

Thank you for interest in and questions about the proposed Co-operative Multi-Academy Trust. We hope that this FAQ page will provide you with useful information and clarity. If you do have other queries please contact Kteague@parc-eglos.cornwall.sch.uk and we will do our best to respond swiftly.

Please also see a copy of the power-point shown at parent information events and diagrams of the proposed structure on the school websites. There is a glossary of terms at the foot of this document.

All the information below relates to the current proposal which is being shaped in the light of feedback, and some elements may change, so please do visit the website again to keep up to date with developments.

MAT organisation and development:

What does my school gain from being in the MAT?

There are benefits to all schools in the MAT* – more opportunities for children; greater opportunities for staff development and career progression which means we keep our best staff in the Trust; shared procurement means better use of resources across all the schools ensuring more money is spent on education and the children.

It is important to remember that we are not joining a MAT, we are creating one. This means we can make it what we want it to be and what our children and local communities need from their schools. By doing this we can ensure it is built on our own values and ethos and ensure that these principles are upheld in the future.

Are there any bonuses to becoming a MAT early?

We are not early. The first academy opened its doors in 2002 and nationwide over two thirds of secondary schools and about a fifth of primary schools are academies with many of these members of the 850+ MATs that are already up and running. In fact, the Southwest is leading the way with 72% of its secondary schools now academies.

As a Cooperative Trust* we have evolved and grown and we are now ready to take this next step which will maximise the expertise, resources and collaborative nature of our schools.

By choosing to become a MAT now, the 17 schools who all work together in the Co-operative Trust can continue to work together and provide continuity for the area. If we do not go together, individual schools who find themselves in difficulty may be forced to join other MATs and the unity of values and purpose we have achieved will be undermined. The sooner we become a MAT the sooner we can realise the economies of scale to support the schools' resources. By making the move together we save money on the conversion process – there is significant extra cost if we don't make the move together. The trust has been discussing and exploring the opportunity for conversion to a MAT for almost a year, with some school Governing Bodies looking at options considerably longer.

In addition, by exploring this route together we have been able to access significant grants – such as the Primary Chain Grant* and Small Schools Grant*. If the schools do not go forward, whatever is left of the grant will need to be repaid, However, if we all remain in and convert together, the savings we accrue during the process can be invested in the MAT. The actual costs of converting together are more economical too.

Could there be a MAT made up of smaller amount of schools?

The Regional Schools Commissioner has been very clear about the viability of a MAT being linked to its size, primarily based on pupil numbers. Smaller MATs are beginning to join larger ones in order to make things work effectively. In early conversations we did discuss establishing smaller groups but there was little appetite for that approach (it was felt this would not be financially viable in the long term). In addition, if we started with smaller MATs we would eventually need to join them together and there would be no additional funding for this to happen.

There was also strength of feeling that we should remain together as a Co-operative Trust given that we have a successful working relationship that has brought benefits to our schools already. These benefits include training opportunities for staff, support and coaching for school leaders, progress for schools with Requires Improvement Ofsted judgements and a breadth of opportunities for our pupils.

What are the benefits for us of moving from our current Trust to a MAT?

Whilst a great deal has been achieved as a Trust, this move will strengthen our relationship and bring benefits to every school. For example, by pooling our resources in the top slice we can afford to buy in experts to manage our buildings and our finances to free up educators to concentrate on their area of expertise – teaching and learning. These experts can also undertake procurement work to find the best deals on the basis of all 17 buying into the package – something Heads do not have time to do – thereby bringing two benefits – freeing heads up to work on education and gaining greater cost savings. With the number of schools going together we also trigger an annual grant from the EFA to help maintain our building stock which we have control over. County are struggling to meet the cost of backlog maintenance work.

We also risk losing what we have achieved and value if we don't go forward together into a MAT as there is clear government agenda to require schools to become academies. If one of our schools is forced to join another chain or MAT then our co-operative trust begins to break apart.

Will more schools join the MAT and how big might it become?

Over time other schools might join the MAT but they will need to share our values, ethos and vision. We will not allow other schools to weaken the provision in the founding MAT schools and there will be careful risk management done before they are allowed to join. If we grow, it will be carefully managed. Our primary concern is to make sure our MAT works for our children and our local area. At the current time, we do not anticipate the MAT growing much larger.

What happens if things are missed during due diligence* – what happens if the MAT has been hoodwinked?

