

Volume 2 Number 2 Spring 2013

Academy magazine



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Funding, exams and conditions

Funding continues to be a major concern for school leaders. This is as much about how funds are distributed, and the inequities of the system, as about funding cuts. Huge imbalances between the funding of similar pupils across the country, or even within the same Local Authority, remain morally indefensible. This issue and the vexatious role of many school forums are explored in our articles on funding. Ironically, the same inequity exists in the state of our school buildings with multi-million pound new schools operating cheek by jowl with schools housed in 40 year old temporary buildings. This is a problem that will take decades to resolve, but it is to the Government's credit that the bloated, iconic new-build programmes so loved by their predecessors have been abandoned in favour of something more realistic and cost-effective. Mike Green's article on capital funding gives us an insight into this.

It is good to hear from politicians their views on autonomous schools, and in the articles by David Laws and Stephen Twigg there is clear recognition of the importance of autonomy and the pivotal role of school leaders. In the last issue, I wrote that the academies programme appeared to be slowing down, so the development of Primary Associate Academies (see Paul Smith's article) is to be welcomed. However, as Martin Latham points out, the lump sums being decided upon by school forums will be an incentive for small schools to stay within the Local Authority fold.

The current review of GCSEs is causing less of a stir than I would expect. GCSEs could be replaced with norm-referenced exams in order to prevent grade inflation. Of course, if this were to happen it would not allow schools to demonstrate that they had improved, or that students were learning more and standards rising. Reducing the number of exams students have to sit, ending the culture of bite-sized modules and endless re-sits, and making GCSEs more rigorous are all to be welcomed. However, we must keep an eye on how this links to the methods of accountability. If exams are norm referenced then league tables and Ofsted become redundant other than a tool for identifying schools with weaker students who may, nevertheless, be achieving comparatively great things.

Also, there are some potentially impractical ideas being floated in these reforms – for example that all students will sit the same exams. In maths especially, this would lead to disenchantment and exam hall problems with idle students bored and disaffected because they cannot answer the questions. Similarly ill-considered is the suggestion that exam boards could choose the name for their qualification and their own grading structure. For the benefit of end-users we should aim for clarity and not confusion in our system. After the limp action taken by unions over pensions, the education headlines over the next months will undoubtedly be dominated by the Government's determination to move away from Teacher's National Pay and Conditions. Of course, this has been an option for academies to consider. It may be that their reluctance to do so has spurred Mr Gove to make a move on this front. Away from the rhetoric and the politics from both sides there is a serious point to consider here. As Mark Thompson eloquently points out in his article on NQT Induction, despite the improved quality of the majority of trainees coming into the profession, the universities still have to fill their places and show a reluctance to weed out those who are not up to the mark. This is then compounded by the dismal failure rate on NQT Induction with Appropriate Bodies failing to fulfil their obligations on Quality Assurance and schools opting for the cheapest alternative. Even those NQTs at risk of failure will generally jump ship to find an easier placement to complete their Induction. This lack of rigour at the outset of teacher training is one of the root cause of assertions from Ofsted and others that there are many teachers not up to the mark. Whilst unions and schools fail to address this, the attack on national pay, removing a teacher's right to receive an annual increment for the first few years of their career irrespective of performance, is going to seem reasonable. However, might it have been better to first ensure that ITT and NQT Induction is more rigorously monitored so that only those who show the right qualities and aptitudes to become excellent teachers are allowed to enter and remain in the profession?

We are looking for more interactivity with our readers and would welcome comments, letters or articles. Please send to the editor at editor@academymag.co.uk

Peter Beaven, editor of *Academy*, retired in August 2012 as Headteacher of Norton Hill and Somervale Schools in Midsummer Norton. He had been Headteacher at Norton Hill for 18 years and during the last three years was also Head of Somervale. He can be contacted at editor@academymag.co.uk

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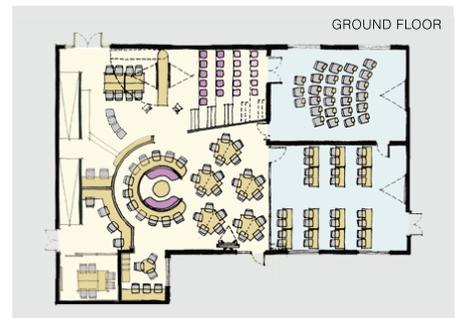
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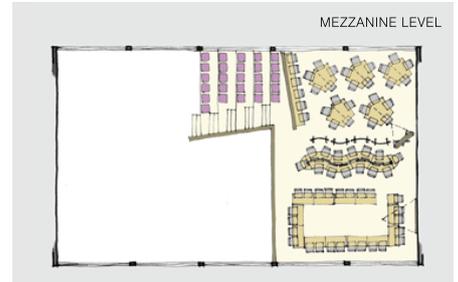
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‘A lot of this is up to us’

Tom Clark, chairman of FASNA, urges schools to be active in providing solutions to funding concerns

Ministers, officials at the DfE, and the Education Funding Agency, seem confident that we will eventually get to a proper national funding formula but only after the current initial transition to a notional budget for all schools. In the meantime it seems that we still have to argue the need for further checks to be put on Schools Forums because for too many schools there is a lack of confidence in the transparency and integrity of too many Forums.

To be clear, FASNA would get all funding directly to schools. Schools could then buy back whatever they need, if they wished. There is no need for Schools Forums. Under the present arrangements there are still too many ‘permitted flexible factors’ which compromise transparency and there are still widespread concerns regarding the effectiveness of Schools Forums and how they are often ‘managed’ by LAs. There is an on-going lack of clarity regarding the composition and competency of school forum members and although representation ratios have been addressed to some degree there are still no prerequisites for member suitability, competency, skills or experience. There is no minimum size but more importantly no maximum size. In Michael Gove’s *School Funding Reform: Next steps towards a fairer system*, section 6.8 makes a commitment to slim down or remove non-school members’ rights to attend school forums. What happened? Why are unions being invited to pack Schools Forums? In too many case the quality and efficiency of secretariat functions lack rigour and consistency including what information and documents should be circulated by when and in what format. Too often there is no clear sense of who ‘owns’ the management of Schools Forum and where the accountability lies.

However we must recognise that it is up to us to challenge Forums. As Martin Latham and Andrew Fielder point out in their articles in this issue of *Academy*, we have been given unprecedented freedoms to shape our own profession and to tackle those deeply embedded problems that politicians and others have steadfastly ignored for decades. It is crucial that we look to provide solutions to our concerns. That is FASNA’s way and that is the responsibility which comes with autonomy. We should make demands of the EFA and ensure that they are monitoring adherence to the new regulations.

There is an on-going lack of clarity regarding the composition and competency of school forum members

Both Martin Latham and Andrew Fielder raise important issues with regard to ‘small school’ support, both for primary and secondary schools. We are concerned about the decision to permit a lump sum as high as £200k to support ‘small schools’. We see this acting as a disincentive to ‘small schools’ that were considering academy conversion particularly as the LACSEG is reducing. Additionally this high level of support is discouraging some LAs from tackling schools that are not cost effective and importantly cannot provide the curriculum entitlement children deserve. As the funding quantum is not increasing, ‘small-school’ support is funded by other schools, many of which face more challenging circumstances than the ‘small schools’ they are ‘subsidising’!

Andrew Fielder’s article offers a radical way forward. Frankly, does every ‘small school’ need its own governing body and chair of governors, its own finance team, even its own Headteacher? As Martin Latham points out, how ridiculous it is that it would be cheaper for an LA to send children to a private school than to one of its own maintained ‘small schools’.

A lot of this is up to us – we have to shape and drive the future education landscape right now. Martin Latham also makes the point that we must not be passive when there is the opportunity to respond to consultations. We must make our voices strong and clear.

Funding of primary schools and local decision-making

Be part of the solution, not the problem,
says Martin Latham, Headteacher,
Robinswood Primary School

As we come towards the end of 2012 and look forward to the issues of 2013, one question in particular will be asked by us all – where do we currently stand with regard to the funding of our schools?

One thing is certain, we all need to ensure that the DfE remain well aware of what impact decisions made by school forums have on all types and phases of schools. As a profession we have not been good at responding to proposals. One only has to look at the paucity of replies to all the funding consultations over the last two years to understand this. In contrast, Local Authorities have been very effective in their responses, and as a consequence, such consultations have had a skewed feel about them.

The *School Funding Reform: Next Steps* consultation had just 708 responses to the consultation points – 147 from maintained schools, 127 from academies and 107 from LAs. Given the huge number of schools in relation to LAs this is a poor reaction from schools.

Similarly it is important that when we respond to the 2013-14 funding decisions, we do more than complain or highlight concerns. It is crucial that we, as a profession, look to provide solutions to our concerns. If I have learned anything from working with ministers and officers, it is that they welcome us providing them with solutions rather than just a litany of complaints.

I know that, just as in so many other areas of education, FASNA will be looking to lead on this and the views of members are crucial. Perhaps we should have been better at this in the past with the various Ofsted regimes and the numerous National Curriculums and Strategies over the past 24 years – but possibly that is a conversation/article for another issue.

So what might the problems be and what are some of the solutions? As I write this there is no clear picture across the country on what school forums have decided, neither is there as yet, a picture regarding the impartiality of these forums and their effectiveness under the new regulations. The watering down of the rigour around our proposals on school forums is undeniable and I believe will result in most forums still being led by Local Authorities and the views of schools and academies being side-lined.

Previously, in school funding we had some 152 LAs, up to 37

factors and thousands of variations – little wonder nobody could get a national picture. So the huge reduction in factors has to be welcomed even if it is only one step along the way to a National Funding Formula (NFF). However let us make sure in the midst of all these consultations on funding leading up to the next spending review that, as we discuss the concept of an NFF, we all mean the same thing as I don't believe this is clear.

Two key features seem to be arising in discussions around the introduction of the new factors – SEN funding and the impact of the lump sum. In particular, the latter is causing concern depending upon where you are in the country and the decisions being taken by school forums. I work in Gloucestershire but not in the rural 'Cotswold Stone' area that many associate with this county. We are a large urban school on the largest council estate in the county and in the 10% most deprived areas in the country. The county has for years been one of the most poorly funded in terms of education and a keen member of the F40 group of LAs. Many members have fought for fairer funding for our children over many years.

However, it cannot be denied that the articulate, political will of the affluent rural areas of the county have always held the greater sway when determining the distribution of the limited funding available. The impact has always been therefore that the larger primary schools have subsidised the smaller, largely rural primaries. This is not a situation peculiar to this county but is in fact replicated across several parts of the country and, as a former Head of a small school, I am well aware of this and its implications.

A needs-led funding formula

Several years ago Gloucestershire, with the help of local Heads, developed a needs-led funding formula that was meant to limit these problems. It still gave some support to many smaller schools, at the expense of larger schools, but the impact was reduced. This still meant favourable funding for smaller schools but at least had some rationale for what was being done. Now the impact of the changes in the lump sum from 2013 has been significant. Most of the national discussion around the lump sum has been that this is a factor to support small school funding



“It cannot be denied that the articulate, political will of the affluent rural areas of the county have always held the greater sway when determining the distribution of the limited funding available.”

and, after input from several LAs, the maximum figure was raised from £100,00 up to £200,000.

The key point to watch is the effect that any local decisions may have on other phases and categories of schools within each and every one of the Local Authorities. It is crucial that all of us highlight the consequences of these decisions and ensure that they are passed on either directly to the Education Funding Agency (EFA) or via FASNA representatives to the EFA.

In Gloucestershire, the lump sum is being set at close to £67,000, which may seem low in comparison to others, however the impact it will have is interesting. It will mean a significant shift of funding from the larger primaries to the smaller primaries. This means moving funding from the centres such as Gloucester and Cheltenham, where there is considerable deprivation, to the rural, more affluent areas. At a time of huge cuts to other agencies supporting families and the schools taking on ever greater social responsibility, it is an extremely questionable decision. This must also be considered alongside the fact that the current level of funding, before these changes, means that one small school can advertise to parents that they are offering ‘private education on the State’ because their per-pupil income is greater than the fees at the local private school, and another is funded at such a level that it would save £1000 a year to send all those pupils to the best private schools in Cheltenham rather than the community school they are in.

Little comfort

The local proposals for 2013 will actually shift more money to these schools from the larger primary schools, which would be funded at a much lower per-pupil rate. The responses usually made when these anomalies are pointed out are things like the Minimum Funding Guarantee offering protection and how these points will be reviewed in the future. These offer little comfort as quite simply we have a system which is obviously still politically driven and will impact negatively upon the underprivileged majority and positively upon the privileged majority. It is a clear

example that the school forum structure still doesn’t work and the influence of the LA is paramount. The LA is protecting the small primaries who are still dependent upon the LA.

This is certainly not an effort to say that small schools should close. Just like any school large or small, some are effective and others aren’t. As a Head of a small school for seven years I am aware of what the many positives may be and also what many of the problems are in relation to small schools. However at a time of financial constraints it does highlight the need for all schools to be looking at how they organise themselves in order that they are both as effective and efficient as possible.

I have met a number of innovative schools who are doing this, of all different sizes, and there is, in this area, one very good example of a chain of smaller schools doing this. However I do find it ironic that as we, at Robinswood, open and run a second school from September 2012 which is aimed at providing the best possible education for up to 840 children and using finances as effectively as possible for our pupils, there are many schools unwilling to consider efficiency options such as one Head/one business manager for a chain of schools, and continuing to be hugely inefficient. At the same time this Local Authority is advocating increasing the funding of these schools so that they don’t have to consider other options.

This is not a moan about what may be happening locally, rather it is an attempt to illustrate that the reduction in factors does not mean in any way a consistency in fair funding which any right-minded educationalist would support. To repeat what I said earlier it is crucial that we all focus intensely upon the decisions made by school forums and the impact they have. Similarly, as academies we need to be aware that although Local Authorities may now be very different to what they were some years ago, they still hold great sway within the DfE and their needs may well not match your needs. We must also look to provide solutions to problems which will arise and ensure that when the next spending round arrives we are prepared with the answers to the questions that an NFF will throw up.

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Every child (and their funding) matters

Andy Johnson, Headteacher at Springwood High School, King's Lynn, unpicks the EFA Academies Funding Reform

As a new Headteacher, I know I have much to learn and many more mistakes to make. I came into teaching to educate young people in order for them to have the best life chances possible. In short, finance and accountancy weren't really in my career plan but I now know that an astute financial strategy is vital to deliver the best for the children in my care. The good news is that I have an outstanding director of finance who offers excellent advice to enable the school to fund our education strategy. However, I have to say that even he is struggling to disentangle the myriad of proposed changes.

It is with this in mind that we both decided to attend an Education Funding Agency (EFA) Academies Funding Reform briefing event. As we sat through a comprehensive, well-planned presentation, my mind went back to the first time I received news of becoming a father. After the initial euphoria came those questions that spring from nervous uncertainty. What will it be like? Will it be alright? Shall we be able to cope? What can I do about it? Those same questions all sprang to mind as the presentation progressed. Ultimately the most concerning thought is the lack of control over the situation. Below are some personal thoughts on the changes ahead from someone new to this area that I hope will resonate or prompt debate with other academy leaders.

I thoroughly enjoyed Mike Griffith's article in the last issue on the potential National Funding Formula and school forums that will agree interim arrangements along the way. It was insightful and his wealth of experience allowed him to comment that "I've passed this way before". I completely agree with his pragmatic and student-centred approach to a fair National Funding Formula. Furthermore, the initial positive promise of 'local decision making by schools' via the school forum has now

become an area of compromise rather than of hard and difficult decision-making.

Each student should have an amount of money for their education as their right alongside additional funding for any additional challenges that they face. Any deviation from this takes money from one child and unfairly gives it (indirectly) to another. History has shown that in times of financial hardship, more difficult decisions have to be made which ironically can bring about significant improvement as more stones are turned. I would have hoped that the EFA would ask school forums the challenging questions on fairness, viability and reasonableness. I doubt whether 'observer' status gives them this mandate but here's hoping.

Limited influence

What it will be like is so much dependent on models based on figures produced by the Local Authority. My ability to influence or change that is restricted by my limited influence over my academy representative on the forum, who has even less influence through the model that gives control to the majority representation.

SEND funding is in a massive state of flux. This September, Norfolk moved to an interim cluster arrangement where all new intake students (to either reception or Year 7) have been funded through agreement of the primary cluster (made up of one secondary school, the primary feeder and local special school). As the school with the largest number of SEND students in the cluster, I had the most to lose financially but the small size of many of the primaries means that any drop in funding is relatively significant for them too. Luckily, we worked collaboratively, professionally (and at great speed) to ensure



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My mind went back to the first time I received news of becoming a father. After the initial euphoria came those questions that spring from nervous uncertainty. What will it be like? Will it be alright? Shall we be able to cope? What can I do about it?

leadership/governance arrangements organised a (unanimously agreed) spending plan for this year.

However, we are all daunted by the future where currently it is proposed that all of the SEND funding is allocated by the cluster. We managed as a cottage industry for this year but I cannot see how a group of school leaders, who meet at best two days per term, can effectively divide this up fairly. Surely there must be another (still fairer) way that the money can be directed to each school without the need for further meetings and self-imposed bureaucracy? The jury is out on whether this interim arrangement will succeed.

‘Mainstreaming’

The new EFA model talks of ‘mainstreaming’ the first £6k of SEND funding into the GAG and the remainder being distributed from the Local Authority. Once again, it will be interesting to see what the bottom line shows overall – is mainstreaming a code for ‘removal’? I do know that the accountability for additional support for students has not diminished but schools will need to look hard at their SEND provision to ensure maximum impact. Will it be alright? Of course it will have to be but I suspect it will only be alright if we find new, innovative and efficient ways of working. Springwood has begun the design of a specialist ‘nurture base’ for those students with highest need in Year 7 and Year 8 to provide more intensive support centrally. Have any other FASNA members developed innovative approaches in this area?

Sixth form funding within schools will, year on year, become more aligned with the lesser per pupil funding received by Further Education institutions. Recruitment and retention (rather than success) appears the key messages here. The formula

seems relatively straight forward, but the devil will be in the detail as to the worth of each factor.

