science (Science Technician), IT (ICT Technician) and Library (Librarian). A range of business support apprenticeship programmes are also available; the most popular being Business Administration and Customer Service courses, with Team Leader and HR and Accounting apprenticeships also becoming popular, particularly for new Academies who find skills gaps in these areas when newly formed. Catering, Play-Work and Facilities Management are other apprenticeships that school based staff can undertake.

Most of the programmes currently on offer are at Level 2 and Level 3, however there are some exciting developments of higher level programmes. The development of a pathway towards QTS

will clearly necessitate the introduction of new apprenticeship programmes from Level 4 to Level 7 in “teaching”; but more and more subject areas are seeing the introduction of higher level qualifications. Business Administration and Facilities Management both now have a Level 4 apprenticeship offer, and many of the new apprenticeship standards being developed are higher level. The most popular higher level apprenticeships are in Leadership and Management; with programmes from Level 3 through to the Chartered Management Apprenticeship Degree. Changes to the funding rules being introduced alongside the Levy in April mean that staff with existing degrees are for the first time eligible to undertake these apprenticeship programmes. This could be a fantastic opportunity for schools; with teaching staff newly promoted into management positions being eligible for apprenticeship training in management.

### The way forward

Using apprenticeship training to simply spend the Levy tax, or to hit a Government target, is not the way forward. Schools should review their staffing needs; both current and future, and identify areas where apprenticeship training could help improve skills and performance of existing staff; or help succession plan for future requirements. Apprenticeships, when well planned and delivered, can provide an excellent career pathway for staff in schools; identifying and planning successful careers that can benefit the employee and the school; and most importantly in the long term, the pupils!

For more information, contact  
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# THE (MUCH DREADED) STUDENT INTERVIEW PANEL

Dan Roberts, Headteacher of Devenport High School for Boys in Plymouth, believes students need to be given opportunities to empower themselves. In this extract from his new book *Empowering Generation Z*, he gives readers tips for surviving a ‘student interview teaching episode’

**L**ove them or hate them, these days a student interview panel will often play a part in appointing a new member of staff to a school or even be part of an internal recruitment process.

In some schools, this will be one of the roles of the student council committee. I know many teachers who dislike this idea. However, for myself it has been the one panel on the merry-go-round of panels during an interview day that I have always enjoyed, valued and been confident about, often providing an occasional light-hearted moment in what can often be a stressful day.

Why shouldn't schools use a student interview panel? In my opinion, young people can provide an alternative view, show great insight and, more often than not, hit the nail on the head with selecting the winning candidate (though, not always).

## **‘Interview teaching episodes’**

If you have made it through the shortlist to the interview day, or several days of interviews, depending on the role you have applied for, then you will be subjected to teaching a lesson or a ‘teaching episode’ – like a normal lesson but with a completely unrealistic short duration.

For a senior teaching position, it can be more than a one-day interview process and nowadays, some schools like to shadow you in your current school and,

perhaps, watch you teach a lesson there. Obviously this is more realistic than arriving at a new school to teach a group of students you don't know for just 20 minutes (often, you may also be expected to teach the same lesson that two other candidates have already taught before you).

In my opinion, it is essential to see your school's potential new teachers in front of a class – even if it is in slightly different circumstances than normal as you can take this into account while observing them. It is really important, as it gives you a valuable insight into the way they communicate and interact with young people.

One of the reasons given for not having candidates complete an interview lesson in a short, one-off lesson than they do day in, day out. I do accept this; however, part of teaching is that it is a performance and if you observe with a measured eye, then I think it is extremely useful.

In any case, you would obviously triangulate your observation with the student interview panel and the many other merry-go-round panels (oh, and there are always the references too).

Remember that this newly appointed teacher will spend most of their time teaching at your school, even perhaps the rest of their career. Therefore, I believe that they need to teach at interview.

If you have to perform a ‘teaching

episode’ at an interview, then it is likely that the school will discuss this with the students on the so-called ‘receiving end’ and will establish how was it for them. Just like in the student panel interviews, the student feedback will play a part in the final result, so it is an important part of the recruitment process.