Governors and Head Teachers are also very aware of this risk, and everyone involved is being thorough, diligent and robust with our investigations, research and proposals. A huge amount of time and energy has been put in just to get to this stage and we still have work to do to ensure we can put forward a proposal that everyone can be confident in. The same levels of due diligence will apply to any future partner schools.

Parents are worried about being ‘bulldozed into an experiment’ – Please provide reassurance.

We know that the 17 schools in our Cooperative Trust have been working together now for years. The schools have worked together successfully to date and there is no reason why this should not continue in a MAT. The benefits to be gained outweigh the risks. We are committed to providing excellent education in our area – we believe this move will enable us to continue to do this.

In terms of the National context this is not an experiment. About half of all schools are already academies, there are 850+ MATs and we will not even be the first Cooperative MAT; others are already successful in other parts of the country.

How will the hubs* be formed?

The hubs have not been set up as yet but, will be formed using a number of factors, ensuring a good balance of schools in each hub. The schools across the Trust will continue to work together regardless of catchments as they do now but the hubs will be the focus for governance and accountability.

Members*, Trustees*, Governance and Accountability:

Who selects the Trustees? Where do the Trustees come from?

The Shadow Trustees have been selected by the Governors of the schools. Existing governors who wished to be considered as a potential trustee were asked to submit an application to the working party outlining why they wished to be a trustee and outlining their skills and experience. These were anonymised and selection made to ensure that the necessary skills and capabilities were met and that there was representation from the widest range of types of school (small; large; medium; church/non-church; primary /secondary; geographical spread). The shortlisted Trustees were then approved by all the governing bodies.

How many Trustees are there? Are Trustees going to be paid?

The model currently allows for 7 non-executive trustees and 2 executive (paid staff) trustees. The ‘articles’* which set out the legal rules for the MAT do allow for additional Trustees to be co-opted for particular pieces of work but we are beginning with 7.

Who are the Trustees?

The Trustees are: Sean Davis (Cury); Kristin Pryor (Sithney and Garras); Rev Doctor Peter Johnson (Breage); Kevin Thomas (Godolphin); Lil Dye (Trannack); Alan Horne (Helston).

Please see the Trustees profiles published on the website for further details.

There are also 5 Members of the MAT. This body, check that the Trustees are fulfilling their roles properly. In effect, these are the founding Members of the company and the DFE insist on MATs having them. Our Members have been chosen for their co-operative beliefs, skills and experience. The proposed members are: Simon Tregonning (Mullion); Andrew North (Co-operative Society); Dr Ian Luke (University of St Mark and St John); Truro Diocese; and one further Member to be elected at the MAT Annual General Meeting by the Forum.

If someone ceases to be a trustee how will they be replaced?

We are checking the legal arrangements for this. There are rules already set out in the co-operative articles about how Trustees can be replaced.

Do the schools have a separate set of governors? Are parents still involved? Please provide the details of school autonomy and local school governance.

A successful school seeks the views of its parents, staff, pupils and community. Whilst the legal responsibilities are taken by the trustees, locally this allows parents and the community to support the school without such responsibilities. Each school will have its own local group called the Forum*. It is likely that existing governors who have not become trustees will continue to work in the Forum but there will be opportunities for others to join this group. The Forum is a key group and is made up of parents, staff, community, students and alumni*. Each school has worked hard to create its own ethos and the trust seeks to support that ethos. The Forum works closely with the local school ensuring it keeps its ethos and individual character and supporting the key function of the school: learning. The Forum will meet at least termly to discuss what is happening in the school; to feedback views and observations, and make suggestions to their representatives for consideration at the Hub Council*. Each local Forum will have 2 elected representatives who will work on the Hub Councils. The legal aspects of governance will sit with the Hub Council and the Trust Board.

Head Teachers will be delegated the authority to maintain what is good and support from the trust will enhance the school's development.

Who or what organisation will oversee standards or ensure accountability?

As now, the standards in the school are the responsibility of the head teachers and they are answerable to the hub council * and line managed, challenged and supported by the hub leader. This is overseen by the CEO* who is answerable to the Trustees and the Regional Schools Commissioner * (representing the DFE*). Ofsted will still inspect the schools as per the current system.

What is the criteria for how the paid staff are doing their job?

All maintained schools use similar target based Performance Management linked to The Teacher Standards. The Trust will need to ensure a consistent approach and standards across all the 17 schools but are not planning to move away from this.