We can applaud the move to a national funding factor and look forward to some stability in future years. Unfortunately for next year’s budget, the value of this factor will not be known until early next year. The EFA stressed that there will be a greater emphasis (and therefore funding) on students achieving level 2 mathematics and English. Unfortunately, with the current debacle in English marking, this could be an increasing problem. I think that schools will need to look radically at how ‘different’ they make the provision of level 2 English and mathematics teaching in KS5 for students who didn’t manage to achieve it after five years of intensive (and highly accountable) secondary education in these subjects.

Resolute and ready for the challenge

I thought I would end on a simple positive note. I would like to say I am looking forward to my new funding statement (due next March and all within one document – at last) but more honestly I will say that I am resolute and ready to take on the challenges ahead. Will it be alright? Shall we be able to cope? What can we do about it? Time and again Headteachers across the country prove that with the right attitude, positive and clear values and careful strategic planning then not only will we cope and it will be alright but we will come out better and stronger in the long term.

There must be some kind of way outta here...

It's time to batten down the hatches, says Andrew Fielder, CEO Cornwall Academy Trust and executive principal, Sandy Hill Academy

In days gone by, high along the watchtowers you would have heard the voices cry, the horns sound, the drums roll. Each fateful sound was a warning to prepare for battle, storm, fire or potential catastrophe. It gave communities precious time to prepare. Hiding under the table and hoping it would all go away was not an option. Ancient civilisations long understood the need to invest in those with good eyesight and a nose for trouble. Many lives, and the very communities within which they lived, depended upon these tall buildings and the trusted folk who stood within them.

Now, in their place, we have local and national professional networks, allies in high places, 24-hour news coverage, global communications, a world wide web, all populated with a great number of well informed and eloquent commentators and visionaries. In light of these you might justifiably expect no less than our ancient ancestors did, that nothing could creep, unseen and unheeded upon us, something that could momentarily challenge and change the world of education within which we work.

So, which schools in your area are going to be able to stay open and which ones shut down in the next four years as a result of the all-pervading deficit, the inexorable decline of the Local Authority, the new Ofsted framework, raised expectations for school performance, and diminishing school budgets? Do you have a cunning plan?

Have you heard any strident warning calls and have long-rehearsed emergency plans to put into place to save what you can, protect that which is worth saving, and sacrifice those once valued elements for the greater good? Has your LA, or professional association, partnership group, political representative, the DfE, or unions offered up a single meaningful warning and coherent action plan to handle the sheer breadth and depth of this impending storm? You are undoubtedly one of a lucky few if you can answer with a yes to those questions.

No matter how hard you might have listened, did you hear or read a word from the policymakers through three party conferences, a thousand hours of commentary, several hundred newspaper front pages, about what was coming? Especially for our smaller primary (and secondary) schools, of which there are many? Around 8000 primaries have less than 200 pupils, with over 3000 of them having less than 100. Have the drummers and bell ringers in the watchtowers been warning us long or loudly enough? Where are the long-term plans? Is it already too late and the storm already raging around us?

We need to have developed a vision for our future in the face of challenges the scale of which have never been experienced before. Since the latest schools budget negotiations and consultations took place, for some it feels like the storm has arrived. Colleagues in local partnerships, and in LAs, are now receiving calls and emails from Headteachers of primary schools, small, medium and large, deeply anxious about the next two or three pre-election budgets. But what of budgets post-2015, what is our education landscape going to look like then in the face of figures that could make our next couple years look like a time of plenty?

Early rumbles and chilly eddies

In the light of these longer term uncertainties right now it would be fair to suggest that this is no storm but merely the early rumbles, chilly eddies, and swirls of looming black rain-filled clouds. Thankfully it is not too late to heed what few warnings there are and absorb what information our watchers and lookouts are passing on to us. We can begin to put plans into place, to design the future education landscape right now. We have been given unprecedented freedoms to shape our own profession and to tackle those deeply embedded problems that politicians and others have steadfastly ignored for decades. It's time to get a grip, to stop being afraid, uncertain and anxious,

and grasp this opportunity we have been given. Who better to solve these problems than visionary, skilful, and thoughtful practitioners? It is time to stop expecting someone else to solve our problems for us.

A refusal to drown in good intentions

As a skilled and passionate profession we have become expert over the years in doing pretty well, sometimes outstandingly so, largely in spite of the system we work within rather than because of it. In the noughties we faced an inconceivably deep and sustained flood of policies for over a decade and we refused to drown in that particular sea of good intentions.

We can just as successfully rise to this present and future challenge and ensure that we have a stronger, better, and truly world-class education service as a result. How might we achieve this? By setting out and vigorously applying a few clear principles:

- Every pupil must receive his or her full curricular entitlement, no excuses, and no exceptions
- Every primary schools, academy and multi academy trust should have no fewer than 840 pupils within it
- Each setting designs its own fit-for-purpose governance that is entirely skills based, to a maximum of six governors plus chair, and no quotas
- All governor posts will have a job description, skills set, person spec, and will be open to all suitable candidates, appointment through interview

The application of these principles (some of which will require changes in legislation, please note Mr Gove) will encourage smaller schools to cluster together, preferably in multi-academy trusts of up to ten or beyond. Even without changes to legislation, this model of primary academy chain is eminently achievable, right now, today. Within this highly achievable 840-plus pupil multi-academy trust model the academies have one combined board plus small local subcommittees. Through application to

become academies, ten small schools could accrue a working fund of £250k plus a further £25k for setting up a new chain. This would be used to convert the schools, analyse the business case, set up the Trust, design the management and leadership structure, mitigate risk, and to develop innovative, affordable, and sustainable ways of ensuring that every pupil has access to a full, world-class education. From being ten separate schools averaging perhaps 90 pupils each it becomes a powerful and sustainable multi-campus trust with 900 pupils. Mid-term plans might involve sharing just one SENCO, one business manager, one administrative team, one IT manager. Alongside which, staff from across the trust can run joint lessons, share expertise, CPD, lesson observations, learning resources, moderation of work, pupil data, planning.

Longer term plans should include not replacing Headteachers as they retire or move on, investing capital as part of a co-ordinated programme of relocation from unsustainable buildings, joining a nearby larger umbrella trust so savings could be made across a broader front but without any loss of autonomy.

Colleagues often say that solutions like the one above need visionary leaders with energy and drive to deliver. They are right, but don't we have a great many colleagues and governors who profess to have just these qualities? The solution above is just one possibility there are many more, examples of which are already out there. We need more ideas, drive and ambition and we need them now. And of course, a harsh truth is that no matter what cluster or multi-academy trust is available it won't be enough to save every school.

So do we just sit behind our crumbling barricades, listen to the poorly formed and indistinct warning voices, hunker down under the table, and hope that somebody else will provide a plan for our survival? Or do we take action ourselves right now and build for our children's futures and the schools that serve them? Time is running out, the hour is getting late.



Capital funding for academies

Mike Green, director of capital, Education Funding Agency, says academies can improve their chance of successful applications

When the Academies Capital Maintenance Fund was launched back in 2010 in order to prioritise funding to meet greatest need amongst academies, no one could have predicted just how oversubscribed it would become. In fact there hasn't been a round to date where bids haven't at least tripled the total amount of funding available. While the overall fund is proportionate to that allocated to Local Authorities for their maintained schools, capital funding for Local Authorities, schools and academies alike is much lower than it has been in the past. This means that we have had to prioritise carefully the limited funds available.

In the last edition Barry Featherstone likened the process to a 'lottery' with 'few winners and many losers'. Whilst I would not agree with it being characterised as a game of chance, he is correct in highlighting the simple fact that there is not enough funding to cover all the maintenance and expansion requirements each time. However, unlike a lottery, there are actions academies can take to improve their chance of success – and, on page 15, two academies tell us about their experiences.

The application process has been designed to be short and simple. Academies need to complete a single page form per project to make their case for funding. We advise academies to draw on information that they already have, such as building condition survey data, as evidence for their building needs. Less information is expected for smaller or simpler projects to minimise unnecessary bureaucracy. We expect academies with larger or more complex projects to be able to briefly, but adequately, demonstrate that they or their consultants have the appropriate skills and resources to deliver them.

Knowing what your project is and being able to convey your requirements clearly and concisely is key. What we have learned from previous rounds is that if an academy is having trouble and going way over the word count on the form, it may well be that they need to develop a clearer project plan. In some cases it

might actually be more than one project. It is worth bearing in mind that evidence that a project is vital to the operation of the school, has been thought through appropriately and is ready to deliver will be ranked higher.

In response to feedback from academies who submitted applications in the last round, we have brought the process forward for 2013-14. This will give academies the majority of the financial year in which to deliver the work on site. Whilst this means an earlier submission date than last year, we hope that this move will maximise the amount of works that can be done in the summer holidays – always a key period for all school capital projects.

The Academies Capital Maintenance Fund is currently the main vehicle for academies to access funding for their building condition needs, but this may change in the future. By improving the quality and consistency of condition data across the education estate the aim is that we can develop a more structured maintenance programme for all schools. This is what we are aiming to achieve with the Property Data Survey Programme, the most comprehensive survey of the condition of school buildings ever carried out, which is due to finish later in 2013.

The application process has been designed to be short and simple



Work at Midsomer Norton continues apace

Case study: Michael Johnson, Executive Headteacher, Chulmleigh Academy Trust, Devon

£1,822,600 approved in June 2012

Our successful bid to the Academies Capital Maintenance Fund was the best thing that has happened to our school and community for many years. Our students are excited about the building, its space and the pace at which it is being constructed.

Our bid was made after applying for planning permission (at risk) and provided us with an ambitious challenge of building a 12-classroom space with a performing space (total over 2000 square metres) for £1.8m, within eight months. Key to the successful bid was the realisation that all needed to be in place so that we could progress an excellent building within 34 weeks.

We discovered that working with partner professionals on this project was easier and more straightforward than via the Local Authority. Why? Because we are the client.

Before gaining the ACMF grant, we were on the Building Schools for the Future programme and were expecting something less for approximately £8m. Our high quality building will be constructed more quickly than it took to start the first sketches before BSF was withdrawn. Because of the speed of the build and necessity to complete by the 31st March 2013, there will be up to 70 workmen on site at any one time.

We have applied cost effective principles throughout this process, with public money to give us a permanent building with a long life and low operational costs.

The building will improve the quality of teaching and learning, provide classrooms our students and my colleagues deserve and help us in our drive to improve further.

Case study: Alison Wyatt, Bursar, Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership, Bath and North East Somerset

£987,000 approved in June 2012

Our bid was for a two-storey ten-classroom block to replace 10 existing temporary classrooms ranging in age from 25 to 45 years old. The Local Authority had declared some of these classrooms “at the end of their useful life” in 1996 and we felt we had a good case but the challenge was to convince the EFA of this while being limited to 275 words and six sheets of attachments.

We originally intended to put in a larger bid but it was clear that the level of funding required for the full project and the build timescale would not meet the ACMF deadline. We therefore split the project into two phases and bid for the first phase only. We were able to demonstrate significant building condition needs, and health and safety issues with the temporary classrooms, and backed that up with extracts from our Building Condition Survey and photographs.

The key was to read the criteria carefully and ensure the bid matched. We were able to demonstrate that plans were already drawn up and planning permission applied for. We submitted a programme for the build and a cash flow statement which demonstrated the money being spent to timescale. We demonstrated that we have experience of managing building projects on site and bringing them in on time.

Finally, by allocating some of our own funding to the first phase, we showed our commitment to the project and linked it to the second phase which we hope to bid for in a future round of the ACMF.



A mixed economy of schools, where no school is left behind

Stephen Twigg MP,
Labour's Shadow Education Secretary

There is so much to do to overcome the educational disadvantages that take root in many children even before they begin school. Academies were first established to overcome the persistent underperformance that had taken a hold in some schools; targeting low standards in areas of high social and economic deprivation.

The success of Labour's academies programme is documented by Andrew Adonis in his book, *Education, Education, Education: Reforming England's Schools*.

Andrew identifies four measures of success of Labour's academy programme: improved exam results, popularity amongst parents, positive impact on neighbouring schools and combating disadvantage.

I would add an additional success measure: academies have played an important part in strengthening the status and professionalism of education leaders. Academies have given licence to a generation of education leaders with bold ambitions, who refused to accept that failing and underperforming schools cannot be transformed.

Innovation in practice: The Harefield Academy and North Liverpool Academy

I want to draw on two examples of academies that I have visited recently.

Take Harefield Academy in Uxbridge. Under the leadership of Principal Lynn Gadd, Harefield is unrecognisable from the school it replaced in September 2005. It is not only raising standards and aspirations for its pupils and teachers; its impact is being felt right across the local community.

In pioneering a boarding house, Harefield is showing how state schools can bridge the gap between state and private schools, tailoring the education that they provide to meet the needs of individual pupils.

At North Liverpool Academy, Principal Kay Askew oversees a modern day, broad and balanced curriculum that aims to equip her pupils with the 'job skills' needed for the labour market of the future.

NLA has seen excellent progress, serving extremely deprived communities. I was struck by the prominence attached to vocational education at NLA, an increasingly important area in education in the years ahead.

We see in these academies an education built around the whole child. One rooted in the crucial foundations of numeracy and literacy. One that rejects the false choices that pitch academic versus vocational, skills versus knowledge, and rigour versus creativity.

Lyn and Kay are innovative leaders in education, leading confident, bold and progressive schools.

'A mixed economy of schools'

Excellence is not the preserve of any one type of school, it is the preserve of exemplary leadership.

Whilst we are seeing an increase in the number of academies and free schools, there is and will continue to be a mixed economy in the types of schools and if we are to achieve system-wide improvement, all schools – whatever their type – need to work together to ensure that no school is left behind.

Too often it is the case that poor children are served a poor education. According to analysis by Chris Cook for the *Financial Times*, the gap in attainment between rich and poor children narrowed in England during our time in government. Tragically, it remains the case that an individual's social background all too often determines their life chances.

The attainment gap at Key Stage 4 is only one measure. If we were to examine the core characteristics required for success, we would likely find that the gap is as pronounced in leadership skills, speaking skills or exposure to experience in a professional working environment. All of which we know to be crucial for getting ahead in life.

Research by the RSA has found that children from socially deprived backgrounds are served with a double disadvantage. If you are a child from an area of high social deprivation, you are disproportionately more likely to attend a school that is classed as underperforming by Ofsted.

The genesis for Labour’s academies programme was to launch a direct assault on this double disadvantage.

I’m concerned that in losing the focus on underperforming schools in areas of high social and economic deprivation, the positive impact of the academies programme might be diluted.

I worry that the principal foundations for successful early academies – that of collaboration and partnership – have been replaced by a fixation on a numbers game.

Today, hardly anyone thinks that Local Authorities should directly run schools, though there is still an important role for local government in education.

I am interested in a range of models that we can learn from. The London Challenge and the City Challenges have important lessons for us.

London’s secondary schools have gone from performing below the national average to being some of the best in the country. Key to this was a partnership approach and brokering

solutions that were not imposed. Innovation in partnership and collaboration is not limited to London. Nick Weller, Executive Principal of the four academies in the Dixons Group in Bradford, told me recently about the work being done between academies, neighbouring schools and the Local Authority in Bradford.

Bradford Secondary Partnership is a collaboration between the Local Authority, academy schools and maintained schools. It has identified performance in maths and English as a priority and has a recruitment and CPD strategy in place to collectively raise performance in these key areas.

This is the kind of innovation between Local Authority and schools that is needed to ensure that no school is left behind.

As Labour moves forward in its policy review, I look forward to continuing my dialogue with academies on the shared responsibility that is system-wide improvement across all of our schools.



Autonomy: the freedom to achieve, not an escape from responsibility

Government are not here to get in your way, says Minister of State for Schools, David Laws

The government is committed to giving schools greater autonomy. This is true for all schools: academies, maintained, and free schools. There is nothing partisan about this: local management of schools goes back to Ken Baker’s time as Secretary of State, while academies were pioneered by Andrew Adonis.

But while the policy is not partisan, it is ideological and it is evidence based. The government believes, very strongly, that no one knows better than a school what works in their locality. Autonomy is about giving schools the freedom to achieve great things. But equally it should not be seen as a freedom from the responsibility to educate pupils effectively.

That is why autonomy is matched with accountability. That accountability takes many forms. There is accountability to

parents, to governors and to ministers. And in some cases there is also accountability to a ‘middle tier’, whether the Local Authority or academy chain. Accountability comes in many forms as well, from publishing results, from formal inspections and so on.

Academies like autonomy. Ninety-seven per cent of academy principals say that they are positive about school autonomy. In contrast only 50% of community school Headteachers were positive about the freedoms available.

In part this reflects differences in school types: larger schools are more likely to favour autonomy. In contrast smaller schools are less likely to favour autonomy, perhaps reflecting the lesser extent of the managerial expertise.

Academies can have a real role in promoting the benefits of autonomy. Academies usually have larger senior leadership teams,

with more deputy and assistant Heads. The role of management is taken seriously, giving them the capacity to use their freedoms effectively. They can – and should – explain their practices to other schools, so that they can see the benefits of the approaches to management pioneered in academies across the country.

Today one in five Heads state that they are strongly supportive of autonomy. This group contains a disproportionate number of academy Heads. A third of Headteachers support autonomy on balance, while a similar number describe themselves as hesitant. An eighth are sceptical.

Spreading the gospel

Those who know autonomy allows them to improve standards and deliver education effectively need to get out there and talk to other Heads. The one third of Heads who are hesitant about autonomy are not opposed to it – they are willing to listen, to see the evidence, and be persuaded. And we all know that Headteachers are much more willing to listen to other Heads than they are to politicians of any stripe. Academy Heads, more than any other group, need to get out there and talk to their peers. They need to explain what they do, and set out the benefits for pupils from doing so.

The potential for autonomy to improve school standards is huge. We know that Britain has some truly outstanding, world-class, schools. And schools judged as outstanding by Ofsted are more likely to be run by Heads that favour autonomy. Autonomy, of itself, does nothing. But it does allow Heads, and senior leadership teams more generally, to innovate, and to try

new things. It gives them the ability to implement best practice when they see it elsewhere.

