

JOINING PETERBOROUGH DIOCESE EDUCATION TRUST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

These FAQs aim to provide your School with the relevant information of what joining the Peterborough Diocese Education Trust (PDET) will mean for your School.

CONVERTING TO ACADEMY STATUS

What is an Academy?

Academies are independent, state-funded schools, which receive their funding directly from central government, through the Education Funding Agency (EFA), rather than through a local authority.

If your School is a church school and it converts to an academy it will automatically retain its religious designation.

What is a Multi Academy Trust?

PDET is a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) which has been approved by the Department for Education (DfE) as an academy sponsor to operate a number of academies under a single charitable company.

The Board of Directors of PDET are responsible for decisions relating to how each academy operated by PDET is run, from the curriculum to staffing. The Directors key responsibilities are:

1. To ensure the quality of educational provision at academies operated by PDET;
2. To challenge and monitor the performance of the academies operated by PDET;
3. To comply with the terms of its Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State for Education; and
4. To manage PDET's finances, property and assets.

The Board of Directors of PDET will ultimately be accountable and responsible for the performance of your School to the DfE, through its Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State for Education.

Each School which joins PDET would have a Local Governing Body to which certain functions would be delegated by the Board of Directors of PDET (more detail below).

What is the constitution of PDET?

Academies are constituted as companies limited by guarantee. They are also charities.

The constitution of PDET is contained in its Articles of Association, which regulate how it manages its formal business.

What are the benefits of converting to an academy and joining PDET?

PDET can set a strong, shared strategic vision across all the academies in its group, and can enable its academies to have better access to resources and support through economies of scale.

Other benefits of joining PDET include the following:-

- PDET's MAT structure is a strong, widely recognised and used collaborative structure which aides academies to be mutually supportive in raising educational attainment.
- PDET's MAT structure allows for an increase in shared knowledge and good practice across the academies within PDET.
- PDET enables economies of scale to be obtained in procurement of goods and services as there is only one company, PDET, which contracts on behalf of all the academies within PDET. Procurement would become less burdensome for your School.
- Consolidation and forward planning – your School's formal commitment to join PDET allows for the adoption of long-lasting arrangements leading to long term viability and effectiveness.
- Help and support between staff at PDET academies which releases time for strategic planning, better use of resources and benefits of economies of scale. Each PDET school maintains its own unique identity but we believe that by working together, we can achieve more than by each school working alone. Our schools seek to serve their local communities; they are inclusive welcoming children of the Christian Faith of other faiths or of no faith, children from all backgrounds and of all abilities. We believe in the infinite worth of each person: children deserve the very best education and staff deserve support to deliver this.

Research has shown the following benefits of the MAT structure:

- Financial savings through economies of scale and improved recruitment and retention of staff.
- Improved qualities of leadership/creative leadership/management and increased quality of specialist support.
- Enhanced opportunities for CPD (staff peer observations between academies can improve CPD).
- The MAT structure can create a climate for further innovation.
- Wider range of curriculum opportunities for students, and improved capacity to provide extended services across the academies within the MAT.

What would be the timescale and process for conversion?

The DfE estimate that it usually takes between 4-5 months for a School to convert to an academy.

Please see the flowchart at **Annex 1** for an overview of the conversion process. Should your School decide to join PDET, we would work closely with your School through the conversion process providing project management, and support to make the conversion process as seamless as possible for your School.

If we convert will we lose our individuality?

We recognise that schools have their own unique identity, and we want to celebrate this. We see this as a key benefit of being part of PDET. There is currently no expectation that your School's uniform, name or its distinctiveness would be altered as a result of your School's conversion.

Can our School leave PDET if the relationship has broken down irreparably?

Both sides should be committed to making the partnership work. At the moment there is no straightforward process for an academy to leave a MAT, although if the relationship between PDET and your School were to break down irreparably, then we would, of course, sit down with your School (and DfE) to try to resolve matters, and to explore options. Our interests are all aligned in that we all, ultimately, want what is best for the students attending your School.

What would happen to the ownership of our School land and buildings if our School converted to an academy?

For church schools, the land and buildings remain with the site trustees, usually the Diocese. The playing fields are typically held by the local authority and a long lease (125 years) based on the DfE model lease would be granted by the local authority to PDET.

THE RUNNING AND MANAGEMENT OF YOUR SCHOOL IF IT JOINS PDET

What will conversion mean in terms of the running and management of our School?