The paid executive staff will have job descriptions and annual appraisal targets linked to the MAT improvement plan to which they will be held to account by the Trust Board.

Who will be the CEO?

Following an invitation to all existing Head Teachers in the Trust to formally apply for the post, Mrs Donna Bryant (current Headteacher of Helston Community College) was chosen by the Chairs and Vice-Chairs on behalf of the 17 schools in our Cooperative Trust and their recommendation was approved by each governing body.

Will the CEO have anything to do with the running of our school?

The day to day running of the school is the responsibility of the head teacher. The CEO's role is to ensure that Trust is working effectively, that the aims and objectives of the Trust are achieved and that Hub Leaders, Head Teachers and Trust staff are supported to ensure this happens. Where a school is at risk or experiencing difficulties, the CEO and Hub Leader will work with the Head to provide appropriate support and guidance.

How will other executive posts be appointed?

The Hub Leader posts will be advertised within the pool of existing head teachers in the Trust schools. The Trustees will convene an appointments panel to shortlist and interview for these posts.

The Finance Director is currently outsourced until the MAT is established. A full recruitment process will follow conversion for both the Finance and Premises Directors.

Finance:**With falling budgets, how will the MAT deal with small schools?**

The central procurement will result in economies of scale which will help small school budgets to go further.

Additional savings will be made as a central Hub team will be employed from the top slice which means individual schools will not need to pay for expensive County SLAs* (Service Level Agreements), or business providers for areas such as Human Resources and Finance advice and support.

Does being a MAT change per pupil funding?

No, the amount of per pupil funding received is the same as any other school in County, however the 'de-delegation'* and 'education service grant'* that is currently retained by Cornwall Council will remain with the school so the MAT has greater autonomy over how that money is spent.

Schools would continue to receive their pupil premium monies and High Needs Educational Special needs funding – these would not form part of the top slice

Please confirm that school resources are dedicated to each school. Please also confirm the top slice – 5% was stated and what that will pay for and how that stacks against LA SLAs.

Yes, each school will receive the funding allocated to it by the Education Funding Agency*. The 5% top slice will then be deducted to pay for central services such as premises management; finance; human resources; payroll services; school improvement. The current SLAs offered by Cornwall Council are reducing and those services which remain are costing more. The MAT has the option to continue to purchase SLAs from Cornwall Council, to seek alternatives which provide best value or to provide the services in house.

What representation will the individual schools have when budgets are decided?

Each school will have its own budget but this will be agreed centrally in conjunction with the Headteacher of the school.

What will happen to our reserves?

Each school will have their reserves ring fenced at the point of conversion. It is only fair that where schools have raised funds or saved for a particular project that this is honoured.

Should a school be in some form of financial difficulty, would our surplus funds go towards covering another school's debt?

Schools will not be allowed to go into debt. The finance team will ensure that this does not happen. All schools have had to submit their finances for due diligence prior to applying for academy orders with clear plans to reduce any deficit before becoming conversion.

With media coverage of concerns on the education department's finances, what guarantees are there of how much money will be received direct from that department in the future?

There are no guarantees for any school – maintained or academy. The government are currently consulting on a Fair Funding Formula where they are seeking to reallocate school funding in a more equitable fashion.

What happens if not enough money is made available? Will sponsors be sought? Will the cooperative ethos be lost?

The funding for schools regardless of status is shrinking. By having 17 schools with approximately 3,600 pupils means that the MAT will be financially viable. 'Sponsors'* are sought where schools are unsuccessful. We have a good track record of achievement in our schools and have through co-operative working brought about improvement to schools. Our co-operative ethos will be enshrined in the Articles of Association* for the Co-operative MAT. We will continue to be part of the National Schools Co-operative Society. The Co-operative Values will continue to be at the heart of all our decision making.

School staffing and individuality:

Who will be the head Teacher? Will the head belong to a single school or will there be executive heads* over a number of schools?

Whether there is a Headteacher or an Executive Headteacher, there will be a key person in each school responsible for standards, curriculum, teaching and learning, the pupils and for working with parents. The business elements of the role (finance, premises, HR) will be done by a central team who have the training to do those roles. This decision will be made on an individual school basis and a change to an Executive Headteacher will only happen if it is right for the school/schools involved.

If the head of school is over 5 schools, does that mean that they will only be in school one day a week?