Support for all schools

It is not always easy to use autonomy effectively. That is why we are keen for all schools to have the capabilities to use autonomy effectively. Organisations such as the National College for School Leadership, along with national and local leaders in education, offer support for schools of all types. The same is true for teaching schools, and teaching school alliances. We are delighted that the evidence is that more and more schools are using these sorts of approaches to raise standards in so many ways. And we acknowledge – unfashionable though it may be in the pages of *Academy* – that many schools report that their Local Authority is effective at providing CPD for Heads and other school leaders.

The business of running a school has changed out of all recognition in recent decades. Heads are no longer ciphers of local or national government. Instead they have the power – and the responsibility – to run their schools as they think is most appropriate. That makes running a school a bigger challenge than ever before. It also makes it a more rewarding job than ever before.

Neither national nor local government is here to get in your way. Autonomy is for real. And as we have seen, outstanding Heads are using autonomy to run their schools in ways that are effective, creating outstanding schools that deliver high quality education that pupils need to flourish. That, surely, is something we should all celebrate and make the most of.

Those who know autonomy allows them to improve standards and deliver education effectively need to get out there and talk to other Heads

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The future of comprehensive education

The latest research will underpin teaching at the new Pimlico Primary, says Principal Annaliese Briggs

The physical doors to Pimlico Primary – South Westminster’s newest school and first co-located, knowledge-led, all-through academy – may not yet be open, but the foundations are being poured as I write; the doors have been chosen. The doors may sound like an odd place to begin talking about this innovative school, but like everything else at Pimlico, they have been chosen with great care, and like the building itself, they will be secured to a framework on the most solid of foundations. In curriculum terms, those foundations are the essential knowledge to which all children are entitled, and without which they cannot become truly skilled.

A pragmatic approach

Out of sight of the diggers, and in the shadows of the successful Pimlico Academy’s secondary school, an experienced and dedicated team is preparing for the moment that those doors open to welcome our first pupils in September next year. For all of us, those open doors will be the gateway for a new generation of South Westminster’s children, to the kind of educational success, equity and improved life chances not usually seen outside of the independent sector in education. We’ve taken a pragmatic approach to developing all aspects of our school. We’ve looked carefully at research on the most effective practices of independent prep and junior schools as our starting point for doing things better, and we have looked to the latest evidence from cognitive science and curriculum studies to be sure that everything we do is done because it works, not just because it is conventional.

Independent practice

What have we learned from independent preparatory and junior schools? That teaching according to discrete subjects is the skeleton. Accordingly our school day will be organised with timetabled history, geography, science, art and music lessons, in addition to the familiar diet of English and maths. Rather





A week at Pimlico Academy “will be filled with exciting stories, captivating images and hands-on creative work”

than using overarching and all-too-often superficial blended themes that leave behind essential knowledge, the structure of our curriculum starts with these solid subjects. This is not to say that a week of learning at Pimlico Primary won't be engaging. It will be filled with exciting stories, and captivating images, and hands-on creative and kinesthetic work, but whereas most reception classes look at toys in the past, our children will learn about the adventures and achievements of the Ancient Egyptians. They will learn about pharaohs and pyramids, and they will be able to see for themselves the preserved children's shoes from Ancient Egypt in London's British Museum. They will be able to locate Egypt on a map and a globe and they will know that the creation of luxury items of clothing such as shoes was made possible in Ancient Egypt because of the Nile. They will learn that the Nile is the longest river in the world – visible from space. They will learn that the Nile's waters enabled planned farming and the storage and trading of crops. Not having to worry so much about where a day's food may come from allowed the people to develop specialisations like working leather, like writing, like becoming artists. The curriculum will

satisfy and stretch the curiosity of our pupils and to do so with meaning and confidence, Pimlico Primary's teaching staff will work closely with The Curriculum Centre, leading lights on turning evidence-based curriculum reforms into workable and rewarding classroom teaching experiences. Within a culture of collaboration and with a united interest in developing our pupils' cultural literacy, The Curriculum Centre will support Pimlico Primary's staff to refine their use of knowledge in the classroom, to trust knowledge.

Developing cultural literacy

The kind of curriculum content and detail sketched out above is inspired by the tried and tested methods of E.D. Hirsch Jr. and his Core Knowledge Foundation. They have improved educational outcomes in both deprived and affluent parts of the US to the extent that the change in Massachusetts is commonly referred to as the 'Massachusetts Miracle'. Hirsch had worked with inner city children and found that even the brightest struggled to do well in educational terms when their background and cultural knowledge was low. His findings



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chimed with current work on how children learn words, and a new understanding of how the mind develops, to confirm the understanding that first a child must know things. Take reading, for example. In this country most foundation stages focus primarily on teaching generic reading strategies alongside phonics – the mechanics of pronouncing words. At Pimlico Primary we will teach phonics, and teach it systematically, but we will teach it using the kind of language and subject matter that will help our children not only in school, but in life too. They will learn about real leaders, the creativity of great artists, and scientific inventions, not just about publishers' fictional characters chosen because their names and daily routines fit tidily into a phonics programme.

From the independent sector we have also learned the significant impact on outcomes that comes from being able to teach younger pupils than is common in most maintained schools in specialist facilities and with specialist teachers. At Pimlico Primary, for example, the secondary school's science teachers will have a significant input into the teaching of science in Key Stage 2. Similarly in Key Stage 2 drama we will be able to use the secondary school's professional theatre because it will be only paces from our playground. At every stage in a child's

school career at Pimlico Primary we will provide parents with content-specific details of our curriculum, so that they are able to participate in and extend their child's learning, turning the pursuit for knowledge and, ultimately, cultural literacy, into a shared activity that thrives just as well beyond the school gates as it does in the classroom.

With its solid foundations and open doors, both physically and educationally, Pimlico Primary's opening will lead the way for the future of truly comprehensive education.

To find out more about Pimlico Primary at Pimlico Academy visit www.pimlicacademy.org/pimlicoprimary. For more information on the thinking and the work of The Curriculum Centre visit www.the curriculumcentre.org and for further reading about the effective practices of all-through and independent prep schools visit www.templegrove.org.uk/temple-grove-schools-trust/twenty-two-things.aspx

Like the new school building, Pimlico Academy is built on solid foundations





A bumpy journey – but still worthwhile

The Primary Academy Associate programme has been set up to answer questions and assist conversion, says Paul Smith, Principal of Parbold Douglas Primary Academy

I am the principal of a converter primary academy in Lancashire. I am a National Leader of Education and most recently a Primary Academy Associate. Parbold Douglas Primary was the first Church of England primary school to convert in Lancashire.

We converted to academy status because we wanted to carry on our journey to beyond outstanding and felt the best way for this to happen was to embrace the opportunities that academy status offered us, principally autonomy.

The benefits of academy status are there for all to see, but in honesty, they are there for numerous schools now and many of us have always been maverick in adapting national policy to fit our school. The main difference being an academy is that you can make these local decisions based on what is best for the children in your school without need to hide the exciting initiatives that set our best schools apart.

I now think it is more appropriate to think to the future and the benefits going forward. As pragmatists, an important skill for leaders to have, we have to make decisions that we feel are in the best interests of the children and take advantage of the changing landscape in education – we must accept that things are changing. Personally, I am excited by the prospect of formalising the successful partnerships we have built up in the past through the academy structure and bringing real difference to the education of many more children beyond those within the walls of our school.

In March 2011, along with other primary academy leaders, I attended a meeting with Lord Hill where we discussed what being a primary academy meant to us. I was struck initially by the variety of schools represented at the meeting, from large inner city primary schools to small rural schools in fairly isolated

positions. My own school is an average-sized one-form entry primary school.

At that meeting I raised the concept of establishing 'Primary Academy Champions'. The champions would be leaders of academies who would, on request, visit other primary schools and discuss with them what being an academy meant to them and their own personal journey. From this discussion, meetings were held between the National College of School Leadership (NCSL) and FASNA and the role of Primary Academy Associate was born.

Primary Academy Associates (or PAAs as we are also known) are not sales people, nor are they Department for Education enforcers. They are experienced school leaders who have been through the process of conversion and are willing to share their knowledge and experience of the whole process, warts and all. The first initial group of 15 Academy Associates met at the National College during the autumn of 2012 for an induction day to discuss the outlines of the Primary Academy Associates programme with Tom Clark, Chair of FASNA, and Paul Bennett from NCSL. It was a conversation between the newly identified group of school leaders, school business managers and governors, around our experiences of conversion, and how we thought that it we could help other colleagues to gain an accurate and real insight to the whole process.

So what does a Primary Academy Associate do? How much demand will there be?

My experience so far is that demand is not a problem, in that there are many schools making contact to ask me to come along and discuss the process. The really encouraging part so far is that governors have initiated most of the sessions I have been involved



in. I have worked with a broad selection of schools and groups and the work has ranged from meetings with just a couple of schools to large meetings with all the schools in an authority.

Regardless of the context of the session, the message is the same: academy status is a choice to be made by the governors of the school, it is not a difficult process and not something that only large schools can make work, it is about autonomy and freedom. In the large part the people I speak to as a Primary Academy Associate, are open to the process and actively considering it as an opportunity; however, some are less sure and often have legitimate concerns and worries. Conversion is not a process to be taken lightly.

From my own point of view, I have found the process to be an excellent way to reflect on my own learning and refocus on the vision that we discussed during our own conversion.

What do primary colleagues gain from our time?

I believe that the Primary Associate Academy is an excellent resource for schools who are either considering or have decided to go through the conversion process. As a school leader, it is always reassuring and hugely valuable to learn from the experiences of others. The key part of the Primary Academy Associate role for me is being authentic, telling it as it is. Colleagues have to hear all about the process – the good and the



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bad – hopefully dispelling the myths around conversion and the cost of conversion, but most importantly realising that whilst there may be some bumps along the road it doesn't stop it being a worthwhile or realistic journey for all schools.

I believe that the role of Primary Academy Associates with a specific focus on primary education is also a positive outcome of this. A concern I often voice is the threat to the unique skills of leading a primary school if we only allow secondary schools or large chains to become the sponsors. Leadership in a primary school is very different to that of larger organisations. This is a vital part of the Associate's role, to understand primary schools and their leadership, to help them see that academy status has the potential to enhance what they do, and is not a threat to it.

Information is vital

The other role of the Primary Associate Academy is to promote the idea that conversion is not only an option for secondary colleagues or chains, that through close working groups and clusters there is no size of school that cannot both consider and benefit from the freedoms that academy status brings with it. At this point information is vital, and many of us struggle to get the right messages at the right time picking out what is important, separating the 'wheat from the chaff' because of the challenging volume of information that flows to school leaders. PAAs can provide a source of information and advice for schools during their conversion, knowing what should be done and when, where to get funding and who to consult with. These are just some of the ways PAAs can support schools.

I and many of the other Primary Academy Associates start our sessions with the message that we are not there to 'sell' academy status; in truth I don't feel that is a necessity once school leaders hear what being an academy means. Associates instead share what they have done in their schools and how they have begun to use the freedoms afforded to them.

So my advice to any school who is either considering conversion or just doesn't know enough about it, would be to get in touch with FASNA, who can arrange for someone with real knowledge of the conversion process and what being an academy means to come and talk to staff and governors about the options that are available to them.

The main questions I am being asked by schools is about capacity. The message is that you don't have to be a huge school to benefit from conversion and even as a small school there are many exciting benefits to converting as a cluster such as considerable financial support for the conversion and the



benefits of economies of scale post conversion. I believe this, for many small schools, is the best way for them to survive the changes in the education system as well as to continue moving forward so that their children can profit from the best education possible.

Another question often asked is around the conversion process. The answer is quite simple; this is why we have legal advisors. The generous funding of £25,000 to finance the conversion process means you can buy in the best possible support to ensure the conversion process goes through smoothly with little or no impact on the leadership of the school.

The message is simple. Conversion is not a drain on the leadership; it does not appertain exclusively to large urban secondary schools; it is a viable option for schools of all sizes and will benefit the children who attend those schools.



Cuckoos flying the nest

Patricia Sowter CBE, Executive Head of Cuckoo Hall Academies Trust, on taking full advantage of the opportunities to improve education in Edmonton

When I took over as Headteacher at Cuckoo Hall Primary School in 2002 I did not envisage establishing an academy and free school chain.

For me it was all about improving education for children in a challenging area and, following my personal assessment of every individual child's literacy levels, my core task was to ensure that every child left Cuckoo Hall at Year 6 being able to read and write fluently. I was

dismayed that the majority of children at Key Stage 2 had reading ages below that expected and I knew that these children could not possibly go on to achieve at secondary school and beyond.

Keeping things focussed and simple has always been my approach. Too often school leaders become overwhelmed with bureaucratic demands and initiatives that have little to do with improving tangible outcomes for children in classrooms. I could only move forward

by concentrating on the basics – this was to train teachers and support staff to effectively teach reading, writing, spelling and mathematics systematically in lessons every day, and to rigorously and continuously assess every individual child's progress. From this fundamental beginning Cuckoo Hall went on to become an outstanding school in all areas, with standards and achievement well above national expectations.

Constant struggle

My constant struggle with unnecessary bureaucracy and the limitations of the Local Authority led me to be first in line to become an academy convertor in September 2010. I had worked with my governors to use any increased autonomy available to build on the success of the school. With success came the energy, drive and confidence to recognise and harness the opportunities becoming increasingly available to improve the education of children in Edmonton.

The demand from parents for good education in the area is overwhelming. Despite Cuckoo Hall expanding to admit almost 1000 pupils there was a waiting list of over 200 pupils year on year. This led to submitting a proposal to the DfE to open our own two form of entry primary free school on an adjacent site.

Woodpecker Hall Primary Academy opened in September 2011 and was immediately oversubscribed. An application to open a second free school was approved by the DfE, and Kingfisher Hall Primary Academy opened in September 2012. I initially intended to open with one form of entry at nursery and reception but we increased this to two forms due to parental demand.

So what have been the challenges in such rapid expansion to open new schools? Having encountered many obstacles to improving education for children over my educational career, I have been used to thinking outside of the box and using available opportunities wherever possible. I have therefore remained professionally optimistic about dealing with, and sometimes having to work around, the inevitable challenges that come with, what is undeniably

radical, and much needed, educational reform to improve education in our state schools.

The organisation and management of a small chain of schools has challenged my thinking in terms of overall effective governance and leadership structures. Questions arose in terms of the quality control of more than one school, and responsibilities. In 2011 Cuckoo Hall Academies Trust was set up (CHAT) as an overarching structure for governance and accountability. During the past year I have taken advice from Stone King and Place Group to work towards a robust governance model suitable for a growing organisation. This independent advice has been extremely supportive in terms of working directly with my governors to review and agree the management structure, the authority and composition of the CHAT board, the committee structure, and the make up of the local governing body for each individual school within the Trust. This has led to setting out the annual business cycle for the organisation and the development of terms of reference, reporting protocols and template documents. This is still work in progress, but I can already see the benefits of establishing transparent and tight governance structures to ensure accountability and efficiency across all CHAT schools.

Start-up success

Capacity building is an ongoing challenge. The success of the CHAT model is to deploy our existing outstanding class teachers and senior leaders to work in our new schools – this ensures start-up success and the implementation of tried and tested successful practice. This model demands

the continuous recruitment and training of new staff – I am constantly mindful that in opening new successful schools I do not want to undermine the quality of provision in the large ‘mother ship’ that is Cuckoo Hall itself.

Huge resources

We invest huge resources in to the training of new teachers year on year – it has long been a concern of mine that Newly Qualified Teachers are not sufficiently prepared to teach the basic skills, including the basics for managing a class and the behaviour of children. Although we have a great deal of success in developing and training excellent teachers, I was keen to develop this further by training our own teachers at PGCE stage – thereby ensuring that when entering their NQT year they were fully equipped to succeed. The training school model did not suit our particular needs, I wanted to focus entirely on ITT.

This was a seed of an idea when I met Professor Anthony O’Hear from Buckingham University. We struck up what is in my view a unique partnership between the state and private sector for training teachers. I advertised nationally in the best universities for successful graduates who wished to undertake an ‘apprenticeship model’ to train as teachers alongside outstanding teachers in CHAT schools. We decided to invest in this venture by offering a salary to candidates and paying for their training fees with Buckingham. In return trainees must commit to a three-year contract on becoming a Newly Qualified Teacher – in this way I would ensure well-trained teachers on an ongoing basis across CHAT schools.

The response from excellent graduate

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The demand from parents for good education in Edmonton is overwhelming

own ‘all through’ secondary school. Our proposal to open Heron Hall Academy has been approved by the DfE for September 2013. A recent open evening for parents was overwhelmingly successful – even without knowing where the secondary school site and building will actually be. This response from parents has negated any concerns I had about taking on another huge project – children leaving Cuckoo Hall with excellent levels of achievement deserve the opportunity to build on their progress. The percentage of pupils achieving good grades at GCSE in the locality is shockingly low, and a strong basis for our proposal is to provide a seamless transition from CHAT primary schools into Year 7 so that progress is continued. There will be challenges, and indeed the first major challenge is to procure a suitable site. However I remain cautiously optimistic despite the inevitable demands that lay ahead.

My philosophy is that if you aren’t willing to try and fail, then you will never try and succeed. In my view the time is absolutely right to take up opportunities to improve state education – there was a will to do this early on under the Blair government, particularly with educational thinkers such as Andrew Adonis who in his recent book *Education, Education, Education* makes it very clear that autonomy was considered necessary to improve schools. Michael Gove is taking this further and, on taking up office, immediately recognised the benefits of allowing successful schools to become academy converters, including primary schools. He has made it possible for new successful schools to open in areas, such as mine, where parents in the past have had to simply put up with poor educational provision. The educational landscape is changing, with still a long way to go but we intend to stay at the forefront of developments to ensure that children from all backgrounds have the education they deserve.

trainees has been extremely positive – this year we are training six graduates in partnership with Buckingham. Already we can observe the benefits of trainees working alongside outstanding teachers. I will be appointing graduate trainees for the new academic year as part of the School Direct initiative. This will enable some funding for trainees’

salaries – however, inevitably, the model isn’t as straightforward as our own and I am wary about becoming entrenched with unnecessary bureaucracy and the associated costs.

