BECOMING AN ACADEMY: Frequently Asked Questions

General:
What is an Academy?
Academies are state-funded local schools, that operate outside of local authority control and aim to provide a free, first-class education for pupils of all abilities through a fresh approach to school leadership, teaching and learning. They offer a full, broad and balanced curriculum. They have the freedom to tailor this curriculum to the needs of the pupils.

There are single, stand alone academies, sponsored academies and academies which belong within a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). The Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust (DSAT) is a MAT. All schools are now being actively encouraged to join such MATs and there is a clear policy direction towards schools being within MATs by 2022.

Who is responsible for the Academy?
In this case the Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust (DSAT) is a charitable company (Registered in England and Wales no. 08656655) with a Board of Directors drawn from the Salisbury Diocesan Board of Education and others with specialist experience in education and business.

What does being an academy within a Multi-academy trust involve?

- The Trust offers a model of multi-academy conversion within the context of the Church of England, protecting and preserving the school’s Christian Trust Deed.
- For community schools the Trust provides a vehicle for academy conversion which will respect the predecessor school’s heritage and values whilst expecting the school to interpret the Trust’s vision and ethos within the context of their own community.
- The school will belong to a supportive and caring Christian family of academies; the Trust and the convertor school will be committed to supporting each other.
- The school will belong to a network of academies, with a structured process of enabling school to school support; the school will be able to give and to receive. The Trust will support each school to further develop and to celebrate what it does well, develop mutual partnerships and through joint practice development improve the practice of all partners.
- The Trust is committed to a deep model of school improvement which has adult professional learning at its centre. The Trust will support the development of CPD opportunities, for example, leadership development; the improvement of teaching and learning; curriculum planning; coaching and mentoring.
- The Trust is committed to supporting the development of outstanding accountability and self evaluation systems which support and validate the autonomy of each school; each academy will be entitled to draw on the Trust’s school improvement personnel to provide moderation of the school’s self evaluation, in a working relationship that is robust, transparent and supportive.
- The convertor academy will be entitled to draw on the Trust’s services: Human Resources; Finance; School Improvement; Buildings; Admissions; Governor/Local Advisory Board services.
- The Trust is able to offer support for succession planning, including the potential of career progression across the Trust.
The Trust is able to offer mechanisms to create economies of scale, procuring across the Trust where appropriate e.g. purchase of consumables.

Is the academy required to make a financial contribution to the MAT?

Yes. As part of the MAT the Academy will benefit from the MAT’s central services which include academy improvement, finance, human resources and building services and therefore will be required to financially contribute to these. However, academies are funded directly by central government, replacing the funding previously provided through the local authority. This will result on average, in the academy receiving more funding than when under local authority control, as an element was previously retained by the local authority for a variety of services.

As an academy the total funding is received by the academy trust and the individual academy’s contributions to the Trust are clearly seen to give a transparent picture.

Conversion:
What does the conversion process involve and how long does it take?

The Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust (DSAT) will provide support through the conversion process. The areas of work are related to any legal transfers of land or assets, regularising any leases, financial review, consultation and budget setting, TUPE transfer (for staff) and HR work.

In addition, support to transition from a Governing Body to a Local Governing Board within the MAT structure, is also provided.

Most schools are able to convert in around four months. It can, however, take longer where there are further issues to resolve i.e. arrangements for running a nursery, issues relating to land ownership or building works.

Would the school have to cover the full cost to convert to an academy?

No. Total costs vary from school to school but the DFE pays a grant to the Academy Trust to support the conversion.

Why should we become an academy?

You would have:

- As part of an Academy Trust, far greater influence on decision making;
- Greater flexibility in the role staff can play both in your school and across the trust, all helping to improve recruitment and retention of staff;
- More effective use of funds. The entire budget for your school comes to the Trust, rather than a proportion being retained by the local authority. The amount retained by the local authority will vary from area to area but could be up to 10%. This will allow for you to work with the Trust to priorities spending based on your needs;
- The freedom to design your own curriculum. This is particularly important for small primaries. By joining a chain of academies you could increase the breadth of your curriculum offer; and
- The freedom to set the length of your school day, and allow local conditions to be taken into account.
Through collaboration with DSAT, primaries no longer have to depend solely on their local authority but can build arrangements that work best for them. Schools of all shapes and sizes can join together, share resources and work together to bring about an improvement in standards.

If our school becomes an academy, will we be able to spend the majority of time teaching or will we have to spend it on bureaucracy?