If your School joins PDET, PDET would become the employer of your School staff, and would be responsible for the overall effectiveness of your School. PDET is accountable to DfE through its Funding Agreement, and must meet certain defined standards. Your School would continue to be monitored by Ofsted and SIAMs.

What changes will there be to the constitution of our Governing Body?

All Academy Trusts have at least two layers of governance, the Members (equivalent to Shareholders) and the Directors who are responsible for making sure that the Academy Trust achieves its objectives. The Members are responsible for the strategic oversight of the Academy Trust. They are the conscience, ensuring that the Academy Trust's objectives are upheld.

The Members of PDET are the Diocese of Peterborough and up to two nominees appointed by the Diocese of Peterborough. The Members appoint most of PDET's Directors.

The Directors of PDET determine the policies of the MAT, make judgments about the effectiveness of individual academies operated by PDET, manage central services, and report to the Secretary of State. The Directors work with academies within the PDET MAT to ensure they are performing to their best ability, and that the academies get the support they require.

PDET also has a third layer of governance. Each PDET academy has a Local Governing Body to which certain powers for the day to day running of the academy

are delegated. Local Governing Bodies have a similar status to committees of a maintained school's governing body. Powers are delegated by the Board of PDET on the basis of 'earned autonomy' i.e. we envisage good and outstanding schools having a greater degree of delegated powers than weaker schools, who would gain increasing powers and autonomy as they improve.

We envisage the Governing Body of your School becoming the Local Governing Body. The proportion of governors appointed by the Diocese will be preserved post conversion. The Local Governing Body for your School would have responsibility for all decisions that solely affect your School including control over its budget. These responsibilities would be set out in the formal scheme of delegation between the Local Governing Body and the Board of Directors of PDET, known as Terms of Reference.

Whilst PDET Local Governing Bodies will usually have delegated authority to run their School, the Directors of PDET will be ultimately responsible for all of the academies it runs.

Strictly speaking the Directors of PDET are responsible for appointing all Governors. In practice, how the appointments are made will vary according to the category of Governor. Staff and parent Governors will be elected in the normal way; Foundation Governors will be appointed by PDET, following the nomination and consultation procedures currently in use. Any other categories of Governor, e.g. Community or co-opted, will have their appointments formally ratified by PDET on nomination by the school.

How would admission arrangements change once our school became an academy with PDET?

PDET becomes the Admissions Authority for the Academy. This means that the admission criteria can be altered (provided they are in accordance with the School Admissions Code). The most significant possible alteration would be to include some priority for Church attenders. However, PDET does not have a hard and fast policy on this and is highly unlikely to propose any change without the agreement of the Local Governing Body.

As far the administration of admissions is concerned, Academies will find themselves in the same position as VA schools are currently. For the main September intake, the LA continues to co-ordinate the process. All applications are received by them. In late Jan/early Feb., they send an electronic file to schools of all the applications they have received and the school has to rank them according to its admission criteria and return them to the LA. This is a relatively simple administrative process that only takes place once a year. The Diocese provides training for school staff in how to do it. The LA continues to send out all of the offer letters to parents.

How would appeal arrangements change once our school became an academy with PDET?"

PDET will be responsible for setting up appeals for its Academies. The Diocese already has long-established arrangements in place for appeals. Academies will need to prepare a "Statement of Case" in advance of the appeal and field a

“Presenting Officer” (Governor or senior member of staff) for the appeal itself. Again, the Diocese provides training on these responsibilities and has template Statements of Case which schools can populate quickly and easily.

Who will set the strategic vision for our School? The Local Governing Body or PDET?

Both. The relationship will be similar to the one your School currently has with the Local Authority (and Diocese, if applicable). Both the Local Authority and Diocese have broad aims and aspirations for their schools but these are worked through and embedded in the local context by your School’s Governing Body. In the same way, PDET would work closely with your School’s Local Governing Body in terms of setting the strategic vision for your School.

FINANCIAL MATTERS

What are the financial implications of converting?

With the exception of the “top slice”, referred to below, the actual money available for schools is the same whether or not they are maintained schools or academies. The key difference is that your School’s funding will come straight to PDET for your School, not via the Local Authority, and your School will have more freedom to decide how it spends its money. Financial flexibility would mean that your School’s resources can be more effectively targeted at your School’s needs, and not be subject to the Local Authority spending agenda.

At the moment, the Local Authority takes a slice of the funding available to pay for services (typically between 8-12%) such as school improvement services, education support services, property management and maintenance services, human resources, payroll and financial services. The rest is then delegated to your School.