The next step

The obvious next step for our growing chain of primary schools was to open our

Words of warning; words of hope

Dr Colin Hankinson, chief executive, tells the story of the University of Chester Academies Trust

As with many things the beginning is a difficult and dangerous time and so it is with the development of academies; the much quoted advice given many centuries ago by Machiavelli in his book *The Prince* has a strong resonance here:

“It must be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to plan, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage than the creation of a new system. For the initiator has the enmity of all who would profit by the preservation of the old institutions and merely lukewarm defenders in those who should gain by the new ones.”

There is little doubt that as educationalists we are living through a revolution in state education unparalleled in recent times. A seismic shift in power and influence away from the Local Authorities to the rapidly growing academy sponsor and multi-sponsor trusts. We are faced with a greater pace of change than ever before and a much deeper sense of urgency over the need to deliver a rapid, enduring, life-changing upward shift in educational outcomes for all our students.

As we who are involved in academy trusts are all only too well aware that with increased influence comes greater responsibility. How we use our growing influence and live up to our responsibilities will define not only ourselves as individuals but the organisations of which we form a part, and it is the sum total of those organisations that together will have a significant part to play in the educational wellbeing of this country for many

generations to come.

With the rapid changes we have experienced in recent years we can perhaps be forgiven for a certain cynicism edging into our thinking. However, despite all the many difficulties and stresses involved in playing a part, however small, in the creation of a new system, I have no doubt that ‘academisation’ will ultimately lead to the creation of a state education system in this country that will be the envy of the world and will provide a firm base for all our children to learn, grow and become all that they are capable of becoming.

Complex issues

Of the many complex issues involved in the growth of academies perhaps the most interesting is the rapid growth of a comparatively small number of multi-sponsor academy trusts into organisations of significant size and influence who are together responsible for hundreds of academies, many thousands of students and billions of pounds of assets and funding.

Consider the following: as of September 2012, the largest academy multi-sponsor trust has the responsibility for over 60 academies; the second largest over 30; a number of them have 20-plus; an increasing number have over ten; at least one trust has stated publicly its intention is to aim for in excess of 200. Many sponsors have one or two academies and the number and diversity of sponsors becoming actively involved in academy development is growing significantly and is now in excess of 300 and escalating rapidly.

In any organisation, any expansion

strategy must give consideration to the overall size of the market and the fact that the number of schools available to become academies, and potentially become a part of a multi-sponsor trust, is finite. One major concern developing from this is that a natural cap to market growth and a limited time to reach that cap may motivate some trusts to expand at a rate that diminishes their ability to deliver consistent high quality outcomes for all their students. Rapid growth may come at the expense of overall quality of educational outcomes. It is vital therefore that central to any multi-sponsor trust expansion strategy is close consideration of the key factors involved in blending quantity and quality.

The growth strategy adopted by any individual trust is of course for them to decide. I can only speak for the multi-sponsor trust that I have the great privilege of being the CEO for and that is the University of Chester Academies Trust (UCAT). The University of Chester entered into academy sponsorship in 2008 and became the lead sponsor of the University Church of England Academy in Ellesmere Port. Since that time the University’s involvement has intensified to the point that it formed the University of Chester Trust (UCT) in 2011 as the vehicle for academy delivery, with the University of Chester Academies Trust as the operational arm of the UCT. It is four years since the University’s initial involvement, UCAT now sponsors eight academies, six as lead sponsor and two as co-sponsor.

The development of UCAT should be viewed in the context of the almost

paradigm shift in the structure and delivery of state funded education that has taken place with an ever-quickening pace over the past decade. The original concept of the modern academy developed as a radical solution to the deep-rooted problem of the persistently failing schools serving the most underprivileged communities. It was a desire to contribute to this important transformational agenda that prompted the University of Chester to become involved with academy sponsorship.

Happy and productive

UCAT evolved in response to the DfE's rapid expansion of its definition of the type and nature of an academy school to incorporate convertors, free schools, UCTs, studio schools *etc.* The rationale behind the development of UCAT centres upon the creation of an academy multi-sponsor that could respond quickly and effectively to a rapidly changing educational reality and deliver high quality teaching and learning to the largest number of students offering them a firm foundation for a happy and productive life.

From the beginning, for UCAT the focus was firmly on 'quality' as an essential precursor to 'quantity', the development of high quality staff, systems and processes structured to deliver consistent, sustainable improvement for all our academies was and still is at the core of everything we do. In 2012 UCAT's existing secondary academies (each of them a phoenix rising from the ashes of seriously underperforming predecessor schools) produced an average GCSE result increase (5A*-C including English and Maths) of 8.7%; one of, if not the most, pronounced improvements of any academy chain in the country. UCAT's academy in Liverpool was the most improved high school in the city and the UCAT academy in Northwich, Cheshire (UCAN) was the most improved school in the Cheshire West and Chester LA. Perhaps the greatest indicator of a consistent upward trajectory is shown by

our first academy opened in Ellesmere Port (UCEA). It received a regional School of the Year award at the end of its first year of operation and by the end of its third year had almost doubled its GCSE results. It would, I feel, be reasonable to say that UCAT is now successfully at the end of its beginning, but what comes next? How do we translate our hard-won success in the north-west of the country into national success; how do we maintain 'quality' whilst developing 'quantity'?

Setting up a multi-academy trust takes considerable time and resources. UCAT has over time developed a highly successful model for school improvement that we are now enhancing and expanding nationally via a network of Local Lead Partners (LLPs). We are very much aware that in order for the academy movement to achieve the heights of its billing, it must be fully inclusive in relation to the type and nature of its sponsors. The value that other HE and FE institutions can bring to the movement is incalculable as is the benefit of outstanding/good schools or private sector business or indeed the traditional independent schools; all have a part to play in making our educational system world class. By working together we can offer local solutions to a larger national educational agenda. The benefits of becoming a UCAT Local Lead Partner

will vary depending on the type of organisation and the local context but, in essence, it is active academy involvement allowing for the unique skills and identity of your organisation to lead the local academy development but with a much reduced financial and reputational risk. UCAT has developed considerable understanding of how existing educational and business institutions operating as academy sponsors can deliver consistent improvement in a rapidly changing educational landscape. We are developing our contribution to the national academy agenda based upon an obsession with quality and a consistent drive to improve standards in all the academies we are involved with. We aim to do this by working with prominent Local Lead Partners who will form a strong local focus and understanding that will enhance and be enhanced by the national UCAT family.

Despite all the many challenges that we face at this time (and there are many) one thing I am absolutely sure of is that we have a duty both as professionals and as human beings to embrace this unique opportunity wholeheartedly. The development of academies has already started to change lives for the better and will continue to do so with ever increasing certainty for generations to come.





An appropriate body?

Dr Mark Thompson, Deputy Head of the Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership, argues that the current system of appropriate bodies for new teachers fails to address the issues of quality and quality assurance

Headteachers across the country are still coming to terms with the new ‘zero tolerance’ approach to school scrutiny and inspection implemented by Michael Gove this year. Schools will be inspected with less than 24 hours’ notice, while new capability procedures will allow Heads and governors to dismiss the worst performing staff in just a term. Michael Wilshaw declared in February 2012 that there should be “no excuses”, arguing that “we have tolerated mediocrity for too long”.

Yet beyond the hue and cry in the press surrounding inspection, capability and the worst performing staff, comparatively little attention has been focussed on the quality of new teachers entering the profession, and their early professional development and assessment. We know it’s important. We know that the performance of pupils is not substantially determined by class size or new buildings, but by the quality of the teaching that pupils experience. And even those not so convinced by research suggesting this strong connection between teaching quality and learning are likely to share the aspiration of having a teaching profession constantly reinforced by an influx of high quality new recruits who without exception receive in their first year of teaching the best levels of challenge and support.

Form filling

Notwithstanding all this, with the recent rapid rise of academy conversions, we appear to have drifted into a ‘marketised’ network of appropriate bodies – made up principally of Local Authorities – whereby we in effect pay lip-service to quality assurance, while schools inducting newly qualified teachers are charged for what can in effect appear to be little more than a glorified postal service. In some cases, this can mean a relationship whereby the sum total of a school’s relationship with the appropriate body can come down to a bare minimum of form filling: end of term assessments are completed in school and relayed to the appropriate body for signing off.

There is all too often no shared model of effective induction practice, and certainly no checks to ensure that effective support is in place and that the trainee is both rigorously assessed and effectively supported. The result is that the quality of new entrants to the profession and the support they receive sit outside any effective external scrutiny, challenge and proper validation.

This is not to say that the framework isn’t there. Statutory guidance for the induction of newly qualified teachers makes very clear the role of the appropriate body. It “has the main quality assurance role within the

induction process”. This is a function that should not be taken lightly, taking in as it does the task of ensuring that schools are meeting their responsibilities for induction, ensuring monitoring, intervention and support, and making the final decision on whether or not at the end of the first year of teaching, a newly qualified teacher is performing satisfactory against the standards, or whether an extension may be needed.

Rigorous scrutiny?

Given these guidelines, and in the climate of ‘no excuses’, we might expect rigorous scrutiny of new entrants to the profession and the support they receive to ensure a high quality education for pupils. Beyond a focus on degree classification, however, comparatively little attention has been paid to ensuring that we get the very best entrants to our profession and the very best induction in our schools. Across a range of schools, many colleagues I work with have painted a familiar picture of the current situation. Universities face financial imperatives that drive them to fill PGCE places as a priority. Schools report target-driven pressure to award ever higher grades and a marked reluctance to fail all but the very weakest of trainees. We then add to this the fact that the NQT induction year is not properly scrutinised or quality

There is nothing in the system run by the Local Authorities to monitor or check up on the support their trainees get. They take in the money and leave the question of quality well alone

controlled, and so will therefore vary widely in effectiveness and rigour.

Weak trainees

The overall effect is that the reluctance of universities to fail weak trainees is compounded by a system that then allows the quality of induction to escape monitoring and control, and a similar reluctance on the part of Local Authority appropriate bodies to involve themselves in quality assurance. Around 30,000 new teachers enter the profession each year, of these only about 15 fail to complete their induction year successfully.

The way that schools describe the current situation paints a picture of a race to the bottom, with Local Authorities competing on price to offer a service that in practice means little more than ‘signing off’ on an NQT’s forms. A school in Lancashire described their search for a cheap provider leading to a contract with the Local Authority in South East Kent, charging just £350 per trainee per year, “We do all the mentoring and planning. They provide telephone support and the

all-important sign off.” Other appropriate bodies are cheaper: one Midlands LA and another on Humberside charge only £150 per trainee for the final “sign off”, a similar figure to that charged to the secondary schools in our partnership by Bath and North East Somerset.

The common thread here is that the fee covers administration, but does not in practice allow for assessment of either the quality of the school’s provision for the trainee or the quality of the work of the trainees themselves. A school in Gloucestershire noted how they have flagged up failing trainees only for the appropriate body to arrange a visit where a representative of the appropriate body would “watch them (the teacher) and make a few recommendations on how to improve”. Additional provision is seen as piecemeal: “They offer courses, they’re not free, and we don’t use them”. The uniformity of schools’ responses suggests to me that this is a characterisation that may well ring true for the vast majority of schools. There is nothing in the system run by the Local Authorities to monitor

or check up on the support their trainees get. They take in the money and leave the question of quality well alone.

Positive, constructive support

The first year in teaching is such a tough and vital one for the newly qualified. What is needed is an approach to induction that ensures that positive, constructive support is consistently available across all schools, applied to a willingness to ensure that trainees not able to offer pupils a good quality of education are not simply nodded through at the end of the year, in some cases only to meet a storm of ‘zero tolerance’ and capability procedures after subsequent years in the classroom.

The answer has to lie in a clear model of effective practice and the operation of a rigorous system of quality assurance that both challenges schools whose support falls short, while supporting schools’ judgements of the competence and skills of trainees. This may cost a little more than the current free-for-all, but surely something has to change.

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Not easy, but worthwhile

Lee Gray charts Tudor Grange Academy's journey to become a Teaching School and innovative ITT provider

Tudor Grange Academy Solihull (TGAS) was accredited as a school-centred initial teacher training (SCITT) provider in May 2012. The journey to accreditation took 15 weeks from start to finish and was not an easy one.

Representatives from all teaching schools were invited to a dissemination event in London during January 2012. The teaching agency outlined how academies wishing to become accredited providers for initial teacher training were to be encouraged and guided through a less bureaucratic, streamlined system that required evidence, not in the form of proposals and audits, but rather through the documentation required to actually deliver a high quality programme.

After deciding we could offer an innovative programme we prepared a business proposal and attended a scrutiny meeting in Manchester where we were given the go ahead to prepare the full documentation required. The next eight weeks were hectic to say the least. It was necessary to draw on the good will and expertise of up to 20 members of a dedicated staff to help produce subject handbooks, mentor handbooks, quality assurance documentation, financial plans, assessment software and course content.

Research and professional study

It was important to Tudor Grange that the programme should offer something new and innovative. Trainees had to gain something extra from our course in order to justify the efforts of TGAS staff. At the heart of our programme is the belief that the most important thing a trainee teacher has to do is demonstrate that they can meet the teaching standards to gain the award of qualified teacher status (QTS). However, we also wanted trainees to understand that research and enhanced professional study play an important role in developing teachers, not just during the training year but also beyond. We explored different options

but finally established the Tudor Grange QTS + 60 programme where trainees complete their QTS with Tudor Grange alongside 60 M level credits with the University of Cumbria.

Cumbria were able to provide a very flexible model allowing trainees to link action research to their teaching in order to focus Masters-level work in areas of personal interest to them. It allows us as an academy to focus every element of our professional studies course towards the teaching standards whilst dovetailing with twilight and online sessions for the Cumbria Masters credits.

Marketing and recruitment

After a one-day inspection and detailed scrutiny of all documentation, we were accredited as a SCITT in May. From here the pressure really started as we had six weeks to recruit high quality graduates to a new programme at a time when most universities had been recruiting for eight months. A quick lesson in marketing and recruitment paid off as we interviewed many candidates from whom we recruited eight high quality trainees in maths, chemistry, biology and modern foreign languages. A rather testing part of the interview process was that the trainees had to deliver a 15-minute lesson to a class. We provided a framework and some basic guidance on how to structure such a lesson and we were astounded by the quality that many of the candidates managed to demonstrate.

Our QTS + 60 programme started in September. So what is different about it compared to the more traditional routes? Our trainees are treated as members of staff from day one. This meant we had to be very careful about the sort of induction programme we provided. We had to balance an understanding of the systems and processes at TGAS; including rewards, sanctions, ethos, vertical tutoring and software training with an introduction to what it means to be an outstanding teacher?

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All of the trainees stay at Tudor Grange for the majority of the year, which brings many benefits in terms of continuity and being able to integrate fully and live and breathe the academy. It also brings some potential issues such as having three trainees in one department and a perceived pressure on timetabled classes. However, this has not been a massive issue for us as we have designed the course to break down every aspect of a full time teacher's responsibility. Our trainees team teach, deliver sessions to small groups of pupils and then rotate. They work one-to-one with pupils who have low levels of literacy, they deliver as part of our collapsed timetable two hours a fortnight where teachers lead sessions based on 'enrichment expertise' rather than subject, they also deliver sessions to classes of 30 pupils.

The QTS + 60 programme allows each trainee to work on small areas of practice in detail so that they can begin to combine and integrate them into full lessons. By seeing how they can influence progress with an individual or a small group, trainees are able to fully experience positive relationships and formative assessment processes before being expected to manage the many added dimensions that working with a full class can bring.

Trainees also spend a total of six weeks in two other academies (Tudor Grange Worcester and Alderbrook). They have intensive three-week blocks where they receive a blend of seminars and

interactive sessions along with teaching sequences of lessons.

All of this development is monitored closely by experienced mentors who are all outstanding practitioners in their own right. Mentors are observed regularly by trainees and model the practices discussed during professional studies sessions. Trainees complete an online e-portfolio of their evidence and experience, which is accessible to mentors for immediate feedback. Both of these elements allow effective dialogue to develop.

Excellent progress

After one term, all trainees have made excellent progress. We have received excellent feedback from our first TA inspection and trainees' evaluations have highlighted that they feel they have made the right choice. It has been an incredible year. The accreditation process was a whirlwind of productivity tempered by the fact we had taken a risk in terms of the timing. However, within the first few weeks of the QTS + 60 programme starting we knew that the academy was benefitting immensely from the presence of trainees and that we had developed an innovative and high quality teacher training experience. It is an absolute privilege to be able to guide and mentor trainees to become great teachers and we look forward to employing as many as we can within the alliance and seeing them develop further in the coming years.



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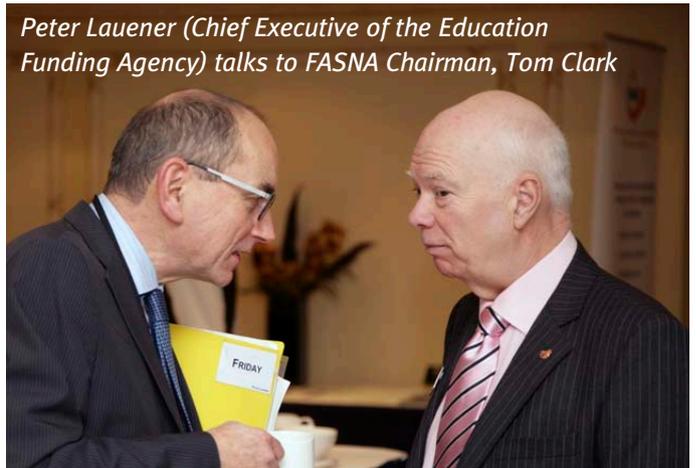
Lively debate and informative workshops at the Millennium Mayfair Hotel, London

Despite wild weather and the annual onslaught of flu, the turnout at the Autumn FASNA conference was excellent. With first-class keynote speakers, workshop leaders and professional advisers, the day achieved what it set out to do: inform and inspire school leaders.