A fundamental principle of the Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust is to allow schools to focus on Teaching and Learning, allowing the Trust to handle all the bureaucracy.

**Academy Trust**

**What is an Academy Trust?**

A Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) is where a number of schools are governed by a single Trust and Board of Directors – there is only one legal entity accountable for all schools within the Trust. There is one set of Articles which governs all the academies in that Trust. DSAT has a Master Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State and each academy also has a Supplemental Funding Agreement. Each of the academies in DSAT has its own Local Governing Board which deals with local issues.

DSAT is accountable for all academies in the Trust. However, before any agreements are signed, decisions are made about which matters will be handled by DSAT and which will stay with the individual academy Local Governing Boards.

**Why should our school join an Academy Trust?**

One of the key strengths of DSAT is the flexibility to manage resources and expertise. Funding to the schools within DSAT continues to be allocated on an individual academy basis, but there are shared support services (e.g. HR, business support, etc.) that can be provided through the academies’ contributions. It is also easier to share expertise as all staff in DSAT are employed by the same employer and so can transfer more easily or work across more than one school.

DSAT is accountable for all academies in the Trust and is expected to provide effective support in the form of expertise or extra resources for any school in DSAT which requires additional support.

**How will the role of governors change if we became an academy?**

The principles and responsibilities of governance are the same in all academies as they are in maintained schools but the governing body operates slightly differently.

DSAT in effect becomes the statutory governing body, but can continue to delegate functions to a Local Governing Board, the Headteacher or any other holder of an executive office. The academies’ Local Governing Boards can choose how many committees to have and decide what to delegate to them. For example, a large secondary school may need to have more committees than a small primary school.

**What will the responsibilities of the governing body be?**

The governing body of DSAT is responsible for establishing and running the academy trust. The academy trust (a charitable company limited by guarantee) will then enter into a funding agreement with the Secretary of State for the running of the academy. The academy trust has a strategic role in running the academy and will be responsible
for appointing the Local Governing Board of each academy, in conjunction with staff, parents, the local church and community.

If our school becomes an academy, how will this affect the governing body structure?

The flexibility of the academy governance model allows, in most cases, converting schools to replicate their existing governing body within the Local Governing Board if it is agreed that this is the best approach. There are some minimum requirements. These are that an academy must have at least two parent governors, no more than a third of governors can be academy staff, and there is no longer a local authority governor.

Will the school be inspected by Ofsted?

Yes. Academies are inspected by Ofsted using the same framework and timescales as for maintained schools.

What happens to the staff?

Regulations on the safeguarding of employment rights apply to staff employed at schools facing closure. Staff working at the School immediately prior to the opening of the Academy would be covered by these regulations (normally referred to as the TUPE Regulations.). This gives them the right of transfer from the existing school to the Academy, which also ensures there is no disruption to pupils’ education.

Who will employ the staff?

DSAT will be the employer.

Do we need to conduct a consultation before converting?

Yes. All schools are required to carry out a consultation. Typically, that will include staff, parents, the local community, and the parish council. Schools have flexibility over how this is conducted.

Admissions:

What must admission arrangements contain?

Admission arrangements are any mechanism or process used to allocate places at a school. They will include:

- Admission numbers for each ‘relevant age group’ (normal admission point);
- A commitment to admit any children with statements of special educational needs which name the academy;
- Oversubscription criteria which prioritise looked-after children and children who were formerly looked-after and include a final tie-break (usually ‘distance from school’);
- Any selection test (if a school is selective);
- Supplementary application form;
- Any catchment area; and
- Waiting list arrangements.

What are the key admission changes a school will notice when it becomes an academy?

Academies are their own admission authorities. This means that:
• The academy trust will be responsible for consulting on and determining (‘finalising’) the school’s admission arrangements in accordance with the School Admissions Code.

• The academy trust will consider applications to the school rather than the LA. The school will have to rank applicants against the oversubscription criteria and send ranked lists back to the LA as part of the local process for co-ordinating admissions over the winter.

• The academy trust becomes responsible for organising admission appeals in compliance with the School Admission Appeals Code, not the LA.

• DSAT delegates the majority of the admission process back to its academies as they are best suited to deal with this in their local community.

Foundation schools and voluntary-aided schools that were already their own admission authority prior to conversion will see no change. Community schools and voluntary-controlled schools will become admission authorities for the first time, although many will continue to buy back services from the local authority. Their academy trusts will need to familiarise themselves with the admission and appeals codes.