Each school will have a Headteacher or share an Executive Head in the way that Garras, Sithney and Godolphin, or Boskenwyn and Germoe have chosen to do. These Head Teachers and Executive Heads would be line managed by a Hub Leader who again would be the Headteacher of their own school. They would not be the Head Teacher of 5 schools.

Will heads still go out to support other schools?

Yes, this approach has helped significantly to improve practice across the schools. However, because the heads will need to spend less time on issues such as premises they will have more time for the development of teaching and learning in their own schools and for others.

Will staff be moved to other schools?

Staff will continue in their current schools. There may be opportunities for them to move or work in more than one base if they choose to for professional and career development or to support other schools in the MAT as needs arise. We already support each other in this way with staff working in other schools to help when needed.

Who makes the staffing decisions for a school?

The Head Teacher identifies the staffing requirements for their school and discusses the best way to fulfil this need with the Hub Leader. The responsibility for appointing staff, within the constraints of their budget, lies with the Head Teacher. The recruitment process would be supported by the HR team.

As an academy will you employ non-qualified teachers to teach our children? What if the budgetary constraints forces you to this?

Sometimes now, we do employ unqualified staff – there are a variety of reasons of this, for example, lack of availability of qualified staff. Our approach is, and will be, to appoint the best person for the job. Those who are unqualified, as now, are supported to gain their teaching qualification, and are suitably supervised to ensure the children have the best provision available.

There is no plan to change our current practice. For example, some staff at Helston were qualified to teach at Post 16 and, subsequently, have developed their expertise and undertaken training to teach in the main school.

Do academies come under the National Curriculum or can the MAT do its own thing? Can you change GCSEs etc?

There is a lot in the press about academies having freedom to set their own curriculum. In reality, as schools we are held to account on national data sets based on SATs, GCSE and Btecs there is little scope for changing the curriculum other than in the ways we do already.

Will the curriculum be school specific?

Each school will continue to determine its own curriculum but common approaches across the MAT may develop over time just as they have done through our work as a Cooperative Trust.

How much individuality will each school have? Please provide reassurance that our small schools will remain autonomous.

We are all keen for schools to maintain their distinctive ethos just as they do now. There are no plans for school name changes or changes to uniform and the schools will continue to be responsible for their community links.

One of the reasons for creating the Cooperative Trust and now the MAT is to secure this autonomy for our schools and their communities for the present and in the future.

Buildings:

Could an academy sell off school fields and land?

At the current time the land and assets of all the schools are held in trust by the existing Co-operative Trust (with the exception of the church schools and those who lease buildings/land). There are strict rules around the sale of school land. So whilst in theory it could be done, this is no different to the existing arrangements. The land and assets are held in trust for educational purposes.

Where will the church schools' land and assets lie?

Church school land remains with the Diocese* and the MAT have permission to use it. It is important to know that the Diocese are fully behind what we are planning to do and have been very supportive of our efforts so far.

How do our independent preschools fit in to the equation? Currently some rent a classroom from the school so will they be renting from the school or from the MAT and, if from the MAT, would there be a flat rate, etc.

Whether with the school direct or with the MAT, the current rental agreement would continue, most schools hold regular rent reviews and this practice would continue.

Who will manage the buildings and any new building projects?

The plan is to appoint a premises manager to oversee the buildings and manage any development work across the Trust. Due to the size of the MAT, we will be entitled to the Condition Improvement Fund* without having to bid to the EFA* which will help us to manage maintenance issues.

Will the new building project at Helston Community College be affected by the MAT proposal?

The plans for the rebuild/refurbishment are not affected by the MAT proposal. The Priority Schools Building Project*, of which Helston is a part, applies to both academies and maintained schools

How will the area deal with the influx of building – where will extra school places come from?

The local authority will still have the role to ensure that sufficient school places are available. Additionally, as a MAT there are funding streams from the EFA to finance expansion or improvement to buildings.

Other:**Will the admissions code and school holidays be changed by becoming a MAT?**

We plan to keep our admissions codes and school holidays as they are now.

Please provide assurance that pupils will not have to attend Helston College for 16-19 provision.

There will be, as there is now, complete freedom of choice for students for Post 16 provision and we will continue to provide comprehensive careers education and Independent Advice and Guidance (IAG) support

Who will be in charge of travel budgets for travel to secondary school?

This responsibility remains with the local authority as per the current situation

How will the formal consultation take place?