The day began with Janet Holloway standing in for Glenys Stacey (the chief executive of Ofqual who was unable to attend due to a bereavement). Janet is Head of Reform at Ofqual. She was able to bring us up to speed on challenges being faced and the role they have in advising the Government on hand and regulating the exam boards on the other. Of course, the role of Ofqual with regard to GCSEs is a hot topic and subject to judicial review, so some questions were off-limits. However, the inevitable question was asked: who should resign if things went wrong – the Secretary of State or the Head of Ofqual? Her presentation, hampered by a failing voice, was nevertheless articulate and painted a clear picture. She made it clear that Ofqual felt A levels were fit for purpose but there were question marks over AS levels. Janet managed admirably to conclude the session, giving forthright answers to questions that were testing and searching. Was the move to having one exam board for each subject the best way forward? Do universities really want to play a role in A level reform?

As this session was primarily of interest to secondary schools there was a simultaneous seminar with Kevin Eveleigh, Head of

Peter Lauener (Chief Executive of the Education Funding Agency) talks to FASNA Chairman, Tom Clark



Peter Beaven chairs an Ofsted discussion, with Richard Barnard and Keely Folker from Coopers Edge Primary



Delegates listen attentively as Janet Holloway speaks about the role of Ofqual



Barnby Road Primary School, discussing primary competitive sport, entitled Reality v Legacy (expanded on later in this issue of *Academy*). His lively session was entertaining yet thought provoking and had delegates talking sport.

The opening session was followed by smaller workshops. School funding was facilitated by Stephen Morales, finance director at Watford Girl's Grammar, and Corrina Beckett, bursar at Barnby Road Primary, and was chaired by Tom Clark. In attendance was the deputy chief executive of the EFA, Lindsay McManus, who explained how so much is dependent on Treasury processes and procedures, overseen by the National Audit Office, and how it was taking a long time to force change but that progress was being made and matters were becoming simpler. There has been improvement and more is expected. School forums were much in the thoughts of the attendees and it was clearly requested by FASNA as a matter of urgency, that discrepancies of any nature need to be recorded and passed on by the membership, particularly at this early stage in the Forum's development.

Contracts, unions and appraisal formed much of the performance management sessions, led by Mike Griffiths, Principal of Samworth Church Academy, and Sonia Case, Head of Dulwich Hamlet Junior School, and chaired by Janet Aldridge. Stone King were well positioned to provide a legal view on a broad

range of practices that were identified. Appraisal driving school improvement was exemplified through ethicaltraining.com and the use of IRIS, a video-based system that empowers teachers to reflect on, analyse and share lessons, was cited as a good resource.

The Conversion workshop, led by Richard Edwards, Head of Nicholas Hawksmoor Primary, and David Wilson, chair of Governors at Christ The King RC School, and chaired by Joan Binder, gave a good all-round view of the management and governorship of academies. Looking at umbrella trusts, sponsorship, grants and pensions, Richard, David and Joan were key experts and able to cite examples and interpretations dispelling myths and vague perceptions and stating it as it is.

The Ofsted session run by Richard Barnard, chair of governors at Robinswood Primary, and Keely Folker, Head at Coopers Edge Primary, was chaired by Peter Beaven, editor of this magazine. It offered lively debate on key results and an exploration on how to achieve 'good' in each of the four areas. Schools must know how different groups of children are performing; lessons need to be consistently good, the wow factor is not so important, key skills and marking will be looked at. And finally, the key question: what do governors need to do and show! Critically, they told delegates to ensure that governors know how the Pupil Premium is spent and what impact it is having. They need to be able to show how appraisal is supported by CPD and what TLR payments are achieving. A thought

Keely Folker, Headteacher of Coopers Edge Primary School, explains her recent successful Ofsted experience



Baroness Sue Campbell, Chair of UK Sport spoke on confidence and continual improvement and marginal gains.

Janet Holloway, Head of Reform at Ofqual, stood in for Glenys Stacey despite losing her voice



Janet Holloway, Mike Griffiths, Principal of Samworth Church Academy, and Helen Hyde, President of FASNA



Kevin Eveleigh, Head of Barnby Road Primary School, points out some red herrings!

provoking and informative session that had delegates debating their circumstances with each other.

An open business meeting led by Tom Clark took place immediately following lunch and news of FASNA's activities were presented. Peter Beaven announced FASNA's bid to become an appropriate body for NQT Induction. David Wilson prepared the delegates for the forthcoming initiative FASNA members will be invited to contribute to, Free the Children, whose mission is to create a world where all young people are free to achieve their fullest potential as agents of change. Peter Lauener, the chief executive of the EFA, also spoke and reiterated that the bureaucracy will become simpler as time progresses.

The icing on the cake was the inspirational presentation by Baroness Sue Campbell, Chair of UK Sport (and also on the panel of the BBC Sports Personality of the Year award 2013). Sue outlined the task she faced when she became Chair of UK Sport in 2003. Her task was to focus funding across all sports to increase the medal tally in the Olympics. She described how she had achieved this: Great Britain had been 36th in the Atlanta Games of 1996, tenth in 2000 and 2004, then under Sue's leadership fourth in Beijing and third in London. This remarkable achievement was the result of persuading the 47 sports to operate in a more analytical way and identify the key factors required to improve performance and linking funding to their action plans. The presentation was an exemplar in senior management training; the headlines were: unlocking the potential of your staff; changing the culture; confidence and continual improvement and marginal gains.

Sue then linked her talk to sport in school. She wanted to emphasise the importance of physical literacy in primary schools and the need for secondary schools to learn from the independent sector where someone is charged with organising extracurricular sport; co-ordinating teams, activities and coaches.

The questions that followed were insightful and went to the core of the issues affecting FASNA members. Asked about the removal of funding from School Sport's Co-ordinators, Baroness Campbell emphatically said she was opposed to this. When asked if there was any new funding on the horizon she was not in a position at the time of the conference to answer the question but the reticence and careful wording showed she was deeply troubled that representations from primary school Headteachers on this issue had not been fully appreciated.

The conference was concluded by a legal update from Stone King Solicitors, focussing on changes to employment law schools need to aware of. This rounded off a good day.

I was inspired, informed, challenged and empowered by being with a group of leading educators faced with keeping freedom and autonomy rolling forwards. The venue, on Grosvenor Square, was easy to get to and offered adequate comfort and refreshments – it was great!

Jonathan Evans is managing director of John Catt Educational, publishers of *Academy* magazine



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Improving access to our best universities

The Sutton Trust are playing their part in ensuring that our best universities are open to all, regardless of their background, says Conor Ryan

Each year, around one in ten of the young people who gain the right A levels fail to get into one of our leading universities. Many of these 3000 teenagers are from low and middle-income families, who feel that an elite university is not right for them. But those universities are a gateway to the best jobs and professions, and to lifelong networks.

The Sutton Trust has been promoting social mobility for 15 years, from the early years to higher education and the professions. Widening participation and improved access have become a part of the political agenda in that time.

Universities are set benchmarks for state school participation and we have more data than ever about participation by young people from different neighbourhoods or family backgrounds. This year, Cambridge announced that 63% of its intake is from state schools compared to 52% when the Trust was founded.

Yet, despite such progress, the uncomfortable fact remains that the top five independent schools, including Eton, sent more pupils to Oxford and Cambridge between them over three years between 2007 and 2009 than 2000 state schools and colleges – two-thirds of the total – across the UK. Pupil destination data now show that schools with similar results have very different numbers going to Oxbridge.

To make it easier for able pupils from state schools and academies to fulfil their potential, the Sutton Trust supports a number of programmes. Our summer schools, week-long campus-based residential programmes, provide students from non-privileged homes with the chance to experience life and study at a leading university. More than 10,000 young people have benefitted since 1997, and the model has been adopted by the Government and other universities.

Sutton Trust summer schools are run at Bristol, Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh, Imperial College London, King's College London, Nottingham and University College London, with 1500 places next year. They help demystify elite universities and equip students – most of whom will be the first in their families to go on to higher education – with the knowledge and insight to make strong applications to prestigious universities. In 2012, for

the first time, we organised a summer school at Yale for 65 UK students interested in studying at American universities.

Summer schools help young people decide the right university. However, it is vital that young people study the right subjects and gain the right grades if they are to make a successful application. The Trust organises a number of specific activities focussed on boosting mathematics interest and attainment, and improving applications.

Substantial improvements

The Cambridge STEP programme supports young people from state schools who have received a conditional offer to read mathematics at the university. With a four-day Easter school for 70 state school students each year, there have been substantial improvements in the take up of places to read maths at Cambridge by sixth-formers from less affluent homes.

The Oxford Pathways programme offers sustained support to students in Years 10-13 to help them make strong applications to Oxford. The Sutton Trust funds 'prep' days for Year 12 and 13 students with focussed advice and guidance around Oxford admissions.

We also organise specific 'Pathways' programmes of mentoring and application support for young people. Pathways to Law, based on an Edinburgh University model, widens access to the legal profession by giving talented non-privileged youngsters a two-year programme including mentoring by law undergraduates and work placements at law firms. The initiative is jointly supported by the College of Law with leading law firms, and involves seven universities and 400 students per year. We are keen to develop this model in other professions.

We also work to raise aspirations from an early age. Despite the introduction of tuition fees, aspirations to go to university remain high: over 80% in this age group think they are very or fairly likely to enter higher education, according to Ipsos-MORI. But there are some worrying signs.

Among those who don't think they will go to university, 36% of students from single parent households believe their family

couldn't afford for them to be a student compared with 13% of those in two-parent homes. Older pupils are more likely to cite worries over getting into debt as a reason for saying they are unlikely to continue into higher education.

And 63% of pupils think that elite universities are more expensive for students than other universities, even though most universities charge a similar £9000 fee, and 52% think they are mainly attended by those from wealthy backgrounds; 27% think that elite universities are 'not for people like me'.

Valuable mentors

But there remains the challenge of explaining that elite universities generally cost no more than other institutions, and that they are open to all those with the right grades. Successful students can themselves be valuable mentors. The Brilliant Club, which we fund, brings PhD students into schools to encourage bright students from disadvantaged backgrounds to secure places at leading universities.

Founded by two Teach First ambassadors, the club places PhD students in schools in low participation communities. They deliver university-style tutorials to outstanding students from Key Stage 2 to 5, developing the skills, confidence and ambition needed to secure places at leading universities. It is currently working with over 40 schools in London, Birmingham, Essex and Luton, but we hope it will grow in the future.

Teachers and leaders in schools and academies are in the frontline when it comes to lifting aspirations, and in encouraging their pupils to maximise their potential. Worryingly, some teachers underestimate the chances of their students winning a place in a leading university, particularly Oxford or Cambridge, and this can impact on those missing 3000.

Separate Ipsos-MORI polling earlier this year for the Sutton Trust showed just 44% of teachers in state-funded schools would encourage their most able students to consider applying to Oxford or Cambridge. By contrast, only 16% of teachers always encourage their academically gifted pupils to apply to Oxbridge, while 28% usually do so.

Perhaps even more worrying was the fact that a majority of teachers greatly underestimated the proportion of state school students at Oxbridge. Only 7% correctly guessed that over half of UK students were from the state sector. Most assumed it to be 30%, though in fact it is nearly twice that proportion.

Of course, universities themselves need to do more to work directly with schools and academies, to dispel such misconceptions. It is through such outreach work, more than through bursaries, we can do most to widen access.

Improving social mobility in England requires a concerted effort. Getting it right would ensure that we made the most of the abilities of every young person. Doing so would not only help individuals to get on, it would enhance our society and boost our global competitiveness.

Through our summer schools, research and other projects, we are trying to play our part in ensuring that our best universities are open to all with the ability to succeed, regardless of their background. Working in partnership with schools, academies and universities, it is vital that together we do all we can to harness the talents of all our young people.

Conor Ryan is director of research and communications at the Sutton Trust. For more about Sutton Trust summer schools visit www.suttontrust.com/summer-schools



Sutton Trust summer school students touring Yale (photographer Helen Carey)

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Russell Group universities: our doors are wide open to talented and able students

Russell Group universities prioritise providing an excellent education and student experience which offers lasting benefits to our graduates and society as a whole

The UK is a world leader in higher education and ranks second only to the US in the number of world-class universities. Having a cadre of universities with a global reputation really matters for both the education they offer and the research they carry out.

The UK needs to produce the outstanding workers, leaders and citizens of tomorrow. The benefits of high-quality research-led teaching that is offered by our leading universities are a large part of the reason why they are so popular with students and held in such high esteem by employers.

We aim to produce graduates who are good at problem-solving, are entrepreneurial and able to work both independently and within a team. We do this by providing access to leading thinkers and researchers; world-class libraries and facilities, and a highly motivated and talented peer group.

It is a model that ensures we continue to produce capable, self-motivated graduates of the highest standard who succeed in a global employment market. Ten of the top 30 universities in the world, as ranked by employers, are Russell Group universities.

The quality of our higher education system is crucially important to our economy and society as a whole. It contributes more than £8.2 billion to the UK's overseas earnings.

Human capital

The UK also needs to produce research of the highest quality as this is key to growth. Two years ago our report showed that just a small number of breakthroughs at our universities had generated a combined wealth of almost £2 billion. Universities play a key role in developing human capital and helping businesses gain competitive advantage through collaboration on research.

But research does not only produce economic benefits – however important that may be at the current time. Research and innovation, in its many guises, can transform our lives and

reach areas we may never have thought of – from addressing sectarianism to making food production more efficient.

In order to continue to be among the world's leading universities it is in our interests to make sure we are not overlooking the brightest and the best undergraduates.

We are wholeheartedly committed to ensuring our doors are wide open to talented and able students from all backgrounds, provided they have the ability, potential and determination to succeed on what are very demanding courses.

We recognise that poorer students are not as well-represented as their middle-class peers within our universities but it is important to understand the root causes of the under-representation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The key reason why too few students from disadvantaged backgrounds even apply to leading universities is that they are not achieving the right grades in the right subjects at school.

Universities can and do help. We actively seek to persuade bright but disadvantaged candidates to apply. Many of our members sponsor academies and work directly with schools, including with pupils from a young age or where there is little history of young people progressing to research-intensive universities. We conduct a whole range of activities designed to address the different factors which hold some students back; they include identifying gifted and talented pupils, providing mentors, running Saturday classes and running extended degree programmes.

Our universities also run summer schools to provide taster weeks at leading universities and outreach activities – including visits for pupils and free conferences for teachers – to explain what students need to achieve.

We also offer millions of pounds worth of bursaries for students from poorer backgrounds. But we simply cannot solve these problems alone. School attainment, advice and aspirations

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* Insurance Times, August 2011

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We are concerned that the overheated debates around university finance have distorted the facts among many young people and their families

must all be dramatically improved if we are to remove the real barriers to fair access.

Young people should choose the A level subjects which give them the best possible preparation for their chosen degree course, or which keep as many options open to them as possible.

Poor advice

But in some schools students are not getting the right advice and guidance on the subjects to study – meaning many good students haven't even done the courses they need to apply to the most competitive courses and universities. Universities need students not only to have good grades, but grades in the right subjects.

The Russell Group has published a guide, *Informed Choices*, and an accompanying film, to help students pick the A level subjects that are most commonly asked for so they have the greatest number of options.

Informed Choices is aimed at all students considering A level and equivalent options and it should help improve information about how subject choices at school can impact on university applications. It includes advice on the best subject combinations for a wide range of university courses and advice on the best choices for those who want to keep their options open.

Good early advice is essential; we can't offer places to those who don't apply. There is evidence that even with good grades state school pupils are much less likely to apply to top universities than those at equivalent fee-paying schools.

When prospective students do apply then A level and equivalent grades are the key source of information about academic ability and the best predictor of degree success.

But Russell Group universities already take a range of factors into account to ensure that we can identify the candidates with the most talent and potential to excel on our courses, whatever their social or educational background.

The candidate's academic success is therefore considered in a broader context and assessed individually and holistically. But whatever barriers students have faced, admission to university is

and should be based on merit and merit alone.

Despite the hype, fees have not deterred students this year. In fact since the introduction of fees, Russell Group universities have attracted more students than ever from non-traditional backgrounds.

But we are concerned that the overheated debates around university finance have distorted the facts among many young people and their families.

Sound investment

Going to a good university is a sound investment for the vast majority – with no up-front fees, repayments only when they are affordable and generous help with living costs, money worries shouldn't stop anyone from applying.

Although the headline rate of courses in many universities is £8000-£9000 a year, generous fee waivers and bursaries mean that the average fees at Russell Group institutions in England will generally be well below the maximum.

The first year of the new funding system was always going to be challenging and uncertain. Ironically, the student support system is still highly subsidised by the Government which therefore has to be careful about limiting costs as much as possible; it does this by keeping a control on the overall number of places offered to students.

This meant that this year the Government's policy of re-distributing some places to different institutions, largely on the basis of lower fees, resulted in our universities having fewer places to offer to students with grades below AAB, as these were limited. We hope the change to ABB next year will help.

Our universities are looking forward to welcoming the brightest and the best from schools up and down the country, including of course FASNA members.

Dr Wendy Piatt is director general and chief executive of the Russell Group of universities



Raising the participation age

How can local government, academies, schools and colleges meet the challenge together? Gina Bradbury, Head of UCAS Progress, explains

From next year councils, academies and schools must tackle a range of new statutory obligations towards the continued education and training of teenagers.

UCAS – known for university admissions – has launched an online service that can help meet these responsibilities by allowing young people to search and apply for post-16 courses such as A levels, BTECs, and apprenticeships from one place.

UCAS Progress (ucasprogress.com) went live as an application system at the start of October and received over 7000 applications to courses in the first eight weeks. As you read this, I'm sure that number will be closer to 10,000.

Courses on the system range from engineering and hairdressing to mathematics and history, and students take ownership of an online profile that enables them to return and complete the application form at any time.

Part of the popularity of the system lies in the fact that it can be accessed in the classroom with teachers alongside to advise, or at home with parents offering a helping hand. It's designed with today's tech-savvy teenagers in mind, and can be viewed on mobile devices like tablets as well.

A total of 58 councils in England are signed up to UCAS Progress in some

form. This makes it the largest provider of course search and applications services for secondary education in the country.