As a PDET academy, your School would receive more of this “top slice” funding as PDET would top slice 5% rather than the typical 8-12% of your School’s overall budget. This increase in funding is clearly something that could benefit your School greatly. Your School would, of course, have to buy, as and when required by it, services which had previously been supplied by the Local Authority, other than services which will be provided directly by PDET through the 5% hold back of your School’s budget.

What will this 5% cover and what services will be provided from this?

PDET will try to make the 5% stretch as far as possible and the top slice will, at least, cover all of the responsibilities of an employer such as HR and payroll administration as well as Headteachers’ performance management; finance (accountant, auditing, budget setting support); some Governor services; monitoring and supporting school effectiveness through regular visits from a school improvement partner; promoting educational improvement by facilitating school to school improvement and organising CPD opportunities such as TEEP, for schools to ‘buy into’ at competitive rates.

In addition, PDET academies will still be able to buy into the Diocesan Service Level Agreement and receive the benefits that includes.

Additional benefits will be access to benchmarking and group procurement for other services, i.e. ICT support; insurance; software; licences; SLAs etc which should bring financial savings for your School.

For those services we have to pay for separately, will we have to use suppliers recommended by PDET, or will our School be able to buy-in services from elsewhere if they chose?

PDET academies will be free to choose their own suppliers for services outside of the PDET core responsibilities, but will be expected to follow the PDET financial regulations on purchasing (i.e. like for like quotes above a specified value etc). PDET will be able to broker relationships on behalf of its academies that offer reduced costs and a single point of contact. In due course, it may be appropriate to consider whether there are any areas where jointly procured services might be beneficial to PDET and its academies both financially and in terms of quality of service.

Could this percentage be increased by PDET?

Any increase to the 5% would be due to an unavoidable increase in the cost of providing services to PDET Schools. Schools would be consulted of any proposed increase, and would receive good notice of any increase, and would have the opportunity to build it into their budget.

Will we receive any additional resources in terms of money or support?

The additional support will come from PDET central staff, such as, the Business Director.

PDET have been granted a Sponsor Capacity Grant from the DfE, and the Diocese has matched this to fund the initial PDET set up work. These are extra resources for the benefit of the whole MAT, but do not come directly to the schools.

How much say do individual Schools have in their own budgets?

Individual Schools will still set their own budgets with assistance from the PDET Business Director. Budgets will need to be signed off by the School's Local Governing Body, and then the PDET Board, prior to formal submission to the EFA.

Can a School with a deficit budget convert?

Conversion with a deficit is largely in the hands of DfE. A School with any size deficit would need to have a recovery plan in place and agreed by the DfE before they would allow its conversion.

Will our School have to employ an accountant at great expense?

Many schools either already employ a fully qualified school bursar or will be able to use the opportunity of being part of PDET to share the resources of one across PDET's academies.

PDET academies do not need to employ a full time accountant; PDET has an accountant who would work closely with your School's finance personnel on financial matters.

TEACHING STANDARDS

Will we still have Ofsted and SIAMs visits?

Yes, Ofsted is responsible for monitoring academies and SIAMs inspections will continue.

What will be the process should our School's results drop, or an Ofsted report following inspection suggests improvement?

PDET is responsible for overall School performance. PDET will continually monitor standards, and would aim to intervene before an Ofsted inspection if students were not making the required progress. PDET would support the School's action plan to improve outcomes for students and broker external support, if required. Equally, this is a two way process and we would expect Schools to notify PDET of any issues.

It would also be the responsibility of PDET to ensure developments listed in an Ofsted report and section 48 report are made.

Are there benefits of conversion in terms of educational outcomes?

Evidence suggests that schools working together in formal partnerships leads to improved standards. Joining PDET will give you increased opportunity to collaborate with other academies within our MAT.

What changes will there be to the curriculum taught?

Academies do not have to teach the National Curriculum. However, they must teach a broad and balanced curriculum including English, mathematics, science and religious education. We would discuss any proposed curriculum changes with your School, but be assured that changes would only be made where they are in the best interests of the students.

PDET will co-ordinate and promote its academies to work together more closely to encourage curriculum innovation and sharing of good practice.

STAFF

Will staff still be employed by our School or will staff contracts be with PDET if our School converts and becomes a PDET academy?

The conversion to MAT status will involve a transfer of staff under TUPE. If your School joins PDET, PDET will become the employer of the staff and all staff contracts will be with PDET.