This will take place later in the year. All details will be published to parents, staff, community and students nearer the time. All stakeholders will have the opportunity to ask questions and to express their views. There is not an open vote. The final decision, following consideration of feedback from the consultation, lies with existing governing body of each school.

Can schools opt in or out?

Following formal consultation, the Governing Body of each school make the final decision as to whether schools become part of the MAT. Once the decision has been made to join the MAT, the school cannot then opt out again.

What happens if a school within the trust decides that they do not want to move forward so quickly with academisation?

Ideally all schools will go forward together to realise greater benefits for all concerned. However, if a school decides not to go forward with the other schools, then they could potentially join later. However, the cost of conversion will be greater for the remaining schools because of resulting amendments to the legal work and what is left of the share of the conversion grants for that school will need to be returned to the EFA. It is not clear whether the EFA would fund the school through a second conversion process.

What happens if it doesn't work? What happens if the government makes a U turn?

Head Teachers and Governors do not want to lose the good work that is going on in the Trust and this could be put at risk by not moving into a MAT. This is not just a matter of the government agenda in terms of forced academisation. We believe this is the next step for the Co-operative Trust if we are to ensure our co-operative future. Whether the government continues its recent agenda of academisation for all; there are other ways of making academisation happen – and we have seen this already - moving the floor standards; coasting schools' agenda; reducing funding; using Ofsted. We believe it is far better to take a proactive stance and do what works for our schools, communities and young people.

We believe that we need to take this next step on our journey in order to provide excellent educational opportunities for all the children in our area. The central support at County has been severely diminished and we need to take our self-responsibility seriously and ensure the best future for our children, our staff, our schools and our communities.

Glossary:

Alumni	Ex-pupils of a school
Articles of Association	The legal document/rule book governing how the governance of the MAT can operate
Condition Improvement Fund	A government fund to help schools improve the condition of their buildings.
Co-operative Trust	A group of foundation trust schools who work together according to the principles and values of the co-operative movement
De-delegation	Schools Finance Regulations set out that certain amounts can be deducted from maintained school budgets for some central services – this doesn't occur for academies
Department For Education (DFE)	The government office in charge of education
Diocese	Our schools are in the Diocese of Truro. The diocese has particular responsibility for its church schools. We have 3 church schools in our proposed MAT.
Due diligence	The process of checking any risks and liabilities thoroughly – financial, premises, personnel, legal
Education Funding Agency (EFA)	The government body responsible for funding academies, central school building programmes; national Post 16 funding

Education Service Grant (ESG)	The education services grant (ESG) gives local authorities and academy trusts money to fund their schools' services.
Executive Headteacher	A head teacher in charge of more than one school
Forum	A group of co-operative stakeholders – students, parents, staff, alumni and community
Hub	A group of schools working together in this MAT
Hub Council	The representatives of each forum working together to govern the schools in their hub
Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)	A group of academies operating within a single trust with a defined set of articles of association
Member	<p>The members are akin to the shareholders of a company. They have ultimate control over the academy trust, with the ability to appoint some of the trustees and the right to amend the trust's articles of association</p> <p>While trustees can also serve as members, the most effective governance models recognise that the members are responsible for holding the trustees to account. Some separation between those serving as trustees and those serving as members is, therefore, desirable for achieving robust accountability.</p>
Primary Chain Grant	A government grant to help fund the process for groups of primary schools forming or joining a MAT.
Priority Schools Building Project 2 (PSBP2)	A building programme to upgrade the worst 270 school buildings in the country
Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC)	The person responsible for the standards of academies in a region with the powers to compel schools to join MATs
Service Level Agreement (SLA)	An agreed contract for services provided
Small Schools Grant	A government grant to help fund the process for groups of primary schools with less than 200 pupils forming or joining a MAT
Sponsors	A chain, MAT or Academy that takes failing schools into their organisation
Trustee	A director of the company/MAT responsible for the MAT. The trustees are responsible for the same three core governance functions performed by the governing body in a maintained school: setting the direction, holding the head teacher to account and ensuring financial probity. As charity trustees, they must also ensure that they are complying with charity law requirements. Academy trusts are charitable companies and the trustees are company directors and must comply with company law requirements. This may sound daunting, but, in reality, the duties are largely the same as those of a governor of a maintained school, such as regularly attending meetings, managing conflicts of interest, seeking advice from the academy's leadership team and ensuring the academy has appropriate procedures in place for reporting financial information.