Increasingly we are working with academies and schools sitting outside Local Authority client areas who recognise the value of using UCAS Progress to attract cross-border students. They also see the benefits of using Progress to manage internal applications from students wishing to stay on at their current provider.

The more schools and Local Authorities who subscribe, the greater UCAS Progress' value will be. The website has already been visited over 200,000 times (with around four million page views), since it launched as a full application system on 1st October 2012.

It is early days, but I'm sure these numbers are evidence of a strong desire across education sector for a complete post-16 application system.

We believe passionately that the service can become a powerful means for learning providers and LAs to support the delivery of Raising the Participation Age (RPA) and to identify young people at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training).

As you'll be aware, the demands of RPA will become a reality from summer 2013 when young people will be required to stay in some form of education or

training until the end of the academic year in which they turn 17. From 2015 that requirement will extend until their 18th birthday.

We want to work with learning providers of all kinds, as well as councils, to equip students with the tools to understand the opportunities available to them. That could be applying for courses in their existing school or exploring options further afield.

UCAS Progress also helps learning providers and councils to meet the 'September Guarantee', ensuring that each young person will have an offer of a suitable place in education or training after their compulsory education is over.

The system also allows the tracking of participation for destination data.

Already focussed on England, UCAS Progress has also launched a bilingual version in Swansea. Longer-term ambitions include a roll out across the UK.

Search, Apply, Inform

There are three components: search, the single online course directory; apply, the application tool; and inform (currently in development), providing information and advice.

Search was launched in September 2011, and is a single online directory offering searches and map views, based on location and distance the learner

is willing to travel. For providers and support staff, Search makes reporting and administration much easier, as well as being a great marketing and profile-raising opportunity. All of this comes with strong resources and training.

Apply, the single online application system, launched in October 2011 and is already proving itself. Institutions can use it for reporting, tracking, and data supply, and there is also data to support Local Authority, provider and careers education guidance (CEG) targets.

Supporting Search and Apply is Inform, an online information and advice resource, which will grow incrementally, containing comprehensive, high quality materials and training resources as well as signposting to other resources.

UCAS Progress' heritage

UCAS Progress was created at the start of 2011. It brought together the UCAS 14-19 and S-Cool programmes, as well as our seven years' experience delivering Area Wide Prospectuses and the Common Application Process to many of England's Local Authorities.

Against a backdrop of big changes across the sector, the evidence shows that UCAS Progress offers a dynamic, agile solution to education and local government that simply wasn't there under old systems.

Through just one website young people are now able to research learning opportunities, irrespective of local boundaries.

UCAS Progress provides comprehensive information on learning opportunities for all young people at the crucial ages of 13 and 15. It is backed up with an efficient and effective means of application, free from cross-border issues.

UCAS Progress

Rollout and the future

The UCAS Progress team cares passionately about young people and about helping them make the right choices as they look beyond their GCSE year to the future.

We want to equip young teenagers with the information and tools to understand the opportunities available to them. We recognise that higher education isn't right for everyone, but we believe everyone has the right to information and support to make informed decisions about their future.

Our solution is currently focussed around Key Stage 5 options, but as we get UCAS Progress embedded we want to enhance our coverage of Key Stage 4 choices.

We see UCAS Progress playing this valuable role in helping academies, schools and colleges meet their obligations to provide impartial IAG and reports in support of destination data.

We will also be working directly with state and independent schools, academies,

colleges and work-based learning providers in areas where authorities are not in a position to support the process.

Whilst currently focused on England, UCAS Progress is also beginning to work in Wales, and longer term has ambitions to roll out to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

I'm delighted with our rate of growth and the way that UCAS Progress has been embraced by the sector so far – but there is still some way to go.

We want to be a sustainable and embedded resource for those charged with supporting young people in making the right decisions.

For further information
on UCAS Progress, go
to ucasprogress.com, or
contact UCAS Progress
on 01242 544870 or
ucasprogress@ucas.ac.uk

Realise the potential of school improvement planning



School improvement planning has the power to make a big difference to pupil attainment, yet most academies have yet to fully realise its potential, says Keith Wright

It would be almost unimaginable today for a school not to have systems in place that helped them accurately track and measure the attainment of pupils.

Management information and pupil assessment systems have become commonplace in schools and academies because they make it easy for leaders to analyse a student's progress so that teachers can target support where it is most needed.

Ensuring that no pupil falls through the net and that every student meets or exceeds their potential is a number one priority for every school leader.

But in order for them to fully realise these ambitions they need to look at 'backroom' school improvement processes such as CPD, performance management and development planning as much as what happens in the classroom.

If school leaders have a clear view of what's happening in these areas they can make sure everybody plays a part in reaching school development targets. It also means that leaders can identify which staff members need more professional support and everyone gets recognition for the contribution their work makes. The result is a better run school in which pupils prosper.

We know these processes have a big impact on pupil performance. The Teacher Development Trust for example

highlights a New Zealand study showing that classes whose teachers had taken part in high-quality professional development improved twice as fast as those in other classes. It also showed that the 20% of pupils deemed 'least able' made improvements up to six times faster than their peers in other classes.

Strange, then, that the vast majority of schools in England and Wales today – around 85% – simply don't have the means to track and manage these improvement processes in ways that make it easy for them to use the information and act on it. The fact is many leaders think they have that 'clear view' but when compared with schools that use modern day tools, the gap is quite staggering.

Most schools still follow the standard information gathering approach, usually involving hyperlinked Word documents, over-complicated spreadsheets or lever arch files destined to sit on an office shelf.

Money, time and complexity are the main reasons why this approach still persists. It's too tricky to get that intelligent view with a PC spreadsheet because it takes too much time to mine the data, interpret it in various ways and link it to evidence. I've seen for myself some wonderfully creative, DIY documents which at first appear to be a massive step forward for schools. But after

a few months, it becomes quite apparent that maintaining these tools is a full-time job which can't be sustained because there aren't the resources. Another downside of this approach is that these 'homebrew' tools often become unstable and this frustrates school leaders when they need to access accurate information.

As well as clouding a school's view of what it needs to do to keep on improving, this traditional approach could also create problems with Ofsted. The body now wants schools and academies to give full account of the improvement processes that ultimately have a huge impact upon pupil attainment. It wants evidence that the SLT knows the school's strengths and weaknesses, that leaders are immersed in self-evaluation and that development plans are focussed on improving teaching and raising achievement.

These are compelling reasons for schools to change, yet most still have a bit of a blind spot in this area. I worry that this reluctance might be a sign of a deeper, age-old, issue: a fear of change.

All school leaders and their staff are open to change if it means tangible improvements. But human nature is what it is and some schools think it better to avoid the discomfort and continue as they have always done.

I believe the intelligent management

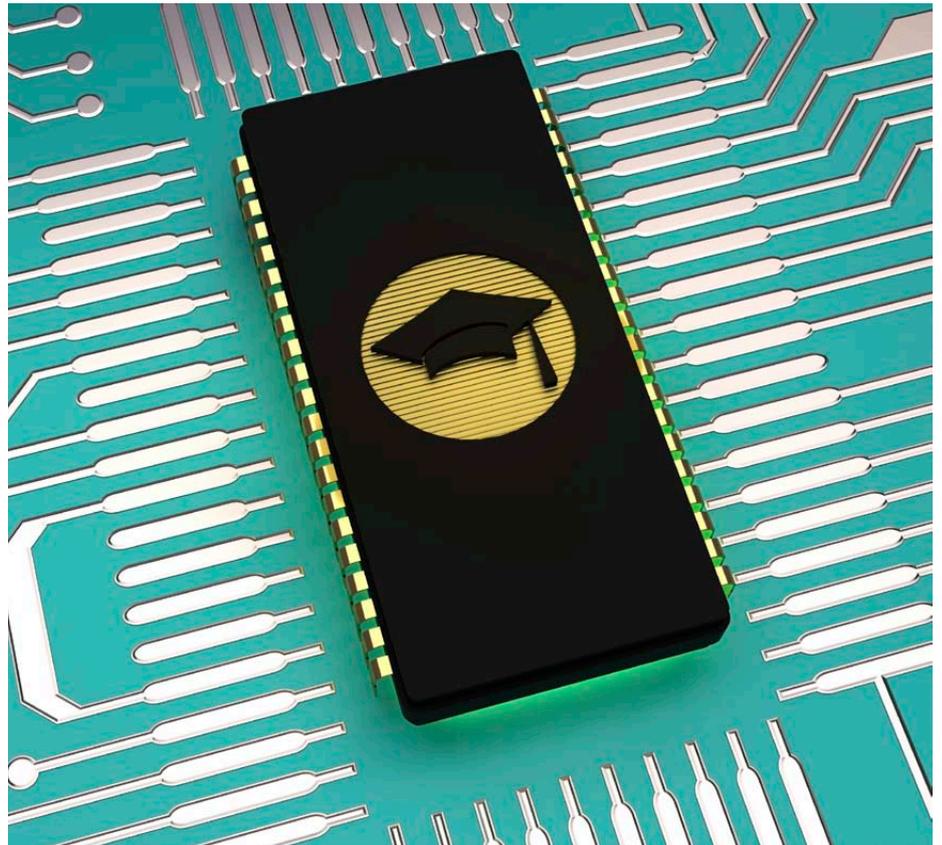
of these processes will help leaders and their staff overcome these fears. School improvement planning and the monitoring of impact shouldn't be about cold data crunching. We need to use technology to support people in their development and let them make a real contribution to school objectives. This applies equally to individuals following their own career path and large organisations trying to make sense of the bigger picture. Essentially, it's time to adopt modern day business practice for the business side of things so that the number one priority, education, is informed, evidence-led and free from the burden of bureaucracy.

For example, if a school's performance management systems show that staff need some professional development in a particular area it would help if they were given the means to evaluate that CPD themselves and back this up with evidence that it is making a difference – or not. Many leaders will claim they already do this, but are the methods they use sustainable, accessible and above all, do they solve the old problem of how to produce evidence of the impact of CPD on pupil achievement?

This is easier said than done with traditional tracking and management methods but it is achievable using the online school improvement planning systems that are now available. These systems can unify staff rather than alienate them, giving them a voice in the change management process that otherwise might not be heard. This is about staff having ownership and control and it helps dissipate their fears about change.

The issues around school improvement planning that I pointed out earlier are likely to become even more pronounced for leaders of groups of schools, such as academy chains, federations and trusts.

Recently I've been spending more time working with groups of schools, helping them to address these issues. They are all faced with some common challenges. The chief one is how to reduce the time spent on school improvement planning across their schools while ensuring that there



Most schools are still using “hyperlinked Word documents, over-complicated spreadsheets or lever arch files”

is consistency in tracking, management, reporting and ultimately quality assurance so that it makes it easier to manage and deliver support where it is needed.

In these situations the quality assurance of member schools becomes a pressure point because of geographical distance. A teaching school will, for example, need to monitor the progress of teacher training students and the quality of its ITT provision.

With online systems the miles don't matter as much. This gives school leaders the means of reviewing the schools from where they work and target support where it is needed.

As the UK education system becomes more diverse, with academies at the forefront of this transformation, there is now an even greater need for schools to manage themselves as effectively as possible. Paper and spreadsheets might give schools data about their school improvement processes, but it won't be

easy to interpret or act upon because it will be so difficult to manipulate.

It really is time for schools to get a clear, intelligent view of improvement processes like CPD, performance management and development planning so that they can meet the demands of accountability – and help staff help pupils achieve.

Keith Wright is managing director of school information management business Bluewave.SWIFT (www.bluewaveswift.co.uk).

Over the past decade he has worked with hundreds of schools as well as local authorities and overseas education ministries, advising them on raising school standards through the use of school improvement support systems



Reality v Legacy: round one

Kevin Eveleigh OBE, Headteacher at Barnby Road Primary School, Nottinghamshire, asks for realistic expectations on primary school sport take-up following the Olympics

I am a primary Headteacher with the same resources after the Olympics as I had before the Olympics. I love all sport. I love sports clubs. I love competitive sport. I know what sport can do for the ethos and health of a school, but...

All the lovely media pundits and 'experts' telling us it's "now down to the schools"; all those interviews with children about being inspired by the Olympics; all that genuine excitement and expectation. It's all good – but when such weighty expectation and inferred promise meets actual reality someone will be held accountable and we may have an accident waiting to happen.

We've got to get the reality across to all these 'experts' and 'pundits' who don't work in primary schools, those looking in from their lofty glass towers, looking up from action plans and thousand-page statistical audits examining 'outcomes' instead of reasons.

We have to state our position; we need to explain the feasibility of our position and share what's 'doable' and what currently is not. What we in schools see as obvious so often gets lost in translation as it is handed through one lofty sports body to another.

Size does matter

The average primary school must be around the 220-pupil mark; we're talking seven or eight teachers only. I sometimes think the DfE thinks we're all large secondary institutions. Take out one night a week for a staff meeting. Of those seven teachers, two or three will be leadership team members, so take out another night. I figure that leaves room for netball and football but little else, with those volunteering teachers putting their marking and preparation further back into their family evening.

Today's multi-faceted, accountability curriculum?

Those seven teachers in 'average primary school' will have responsibility for a list of curriculum subjects and initiatives that only began to exist this decade. A list so long it couldn't be tattooed on a Premier League footballer's arm.

Let me expand on the point that is blindingly obvious to all of us: a primary literacy co-coordinator, currently hammering phonics lower down the school, responsible for SAT results, Key Stage 1 and 2 assessment, safeguarding, healthy schools, visits and trips, behaviour policy, e-safety, sex education, swimming,

transport, road safety, EAL education, first aid and secondary liaison and (I nearly forgot) also responsible for teaching and learning in her class of 30 children in ten curriculum areas – is also now asked to be the sports co-ordinator.

And the smaller your school the longer the list. We all know it.

We can't actually get there

These grandiose offers of sport and facility and competition from our wonderfully equipped secondary PE departments, football stadiums and centres of excellence: how very urban. Great if you live next door to the facility; impossible if you don't, and the huge majority of us don't. To get there our little primary schools need transport. Put a foot on a coach and it's costing an arm and leg in diesel. So the teacher spends every free minute outside teaching, tracking down parents to help with cars, checking their insurance, hoping they're safeguarded. The less affluent your catchment the fewer offers you get. It's an art form in itself and something these elite 'experts' have never had to do.

Who's doing the cover?

You take out a team to an in-school time competition organised by your generous secondary school, but who's looking after the 20 you can't take, back in Y4? A lack of cover will mean Heads will say 'no'.

If you don't recognise existing good will from teachers, why would you expect even more?

Good will is how competitive sport in primary schools has survived at all. It's those special 'volunteers' (so celebrated at the Olympics) who are out there every week and never celebrated. I'm not even sure it's money they would want because they tend to be people who are passionate – or doing the job because no one else would.

Who's going to organise it all?

I was a fan of our sports partnership and was an SSCO as a Head, when there was some time to plan proper events. But now there is too much time spent on how to be a leader and how to do huge audits and action plans, and not enough on

“Let’s stand up for ourselves before the wave of blame hits us”



real sporting opportunity. Today I help run the district school sports association. I spend my own time planning the league and tournaments but it needs someone properly recognised to sit down and be allowed to do it as part of an identified role.

Kudos for sports staff? Are you serious?

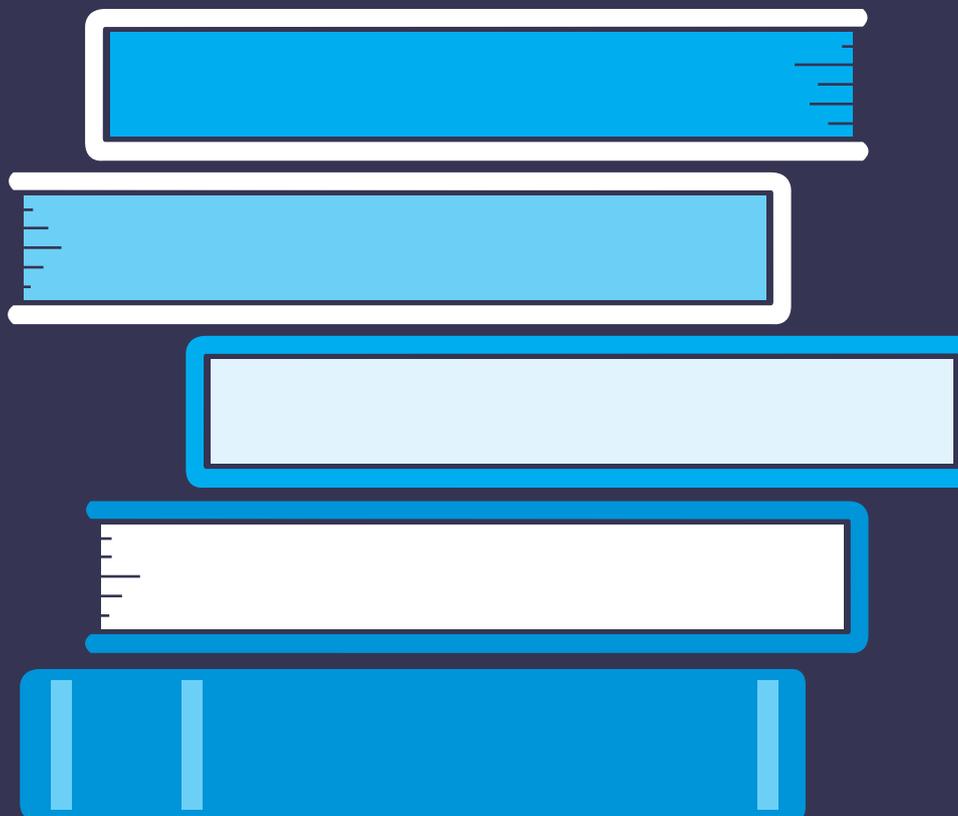
When I were a lad, I was actually promoted for doing sport. That died a death. Then suddenly the sports partnership raised it from the dead and now sport is teetering yet again. It’s a huge role demanding organisational skills, planning time and personal time. Give it some status. Perhaps a ring-fenced £1000 allowance like a SENCO, if a TLR can’t be afforded. When Heads had to spend money and give cover to SSCOs, sport had some status and got their attention.