The important thing is for the students to like and respect you, which is ultimately challenging in just 20 minutes. However, young people are experienced customers when it comes to being taught; they have been watching teachers for five hours a day for many years. They will reflect on your teaching episode and will assess whether they would like to be taught by you in the next academic year, if you were to be appointed.

In my experience of recruiting, they provide valuable insight and often complement your own observations.

If you are heading off to complete a teaching episode soon, then best of luck to you. Hopefully some of the tips below will help:

## **The ‘dos and don'ts’ of performing an ‘interview teaching episode’**

### **Do...**

- Ask for information about the class prior to the interview.
- Provide lesson plans or a copy of any other resources to those observing

you (it doesn't need to be in the school format or any special format, just do something that works for you and that you use regularly).

- Create name badges or stickers so you can use their names during the lesson.
- Set homework or share what you would have set if it were a normal lesson (research this to be in line with the school's policy – this should be on the website).
- Praise students when and where you can.
- Be confident in your ability as a teacher – you do the job day in, day out and probably very successfully. Try to act like you would in your own classroom; for example, be prepared to expand or be flexible with your lesson plan like you would normally. If it isn't working you can discuss this later at interview, but at the least it shows you are a competent and reflective practitioner.

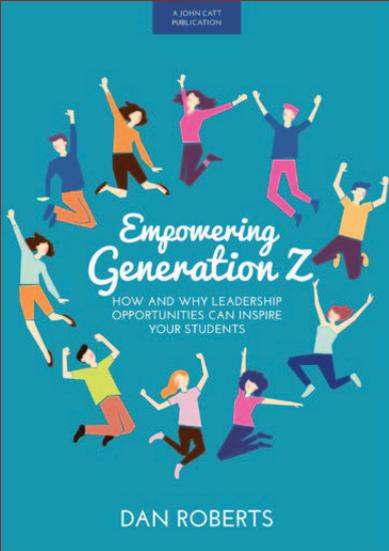
**Don't...**

- Try to recreate one of your normal lessons with six different parts to it. If it is a reduced time, for example, a 20 minute lesson, it just won't work.
- Make the class complete three different worksheets within the timeframe, with little else. (Obviously I am not endorsing or criticising any particular teaching method. However, think about these two questions: will the students enjoy this lesson? Will they learn from this?)

- Ignore any poor behaviour or poor attitudes. (Spending a short time researching the schools Behaviour for Learning policy will help you reinforce this – you can even state this to the students you are teaching, as a reminder.)
- Take answers to any questions that you ask from the same eager student, who is constantly putting their hand up or shouting out the answers, because it is the easiest thing to do

and allows you to keep to your strict, 20 minute schedule.

- Rely on a wonderful, fully-animated PowerPoint that you have spent all night working on, only to find that, for some reason, no matter what you do, it won't play properly on the classroom computer! Always have a couple of back-ups that you can pull out of the bag and remain calm, like a seasoned professional.



*Empowering Generation Z: How and why leadership opportunities can inspire your students*, by Dan Roberts, is published by John Catt Educational.

Dan Roberts has been a regular keynote speaker for the last 10 years at national and international conferences and regularly contributes to media publications and educational research journals.

He has been the Headteacher of Devonport High School for Boys, an 11-18 academy in Plymouth since 2015.

Dan is a keen advocate of technology, he has been blogging for many years about teaching and learning, technology and leadership (<http://www.danjjroberts.co.uk/>) and you can connect with him on twitter at @danjjroberts.

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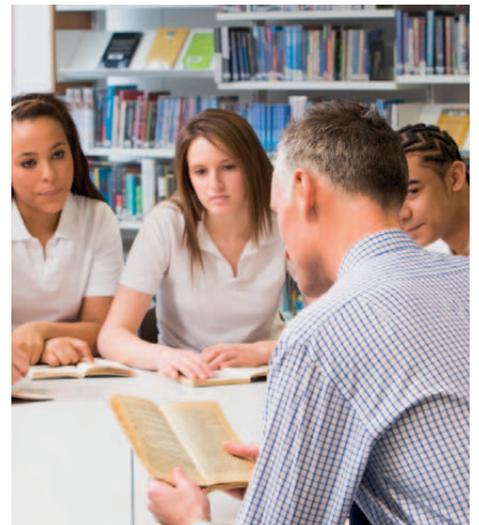
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