



# Twenty-one Questions for Multi-academy Trusts

## Key questions a MAT board should ask itself

Three years ago we set out to encourage school governors to challenge themselves as the best governing boards already did, and in January 2015 the APPG published its second edition of the widely used 'Twenty questions every governing board should ask itself'. At the same time it was agreed that there needed to be a separate dedicated set of questions aimed at Multi-academy Trusts (MATs).

The main difference is the addition of a section on governance structures; MATs tend to have multiple layers of governance but their respective roles have not always been defined well. The structure of any organisation must be designed to enable the achievement of its core purpose – the core purpose of any school is to improve the outcomes for children and young people. Different MATs can and will have different structures – the key question for any MAT is whether the structure supports better outcomes for children and young people.

We are avoiding using the terms governor or local governing body, as all levels to whom the Board of Trustees delegate, whether at regional, cluster or at academy level, are committees of the Trust.

The questions are **NOT** attempting to:

- cover every aspect of effective governance,
- give the answers – these can only be obtained from reflecting honestly and fully on current practice in comparison with others,
- replace the guidance for Multi-academy Trusts provided by a range of organisations.

We hope these questions will help MAT boards ensure that their governance structures are fit for purpose.

### Contact

We welcome comments to [education.governance.appg@nga.org.uk](mailto:education.governance.appg@nga.org.uk)

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## 21 questions every Multi-academy Trust Board should ask itself

### Vision, ethos and strategy

1. Does the Trustee Board have a clear vision and strategic priorities for the next three to five years, to which all academies contribute and which is understood by each of its academies?
2. How effectively do these strategic priorities drive the governance structure, activities and agenda setting at all levels of the Trust?
3. What vision does the Trustee Board have for the size of the Trust and how does the strategy ensure that there is the capacity to support any additional academies well?

### Governance structures

4. Is the structure of the Trust from its members to academy level governance conducive to effective working, ensuring check and balances but avoiding duplication at different levels, and delivering good two-way communications?
5. How does the Trustee Board ensure that its governance structure is clear, in keeping with its Articles of Association, and that those at regional, cluster and academy level understand their roles and responsibilities compared to those of the Trustee Board?
6. a) Does the Trustee Board have a scheme of delegation, is it published on its website and those of its academies, and does the scheme make clear where the following key governance functions are exercised:
  - Determining each individual academy's vision, ethos and strategic direction?
  - Recruiting each academy's Principal/Head of school?
  - Performance management of each academy's Principal/Head of school?
  - Determination of Human Resources policy and practice?
  - Oversight of each academy's budget?
  - Assessment of the risks for each academy?
- b) Is the principle of earned autonomy applied to individual academies or local clusters and if so, do all involved at all levels of governance within the MAT understand how?

### Trustee Board effectiveness and conduct

7. **Right skills:** Has the Trustee Board adopted a robust and transparent process for the recruitment both of trustees and those at local governance level, including role specifications, skills audits and interview panel to ensure those carrying out governance functions have the full range of experience, qualities and skills necessary to discharge all the Trustee Board's responsibilities?
8. **Clerking:** Does the Trustee Board have a professional clerk providing information and guidance on regulatory practice and procedures, including governance leadership to the committees and any academy level governance?
9. **Chair:** How does the Trustee Board ensure the chair shows strong and effective leadership?



10. **Trustee performance:** Does the chair carry out an annual review of each trustee's contribution to the Board's performance and ensure each trustee is investing in his/her own development?
11. **Succession planning:** Do we engage in good succession planning so that, in normal circumstances, no trustee serves for longer than two terms of office and the chair is replaced at least every six years?
12. **Conflicts of interest & conduct:** How does the Trustee Board ensure conflicts are avoided and that the Nolan principles of public life are adhered to?
13. **Learning from others:** Has the Trustee Board regularly reviewed its structures and practice, making use of other Boards' experiences and periodically seeking external expertise?

### Engagement

14. How does the Trustee Board listen to, understand and respond to pupils, parents, staff and local communities across all its academies?
15. What benefit do the academies within the Trust draw from collaboration with other schools and other sectors, including employers, locally and nationally; and how is the Trust involved in contributing to improving leadership and schools beyond its own academies?

### Effective accountability of the executive leadership

16. How well does the Trustee Board understand its academies' performance data, and how do Trustees know that pupils in all their academies are making the best progress they can?
17. What mechanisms does the Trustee Board use to ensure there is a strong and effective executive leadership structure and personnel in place across the Trust with the right skills, clear line-management and reporting mechanisms?
18. How does the Trustee Board ensure senior leaders within academies are challenged to improve the education of pupils, and what intervention would be used if improvement is not progressing according to plan at an academy?
19. How does the Trustee Board ensure that the Trust's financial capability and management systems are robust to ensure compliance with the Academies Financial Handbook, best value for money and deliver the long-term strategy?
20. Do the compliance systems give assurance to the Trustee Board that the Trust is meeting its statutory and legal responsibilities?

### Impact on outcomes for pupils

21. How much have the academies improved over the last three years, and what has the Trustee Board's contribution been to this?