Headteachers priority?

Heads are pragmatic people. They read the runes; clutch their Ofsted framework; track their pupil premiums; change their appraisal systems; and live with next year’s possible Raise Online statistics embedded in a newly-discovered part of the brain. You could forgive them for not having Olympic legacy or competitive sport anywhere near their A-list.

Girls’ sport: you’ve handed it to the boys

We need to move away from politically-correct gender equality in our teams and protect some sports just for our girls. Even at age 9, 10, 11 I see too many girls deferring to boys on our sports fields. A small group of girls under a netball hoop in the corner, a large herd of boys chasing a football. We haven’t



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We're up against an industry that didn't exist in the same intoxicating fashion 20 years ago. I hear it every day: "I can't wait to get home and play my new Xbox game."

protected any of their single-sex sports. I love mixed teams and welcome girls breaking into traditional boy's sports but it's not enough. Girls' sport needs protection. The Olympic netball team wouldn't have had men in it.

Facilities are a big red herring

I don't believe sold-off sports fields are an issue for 99% of us: I think it's a red herring, point-scoring for politicians to play with. I see facilities all over the place that didn't exist in most prior childhoods. Many of our greatest sportsmen of all time had nothing like the access out there today. A decent passionate primary teacher can create wonders on an old tarmac yard (although obviously better if she had far more).

The opposition and instant gratification

The PlayStation and Xbox racks up your scores, increases those levels of difficulty and offers no glass ceiling on performance. It can be private and it doesn't judge you as such. You don't even need to leave sofa or bedroom to take part. *FIFA 2012* lets you be your hero. We have to make clubs fun, full of reward and more challenging. We're up against an industry that didn't exist in the same intoxicating fashion 20 years ago. I hear it every day: "I can't wait to get home and play my new Xbox game."

Why do competitive sport at all?

I think because for one millisecond when any child catches a tennis volley, slides the perfect pass or makes the perfect jump, they become Andy Murray or Steven Gerrard or Jessica Ennis and understand. It doesn't really happen when practicing skills (which is always vital). To my mind as many children as humanly possible should have the chance to play competitive sport and they all deserve that feeling. Few other experiences come near.

Teacher training expectancy

Once upon a time, we all had to do a second subject and complete a PE module as primary phase teachers didn't we?

Independent schools do it better

I can't believe anybody would have to ask why. Firstly, let's largely discount medals in horse riding and, to a degree, rowing (good rowing rivers are not available to most of us). It's simple: most good independent schools (and they are genuinely very good at competitive sport) don't have to deal quite so much with the other points above. They often have children on Saturday mornings; have a whole afternoon of sport in the week; and many of the biggest ones have children boarding with more control over children's free time. When I drive down any motorway I realise that private schools know the value of good mini-buses. They tend to split sports classes by gender. They also have more money to buy in coaches and easier systems to pay them. Independent schools know the value of sport for ethos. They spend money on great facilities and know its value as a marketing tool. There are many things we can learn from but this is a million miles from having a level playing field for state schools.

So let's stand up for ourselves before the wave of blame that will inevitably follow behind the Olympic euphoria hits us. Let's ask to start with the lines marked and the field of play established, before we all have to begin another initiative that, in this financial climate, could never match the funding of the old.

Face reality! Accept what we do and build on what we really have, otherwise another top down sporting initiative will go to waste.

Kevin's OBE was for three 'outstanding' headships and his 35 year passion and work for primary school sports. He was recently invited by the Secretary of State to support discussion on the issues facing primary schools in sport

If GCSE is broke, how should we fix it?

Tony Ashmore reviews an invitation seminar organised by the National Education Trust and hosted by Eton College in November 2012

The final stages of the drive to the seminar seemed like a metaphor for the current state of the GCSE: the stop/start of the Slough traffic lights, finally to arrive at the College following signs to a car park that led away from the rooms where learning takes place, down an ever narrower road to a construction site where, in the afternoon gloom, it was difficult to discern what was being built!

So is GCSE broke? A straw poll amongst Heads and teachers present gave a resounding 'yes' vote, with only a few in the 'not quite' or 'not yet' camps. Welcomed in the 1980s as heralding the end of the divisive two tier O level/CSE system, greater variety in assessment, and a single platform for the full range of post-16 routes, what's changed?

In large measure, the accelerating pace of change in the labour market, coupled with increased accountability of anyone who provides a service and of those in authority. In response to pressures to up-skill the nation's workforce, governments increase demands upon the education system. This translates to pressures to drive up attainment as measured by public examinations, most notably the proportion of 16 year olds achieving five or more 'good' grades at GCSE including English and maths.

The levers of accountability are pulled ever harder – floor targets for the proportion of A*-C grades, league tables and Ofsted ratings dominate the lives of Headteachers.

Quantitative measures of success come to dominate, with reliability of measurement being key to credibility. An ever-sharper focus on measuring the measurable is the result.

Thus we have moved, over the quarter of a century since GCSE was introduced, from an education system concerned with developing the whole student to an examination system in individual subjects certifying those aspects of learning amenable to this method of assessment. Or so the critics of the qualification argue.

Add to this the raising of the age for remaining in education and training to 18, and a qualification that was designed as a school-leaving certificate is viewed by many as an unnecessary and unhelpful interruption. Throw in concerns about the doctrine of equivalence (that a GCSE in history equates to a BTEC in

hairdressing – both are valid, yet entirely different, so why compare?) and fitness for purpose becomes very difficult to defend.

So, how should we fix it? This is where consensus currently eludes us. If the group convened by the National Education Trust is anything to go on, and it included an experienced group of practising Headteachers, there are broadly two camps: those advocating a much reduced role for examinations, and those who view external assessment as vital for driving up standards and school accountability.

The midpoint, not the end

According to Tony Little, Headmaster of Eton College, 16 year olds are at the midpoint, not the end of their upper secondary education, so GCSEs add little value. They seriously interrupt education and are used unfairly by universities to discriminate between students two years before entry. An exception may need to be made for literacy and numeracy: development of skills in these areas is fundamental so national tests at 16 could be helpful, even necessary.

Tony Little referred to calls from the Secretary of State for schools to develop more creativity in their students. More inventive structures for learning need to be developed, including opportunities for collaborative work. Assessments should be adapted to the aims of the curriculum. He argued that where examinations are appropriate, teachers – given the authority and responsibility – are more demanding in assessing their own students than the current exam system.

A contrast was provided by Sally Coates, Head of Burlington Danes Academy. Whilst she agreed that 'GCSE is broke', calling the 2012 row over English a "fiasco" and the "final nail in the coffin", she considered external examinations as essential. Too many children read and write falteringly when they are 11, she maintained, leading to disaffection by the time they are 14. She described a desirable system ahead in which, after the age of seven, children receive specialist teaching in English, maths and science. At age nine they would take tests to ensure they are achieving.

From age 11, setting by ability with rigorous assessments every year would be the norm, leading to national examinations



*Is GCSE broke?
Most Heads
voted 'yes'*

in English and maths at 14. Thereafter students would take exams in other Ebacc subjects; there should be no coursework assessments. Post-16, full apprenticeships should be available alongside other provision which should include opportunity for extended projects.

Joan McVittie, ASCL President, wisely reminded the audience that more than half of all secondary schools do not teach beyond age 16, and therefore a full range of examinations at 16 remained essential to hold schools to account and provide students with the certification they require.

Six attributes

Peter Hyman, Head of School21 in Newham, described how his 4-18 free school is rethinking the purpose of the curriculum. An 18 year-old leaver should have developed six attributes: professionalism (attitude to work and other people); grit (resilience, well-being, morality, character, leadership); spark (ingenuity, problem solving); craftsmanship (creating beautiful work, depth of learning); eloquence (oracy, speaking in a range of settings); expertise (knowledge, ways of thinking like an historian, a scientist, *etc*).

If this is what is wanted, then different pedagogies, and teachers who are not only subject experts, but mentors and teachers of English, are required. The assessment system should be focussed at the age of leaving and be an e-portfolio of examples of work, awards and observations by teachers.

What to take away from the collective wisdom of the speakers and their audience?

First: the current government likes international comparators, and points towards high achieving education systems elsewhere. Where education extends to 18, there are no intermediate exams at 16. The McKinsey consultancy studied how education systems improve: to become good requires strong management, conformity and adherence to process; to become great

requires nurturing excellent teachers and a culture that allows them to inspire learners. Arguably, the focus on process and accountability has already made most of our system good, and further improvement requires a change in approach.

Second: high standards of literacy and numeracy are pre-requisites, and an examination regime can drive these. Otherwise, institutional improvement comes from supporting and enhancing the skills of the professional working within them. Reserving to external agencies the responsibility for major aspects of course planning, assessment, moderation and judgement weakens schools and diminishes the professionalism of those who teach within them.

Third: assessing students is an everyday activity for teachers as they plan lessons and provide guidance. Should external assessment be reserved for the time when a student finishes studying a particular subject? If so, could it take the form of external moderation of the internal school process? Ofsted inspections could provide public reassurance about individual schools, and sampling of attainment by a national agency could give government the information it needs to inform national policy.

The seminar's overall conclusion: the education of 14-16 year olds in England's schools need not be dominated by examinations, invented in a different era, which try to serve too many purposes. If not altogether broke, GCSE is faltering. All sides of the profession will need to work together over the coming year to secure its alternative.

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Communication across the curriculum

Ofsted inspectors are now looking at how well communication is applied across the curriculum. Maxine Burns, I CAN Secondary Years lead communications advisor, looks at the implications

Speech, language and communication skills are now part of national policy. Ofsted's framework includes communication as a key skill in inspecting literacy across the curriculum, yet many teachers and Heads want more information and support in how they respond.

These developments have been welcomed by many organisations including I CAN, the children's communication charity. There is a compelling body of evidence that highlights a connection between oral development, cognitive development and educational attainment.

Inspectors are now looking at how schools embed communication across the whole curriculum and students' individual communication skills. Their training has included some interesting background information including the fact that vocabulary at age five is a powerful predictor of GCSE achievement.

The importance of speech and language skills at secondary

Young people need good speech, language and communication to achieve at school, make friends and succeed in the workplace. Yet in the UK, more young people struggle with these skills than people realise.

It is thought that 10% of all young people have long term and persistent speech, language and communication needs and one study showed that in an inner city area, up to 75% of secondary pupils had limited language.

These young people are at greater risk of developing emotional, social and behavioural difficulties affecting their ability to achieve their potential. Vocabulary development at secondary age is the tool for academic achievement. If a young person struggles with spoken language, they will most likely struggle with reading and decoding information.

Secondary schools have traditionally struggled to know how

to fully support young people's communication and how to identify when a young person is struggling. Surveys have also highlighted that in today's classrooms; too much of what goes on is teacher talk – up to 90% of the time. Reducing this provides more opportunities for pupils to develop their own speaking and listening skills and aids their engagement and learning.

What works in the classroom?

Ofsted's focus is looking at how well pupils develop speech, language and communication. Secondary-aged pupils learn in a different way to how they learned in primary school. They need to understand and use language in a more abstract way, more removed from their personal experience. These skills are known as Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) and the ways that teachers talk are crucial in supporting pupils to develop them.

The following strategies, taken from I CAN's Secondary Talk programme, will help academies to identify skills that aid their pupils understanding and increase pupil interaction and independent learning skills in the classroom.

- Teach students how to work effectively in pairs and groups. Too often pair work is an opportunity for the most articulate to further develop their communication skills while the less confident can be invisible. Many students need to be taught how to communicate through being explicit about good team working skills. Assigning students roles with prompt cards, for example, helps to structure their conversations.
- Help students become more independent learners by teaching the sort of language they need to reflect on and extend their thinking.
- Periods of silence are needed to allow all pupils to assimilate new information, process what they have learned and formulate an answer. Simply implementing a pause time of



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three seconds after asking questions helps pupils digest and consider the question.

- Focus on the communication skills of students who repeatedly find themselves in trouble at school because they either don't understand instructions or keep saying the wrong thing at the wrong time.
- Train some students to give their teachers feedback on how well they learnt in the lesson. This gives a powerful message to students that they are responsible for their own learning.
- Focus on subject-specific vocabulary and working across the staff team on key words that crop up across all subjects and are critical to examination success, such as evaluate, summarise and define.
- Use clear alerts for when the class is required to listen attentively – some pupils may need additional cues such as their name, or a non-verbal cue. Break down instructions into a series of separate sentences. Use visual supports; repeat key information and structure sentences in the order in which the actions need to be taken.
- Think about pupils' language ability and adapt speaking rate appropriately. A slower speaking rate helps young people with communication difficulties to process spoken information. For these young people, slow down speech by 25% - enough to support understanding without sounding patronising.
- Closed questions are of limited use in supporting pupils' learning but can act as a quick check of their knowledge. Open questions help 'scaffold' their learning by allowing a fuller and more thoughtful answer and are often more helpful for pupils. Structuring questions for pupils needs careful planning to match the level of the question to the language level of the student.
- Feedback allows pupils to understand whether their response was correct or needs to be altered in some way but is also used to carry on discussion between the teacher and the pupils. Introduce different kinds of feedback (reformulation, elaboration, comment, repetition and responsiveness) to motivate pupils' participation.
- Praise in a way that creates a strong rather than fragile mindset through following six principles - praise the effort not the ability, praise in the specifics not in generalities, praise privately and authentically and praise the behaviour not the child.

One academy's journey

South Wolverhampton and Bilston Academy (SWB) is situated in an area of social deprivation and with an intake of students that reflect a range of needs. The number of students eligible for free school meals is much higher than the average, meaning there are embedded problems with literacy and communication.

A number of changes were taking place to the academy and SWB recognised the growing Ofsted focus on communication.

They wanted to embed techniques to help students communicate effectively with each other at every stage of academy life and enhance the evidence shown to HMI on their inspection and monitoring visits to improve results.

With these objectives in mind, SWB utilised Secondary Talk – a year-long evidence-based programme developed by I CAN to facilitate a communication supportive academy. Secondary Talk improves young people's communication and helps increase attainment, by providing practical support and coaching for teaching staff.

Secondary Talk augmented SWB's academy plans, embedding communication by focussing on what teachers do in the classroom. Its flexible and practical nature was harnessed by SWB who used it to trial a focus on vocabulary and key words for subjects to support communication within and outside of lessons.

'Pause time' was introduced where teachers give students time to formulate answers or make sense of vocabulary used in discussions. SWB also utilised 'talk targets' where students developed the ability to use a structure to monitor, evaluate and take ownership of their own talk when discussing topic areas.

Secondary communication matters

Ofsted's focus means that students now have to show 'high levels of resilience, confidence and independence'.

Programmes such as Secondary Talk, which have been designed with the flexibility to suit academies, can help settings to develop outstanding practice and stem from a strong evidence base.

University of Sheffield (2011) evidence highlighted Secondary Talk results in statistically significant changes to classroom practice – less teacher talk, more pupil interaction, more supportive classroom practice and teachers who felt confident monitoring pupils' progress in communication.

Prioritising speech, language and communication in academies is essential to ensure young people meet their potential in school, work and beyond. There is a huge emphasis on literacy in our schools – and rightly so – but if a young person struggles with communication, they will struggle with life.

Helpful links

www.ican.org.uk/secondarytalk

www.talkingpoint.org.uk

www.ican.org.uk/~media/Ican2/Whats%20the%20Issue/Evidence/ICAN_TalkSeries10.ashx

Maxine Burns is a speech and language therapist with significant experience of working with secondary aged pupils in both mainstream and specialist settings

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FASNA pull in the crowds at The Academies Show

FASNA made a real impact at the Academies Show. This huge event had over 250 exhibitors and thousands of delegates. Additionally there was a full programme of seminars in four of their large halls and a series of keynote speeches in the conference theatre.

The day started with keynote speeches in the Conference Theatre. The hall was full for this opening session. In a line-up that included David Wooton from IAA, Dominic Herrington (DfE), Zurich Municipal and Peter Lauener (Chief Executive of the Education Funding Agency), FASNA's Chairman Tom Clark gave a very well received speech on Autonomy and Accountability which drew the crowds so that people were having to stand. Tom outlined the new educational landscape and some of the challenges this brought such as:

- the decline in the power of Local Authorities requiring a new 'middle tier', and the role the educational sector could play in this;
- governance in autonomous schools needing to be more professional and challenging and the role of the chair being of paramount importance.

Tom's speech clearly resonated with the audience if the numbers flocking to the FASNA stand were anything to go by!

The second session in the main conference theatre saw Helen Hyde (FASNA President) and her Finance Director, Stephen Morales, following Lord Hill's presentation on Implementing the Academies Programme. Helen and Stephen were speaking on Using Academy Freedoms to be Innovative and Ensuring Value for Money. They were alongside Russell Andrews of the EFA and Julie Collins from the Wider Public Sector. Feedback indicated that the FASNA presentation had a relevance, which again effectively chimed with the audience.

There was also an extensive seminar programme taking place in four large halls accommodating about 150-200 delegates at a time. By the end of the morning the delegates were buzzing about FASNA's input and interest in the FASNA Seminars in the afternoon was huge.

The first FASNA seminar was "Becoming an Academy: From Initial Investigation to Effective Use of the Freedoms" delivered by Joan Binder, FASNA vice chair, with Dianne Marshall, Headteacher from Violet Way Primary, and her business manager, Jayne Harrison. This seminar was packed with the queue winding around the conference stands waiting to get in. Many delegates had to stand and some had to be turned away!

By the end of the morning the delegates were buzzing

Once the presentation was over the FASNA stand was deluged with visitors wanting to know more about FASNA.

The same overcrowding happened the second time this seminar ran. On this occasion the seminar was delivered by Joan, with Martin Latham, Headteacher of Robinswood Primary in Gloucestershire.

FASNA also provided three of the five presenters of the very popular Talking Heads – Case Studies and Panel Discussion. These were Martin Bayliss, Principal of Holyhead School in the West Midlands, Dianne Marshall and Jayne Harrison.