PDET will be involved with appointments of senior staff (Headteacher/Deputy Headteacher), but we envisage other appointments being delegated to your School's Local Governing Body.

Is there still a need for a Bursar in each School?

Individual staffing models will be specific for each School and led by need. It is envisaged that PDET will be supporting, as opposed to replacing, the many and varied responsibilities of a School Bursar.

Will there be a change in the salary scales our School employees are currently on?

Staff will transfer on no less favourable terms and conditions. Any necessary amendments in the future would only be following consultation with staff and unions.

Who decides the Pay & Conditions for each School?

As discussed above, your School staff would transfer to PDET on no less favourable terms and conditions and any necessary amendments in the future would only be following consultation with staff and unions. No changes to terms and conditions will be made as a result of your School becoming part of our MAT. Of course, we all recognise that things can change in any school (academy or not) over time.

What will be the progress for staff progression – performance management? Will there be other opportunities?

There will be a range of opportunities for staff training and staff progression, and we see this as a major advantage of schools joining PDET. PDET will be responsible for the performance management of Headteachers.

What is the situation regarding teacher and support staff pensions once our School becomes an academy?

Teachers working in an academy fall within the scope of the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS), just as if they were employed in a local authority maintained school. Staff transferring from a maintained predecessor would simply continue their membership of the Scheme. As the employer, PDET would be responsible for remitting contributions to the TPS and for all other administrative responsibilities that fall to employers who employ teachers who are subject to the teachers' pensions regulations.

PDET will also ensure that the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) arrangements stay in place for non-teaching staff. As part of the conversion process, the LGPS scheme's administrators will undertake an actuarial assessment to determine how much PDET will need to contribute and the terms of that contribution.

In short, your School's staff will not see any impact on their pensions because of the conversion to academy status. Continuity of service is retained when staff transfer to an academy. PDET's funding agreement requires it to ensure that all staff employed by it have access to the TPS or the LGPS (as applicable).

What about union recognition?

Trade union recognition will transfer under TUPE.

Annex 1

Academy Conversion Step-by-Step Plan

Step 1: Register your School's interest in converting to an academy with PDET using the DfE's online form which can be accessed here:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/academies/register-school>

Step 2: Your School starts its consultation with key stakeholders¹ to join PDET. PDET will support the School through this process.

Step 3: The Governing Body of your School meet to consider the outcome of the stakeholder consultation. The Governing Body of your School resolve to convert to an academy with PDET. Conditional consent from the Diocese will be required at this stage to permit the application to convert.

Suggested wording for your minutes:

Schools choosing to become an academy:

'The Governing Body requests that the Secretary of State issues an Academy Order to enable xxxxxxx to become an Academy as part of Peterborough Diocese Education Trust'

Schools that are compelled by the Secretary of State to become an academy:

'The Governing Body requests that the Secretary of State issues an Academy Order to enable xxxxxxx to become an Academy under the sponsorship of Peterborough Diocese Education Trust'

Step 4: The Secretary of State approves your School's proposal to convert to an academy with PDET and makes an Academy Order.

Step 5: The TUPE consultation process commences. While the Council will lead on the process, PDET will be happy to support your School through this process.

Step 6: Your School would work closely with PDET to prepare the legal documentation to convert your School to an academy. This would involve the following actions on your, and our part:

- **Due Diligence:** assisting PDET in carrying out a property, staffing and commercial due diligence exercise. The earlier this is started the better. PDET would lead on this process and would provide project management support to your School.

¹ A Stakeholder consultation is required by the Academies Act 2010.

- **Property:** assisting PDET to work through and agree the property arrangements on conversion. The process and legal documentation depends on the type of School and the land interest held by your School.
- **TUPE:** completing the TUPE consultation process.
- **Funding Agreement:** working with PDET to prepare your Schools Supplemental Funding Agreement.
- **Commercial Transfer Agreement:** PDET would lead on negotiations of the commercial transfer agreement. Your School is party to this agreement which formally transfers the assets, contracts, staff and undertaking of your School to PDET.

Step 7: PDET, the Local Authority and the Governing Body of your School enter into the Commercial Transfer Agreement and land documentation.

Step 8: PDET and the Secretary of State sign the Supplemental Funding Agreement for your School.

Step 9: Pre-opening actions

- PDET works with your School to ensure that enhanced CRB checks are up-to-date.
- PDET works with your School to ensure that financial systems and insurance are in place.

Step 10: Your School opens as a PDET academy.