Besides the full seminar programme and huge number of exhibition stands, other highlights included the afternoon session in the main conference theatre which had high profile speakers: - Dr Elizabeth Sidwell (Schools Commissioner) on Developing Partnerships with Academy Sponsors, Roy Blatchford (director of National Education Trust) on Improving Teaching Standards, and Emma Knights (chief executive of the National Governor's Association).

Throughout the day the FASNA stand was inundated with visitors. Feedback indicated that FASNA had made a major impression at the show – they seemed to be everywhere. If you were one of FASNA's visitors and want to get in touch, please go to the website www.fasna.org.uk.

Peter Beaven is the editor of *Academy*. FASNA will be at the next Academies Show, which will take place on 24 April 2013 at ExCeL London.

All you need to know about Academy Status – ‘Lifting the Lid’

Wednesday 23 January 2013 or Friday 15 March – Central London

We have been asked by the DfE to present seminars particularly aimed at primary schools, but all schools are welcome to attend. These events are free of charge

Aims of the day – to give delegates:

- An assessment of the new educational landscape and the confidence to consider whether academy status is an appropriate choice
- Input from a Headteacher of a school which recently converted
- An overview of the legal process including multi academy arrangements
- ‘Top tips’ on consultation, communication, governance over the transition
- An opportunity to find out about financial changes
- ‘Top Tips’ on evaluating the impact of conversion and the role of governors in an effective accountability framework

‘Exploring the Contents’ of Academy Status

Friday 1 March 2013 or Wednesday 1 May 2013 – Central London

We have been asked by the DfE to present seminars particularly aimed at primary schools, but all schools are welcome to attend. These events are free of charge

Aims of the day – a workshop format to give delegates the opportunity to:

- Understand and explore the key elements of academy status in more detail
- Identify and understand the advantages and disadvantages of different multi-academy models
- Identify and prepare for the role of governors in the conversion process and beyond
- Identify and prepare for the changes in financial practice
- Consider the impact of greater freedoms for their school
- Discuss and reflect on their particular circumstances and needs

Raising Standards through Effective Governance

Monday 28 January 2013 or Wednesday 13 March 2013 – Central London

How well prepared are you for the challenges of increased autonomy and greater accountability?

Our programme introduces the *FASNA Practical Guidance Handbook* will enable delegates to:

- Be clear about the key responsibilities of the governing body
- Understand what ‘effective governance’ looks like
- Understand the requirements of the new Ofsted Framework
- Consider appropriate skills and an effective governing body structure
- Consider case studies
- Participate, discuss, reflect, work together to identify areas for further development

Prepare for Admission Appeals

Wednesday 27 February 2013 or Monday 18 March 2013 – Central London

Are you considering setting up your own appeals panel? Do you need to understand the appeals process more fully? Are you confident in presenting the school's case to panels?

Programme includes:

- Mandatory training for clerks and panel members in the legal framework and statutory requirements
- The role of the clerk and panel members
- The appeal procedure and conduct of the hearing
- Decision making exercise
- Preparing and presenting the school's case

FASNA Spring Conference 2013

Wednesday 6 March 2013 – Central London

Confirmed speakers:

- Sir Michael Wilshaw, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Ofsted
- David Laws MP, Minister of State (Schools)
- Charlie Taylor, chief executive, Teaching Agency

There will also be:

- Members' business
- A legal update from Stone King

Booking Information

Academy status seminars – free for schools to attend

Full day seminars – £250 + VAT per delegate for FASNA Members and £350 + VAT for non-members

Spring Conference – £150 + VAT per delegate for FASNA Members, £175 + VAT for non-members

Places can be booked online via the FASNA website – www.fasna.org.uk or by emailing the following information to admin@fasna.org.uk:

- Full name(s) of person(s) attending
- Role(s) within school
- Name and address of school
- Contact name and email address for all attendees

By booking the venue we are committed to a certain level of costs and therefore have to implement a cancellation policy:

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The new Ofsted framework: the Coopers Edge experience

Richard Barnard tells the story of a first inspection for their new free school

It had been a long and exciting journey for me. From receiving a phone call from a parent-to-be asking for help to set up a primary school to sitting in front of an Ofsted lead inspector accounting for that school. Was the journey worth it? Were we officially a 'good' school?

It began four years ago when I was chair of governors of Robinswood Primary School, a successful Trust School. I received a telephone call from a lady who said she was from a group of parents who were looking to run a primary school that

was planned for a new housing development in which they lived. They liked what they'd read about our school and hoped we'd help them. I consulted our trustees and suddenly we were on board.

My Headteacher and I worked relentlessly with two parents who hoped to send their children to the new school. I recall the smell left behind in the office of a senior LA official by one of their offspring – the occasion left a smile on our faces!

We won the tender, we set up a new trust, the Headteacher



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We had great concerns that the bare results and progress of Year 6 pupils would put us in a category

of Robinswood helped design the school, and I helped to select a new Headteacher and key staff, especially the business manager. I then became a governor of the new school.

On the 1st September 2011 Coopers Edge School opened with 42 pupils, mostly in the reception year. They were accommodated in temporary buildings adjacent to the rapidly growing construction of the new school; a project we were managing.

In June 2012 we had a grand opening of the new school and in September 2012 a whole new reception year joined us and we had a total of 89 pupils. Then, at 12.30pm the day after the new intake had started full-time, the phone call arrived: Ofsted would be here the next day.

What were our concerns? SATS results for the few Year 6 pupils on roll were below average; our intake had been much lower than anticipated, there were many more special needs pupils than anticipated; there were many more children from social housing; pupils had transferred from many different schools; and the pupils in reception year had only been in school for one full day. We had great concerns that the bare results and progress of Year 6 pupils would put us in a category.

What were our strengths? Good teachers, thanks to a rigorous selection process and extensive training; a shared purpose; effective assessment and tracking systems; strong leadership.

The lead inspector was alone. She had expected to be with two colleagues and thought we had 420 pupils.

Her areas of focus were in line with the new four Key Judgements but specifically: teaching, assessment and tracking (especially of groups); use of the pupil premium; and governance, both in terms of strategic direction and how governors know about achievement.

Our teachers did not let us down. All observations were at least good and some were outstanding. This was especially pleasing in reception given the staff had had so little time to get to know the children.

The lead inspector listened to what we said about the intake of pupils, especially those with special needs, often with only

basic information, at best, from previous schools. Assessment, tracking and use of resources (including pupil premium) and outcomes were viewed and staff questioned rigorously. Priorities were examined such as an initial assessment of weaknesses in numeracy, specifically in calculation, being identified and effectively acted upon, and the current priority being a relative weakness in writing.

Governors were questioned on their involvement in setting the strategic direction of the school and how they knew about achievement levels and how they challenged the Headteacher and staff on this.

The result was that the school was judged good in all aspects; we could not have achieved a more favourable outcome given our attainment levels.

What are the key messages?

- Have a shared vision that sets a clear strategic direction for the school
- Teaching must be securely good and backed up with excellent professional development
- Assessment and tracking systems must identify and support progress for all pupils and groups of pupils
- The Headteacher and governors must know how the pupil premium is being spent and be able to demonstrate the impact it has had
- Governors must demonstrate how well they know and challenge the school

The journey had been worthwhile. As the housing estate expands we are now very well placed to move forward to take our place at the centre of a thriving local community.

Richard Barnard is chair of governors and Trustees at Robinswood Primary Academy and a governor and trustee of Coopers Edge Trust School.

He has been an Ofsted inspector for 17 years and is now a National Leader of Governance.

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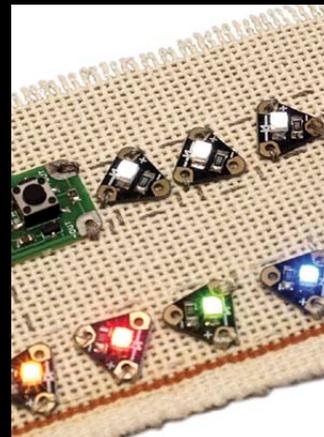
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North Tyneside schools agree UK's first state/independent merger

David Bilton, chief executive of Woodard Academies Trust, tells a unique story of the coming together of 'two different cultures'

Many readers may have seen the recent media coverage announcing that North Tyneside-based Priory Primary has agreed to merge with neighbouring independent school, The King's School, and convert to academy status. The merger is the first of its kind under the new academy programme.

The new school, Kings Priory School, is set to open in September 2013 as a state funded co-educational independent school for pupils aged 4-18. The boards of governors and senior leadership teams are working closely to shape their plans in more depth, and this includes consultation with stakeholders.

Commenting on the merger, Jan Richardson, chair of the Woodard Academies Trust, said: "The Trust is delighted that the academies programme provides, for the first time, opportunities for the independent and maintained sectors to collaborate in order to play a full and active part in improving educational opportunities for children from all walks of life. I firmly believe that our ground-breaking model of amalgamating an outstanding maintained sector school with a high performing independent school will provide even greater opportunities for all pupils."

The school will be co-educational and whilst it will have a Church of England faith designation, it will be open to pupils of all faiths and none.

Although King's is currently a fee-paying school, its governors have recognised that the payment of school fees represents a

growing issue for many parents. Said King's chair of governors, John Evans: "In the north-east region where average incomes are particularly under significant pressure, we felt that by becoming an academy and ceasing to charge fees would allow King's to strengthen its ties with the community it serves. For Priory pupils the merger will give them access to a wider range of facilities and activities, such as sport and more outward-bound activities, and will strengthen the current performing arts and music offer. This was very much a community-based decision. King's School has been in Tynemouth in some shape or form for over 150 years and of course it has evolved over time and this is the latest phase in its long and distinguished history."

Responding to needs and aspirations

The overall plan is to build the pupil roll up to a total of 1350 places: 525 primary, 625 secondary and a sixth form of 200. Priory currently has 420 pupils from reception to Year 6. The current planning assumptions are for reception children to Year 5 to be based on Priory's current location. Years 6 to 13 will be housed a short distance away at the King's School site. All pupils currently attending Priory or King's will be guaranteed a place at the new merged school. Of course, it remains a matter of choice for parents as to whether they want to stay with Kings Priory School or attend a different school from Year 7.

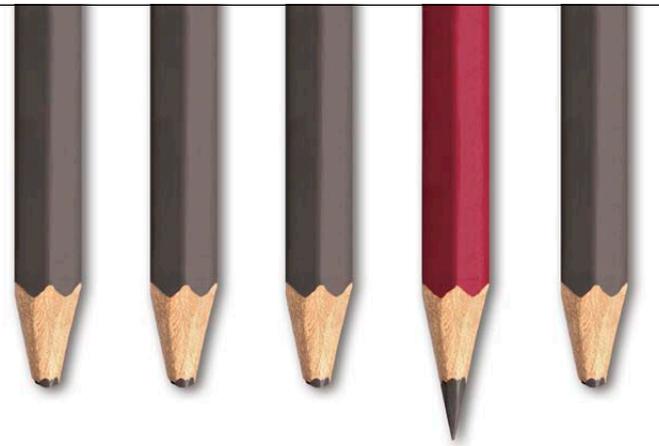
The decision to merge and move to

independent academy status did not happen overnight. It came following the culmination of intensive and in-depth discussions. The Governing Bodies and Headteachers of both schools worked with the proposed sponsor, Woodard Academies Trust, to draw up plans to submit to the DfE. These plans meet the needs and aspirations for a 21st century education, in fit for purpose accommodation, in order to provide a rich and diverse education for children from across Tynemouth and the local community.

Opportunities and freedoms

The proposed merger offers many opportunities:

- The freedom to devise its own independent curriculum, which supports children through the, sometimes difficult, transition between primary and secondary.
- The ability to move away from the often strict and ever-changing guidelines state schools have become used to working within.
- The ability to be innovative and take the best local and international teaching practices, for example, stage rather than age related learning, and review the Key Stage 3 curriculum organisation and provision, in particular, to suit individual pupil's needs.
- New DfE capital investment in school buildings.
- Smaller class sizes – the plan for



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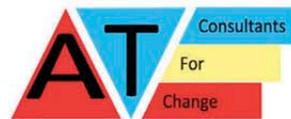
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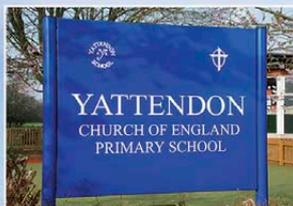
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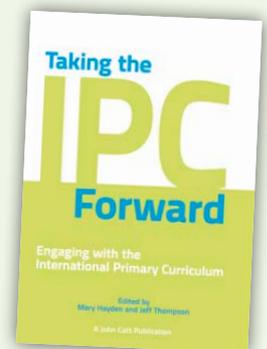
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Taking the International Primary Curriculum Forward



Edited by Mary Hayden and Jeff Thompson

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In this edited collection, contributions are included from those involved in its creation, together with teachers, headteachers and researchers, all of whom explore its strengths, celebrate its achievements and identify areas for potential development.

Includes contributions from: Peter le Noble; Henk van Hout and Tracey Kelly; Steven Mark; Yolande Muschamp; Jayne Pletser; Barbara Deveney; Joanne Marshall; Malcolm Davis; Andrew Wigford; Estelle Tarry; Mary van der Heijden; Graeme Scott; Nicola Cooper, Catherine Copeland and Janet Harwood; Richard Mast; and Martin Skelton.

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This was very much a community-based decision

the new academy is to have class sizes of 25 throughout the school, in keeping with the King's school current average class size. This will be a reduction for Priory Primary.

- Smoother transition for pupils at key phases and improved personal development opportunities on offer with an all-through school.
- Increased opportunities for the professional development of staff – the Priory staff are excited at the prospect of working in an all-through school and the opportunities this presents in terms of specialism and their professional development.
- More community engagement and

support, including support from local businesses.

Those involved are not so naïve as to think that the whole transition to merge with an independent school and convert to an academy won't be without challenges. Said Priory Primary Head, Sue Melbourne: "Two different cultures, work practices and curriculums are about to merge. However, we are all determined to make it work for the benefit of not only our current pupils and staff, but for future generations. Both schools are highly successful, and are built on solid traditions and foundations. We want to ensure that our new school builds on the best of these to the benefit of all."

With regard to the merger, Geoff Ogle, Priory Primary School chair of governors said "We believe our proposals will widen parental choice and improve standards for all children within North Tyneside and that can only be a benefit to all."

In both Priory and King's case the fundamental reason for merging and converting is about the improved opportunities and educational outcomes for all the children involved.

John Evans sums up the interesting year ahead the schools are facing: "I am convinced that our merger and conversion to academy status will deliver an extremely powerful and successful joint educational institution delivering 21st century learning to our pupils."

More information about the new academy and the merger can be found at www.kingsprioryschool.co.uk



The merger improves "educational opportunities for children from all walks of life"



Education: the rock and roll years

Ageing rocker Les Walton reminisces on times past

I have always seen education as the new rock and roll. It is exciting, relevant, sexy, subversive and sometimes even revolutionary. But, it can also become bland and repetitive. As an ageing rocker I am increasingly returning to memories of my childhood and early years in education. Over the coming weeks, months and even years, I wish to share some of my memories and reflections and I would like people to respond by email with their memories. Many old *gadgys** like me are extremely concerned about the national and local memory of education. Too often today our education leaders lack memory. So all you education *gadgys* out there let us remind them what it was really like.

**Crazy bloke, usually found running and flailing down the street, shouting "You killed me ma". (Ref. Urban Dictionary)*

1955

In 1955 the crooners still tended to top the charts – Johnny Ray, Tony Bennett, Doris Day and Jimmy Young with his cover of *Unchained Melody*. Then in June *Rock Around The Clock* hit number one. *Off the Record*, the first British television show to highlight the recording industry, started in May 1955, and included Max Bygraves, Alma Cogan, George Shearing and the Four Aces.

I sat my 11-plus in my final year of elementary school. I was ten years old, my 11th birthday being in June that year. The 11-plus was a basic arithmetic and English test. Some of my fellow pupils had been 11 since the previous September. In order to balance the difference in ages, pupils were given extra points for being younger. It has always been my view that these extra points were the key to me passing the exam.

My passing was of great disappointment to my Headteacher, Harry 'Two Canes' Swann. He had created two classes – the 'goats' and the 'sheep'. I was in the group who were not considered capable of passing the test. Even then I recognised that the pupils in the 'better class' came from more affluent backgrounds – doctors and dentists. They also tended to live in the affluent Rowlands Gill whilst myself and the other 'goats' came from the Villas and Highfield.

1982

1982 was a bad year for rock and roll. Apart from *I Love Rock and Roll* by Joan Jett and the Blackhearts, Michael Jackson's

release of *Thriller* and the release of classics, such as *Fool (If you think it's over)* by Elkie Brooks and *Come on Eileen* by Dexys Midnight Runners.

I had been a 'pastoral Head' since the early seventies in a newly created comprehensive – even earlier if you count my promotion point for being in charge of school milk (pasteurised care). The big debate at the time was whether these new schools should have a house or a year system.

By 1981 we had created Gateshead Pastoral Care Association, bringing together educationalists, social workers, psychologists and other key professions to consider the needs of the 'whole child'. The now famous Steve Munby was a young committee member. My personal motive for the Association was to pinch ideas for assemblies.

A lasting memory is when a rather self-important Head complained to the head of music about always playing the calming Mendelssohn on his Dansette record player on his entry to the assembly. This didn't fit in with his idea of 'leading the troops into battle' and his love of talking about how he 'bombed Germany during the war'. After three weeks of the 633 Squadron and the *Dambusters* theme the hall was packed, ready to hear the latest musical choice. When he entered to the strains of '*Jesus Christ Super Star ... who do you think you really are?*', he finally cracked.

I was then approached by Michael Marland and in 1982 we established the National Association of Pastoral Care. It is hard to imagine now that the 'pastoral care movement' at that time was incredibly powerful. This indeed was a forerunner of 'Every Child Matters'. NAPCE is still going strong.

Les would like to hear from any of you out there who, like him, are aging rockers with fond memories of life in education. Can you recall stories about ROSLA; new comprehensives; the ending of corporal punishment; Warnock; local management of schools?

If you do, please email Les at les.walton@northerneducation.com
Les will be in the next issue with more reflections on the past

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