



Frequently Asked Questions v5

1) Why is our school considering becoming an academy and joining MECMAT?

The Bishop of Lancaster has stated that it is his wish that all Catholic schools in the Diocese of Lancaster move to become academies as part of Multi Academy Trusts by 2026. He believes that by doing so, this will protect, preserve and promote Catholic education across the Diocese. All Catholic schools will make this move over the next five years. For more details on the Bishop's plan and his letter explaining this, please see the school website.

2) What is an academy?

Academies are state schools, funded directly from central government, no longer under the control of the Local Authority. Academy status gives schools more freedom to be innovative and creative with the curriculum, timetabling, staffing and governance.

The school will still be a Catholic school under the authority of the Bishop of Lancaster and its religious designation will not change.

All academies continue to be inspected by Ofsted and comply with the same rules as other schools on special educational needs, exclusions and admissions.

An academy is part of a charitable trust run by a board of trustees. Academies are rightly expected to work with and support other schools, including lower-performing schools. Should you wish to know more about the Government's policy, the Department for Education has its own academies bookmark on <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/convert-to-an-academy-information-for-schools>

3) What is a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)?

A Multi Academy Trust is a charitable company and is responsible for overseeing the running of a number of schools. It has three layers of governance: the members (the Bishop of Lancaster, the Episcopal Vicar for Education and the Diocesan Board of Trustees); the Trustees; the local governing bodies.

A MAT is formed when two or more academies legally come together in partnership. Each school keeps its own name and it is possible for other academies to join the Trust in the future. The partnership ensures that the schools can share skills and best practice and make optimum use of resources ensuring best value for money for each school.

We believe that there is greater scrutiny of academies now than for voluntary aided schools and the Diocese is confident that this will have a positive impact on standards and enable the school to continue to fully engage with its community.

However, we are aware of some difference in opinion as to the effectiveness of Multi Academy Trusts. We would encourage you to consider the arguments for and against and check the accuracy of assertions that are being made before submitting your feedback.

4) What are the main differences between academies and maintained schools?

The religious nature of the school remains the same, but the model of governance and funding change. A Catholic MAT is a group of Catholic schools coming together as a Trust, Only Catholic schools will be members of the Mater Ecclesiae Catholic Multi Academy Trust. Academies have a funding agreement with the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and receive funding directly from them instead of the Local Authority (LA). Standards are monitored by the governance and leadership of the Trust instead of the LA. Standards are reported to the Regional Schools' Commissioner (RSC) on behalf of the Department for Education. Academies

have more freedoms and do not have to follow the national curriculum but they do have to take part in national assessments such as (SATs and GCSEs) and Ofsted will still monitor them.

5) Will the uniform at the school change?

No. It is important that each school continues to have its own unique identity in the Trust.

6) Will the school day or holiday dates change?

No. These will still be determined by the Governing Body of the school and the Headteacher.

7) Will the name of the school change?

There is no requirement for the school to have the word academy in its title, although it can if it wishes.

8) Will staff change or have to move to other schools?

No. Staff terms and conditions are protected by law. Nobody will be told to move to another school. Occasionally, there may be job opportunities in other schools and staff could apply for those, as they could if they weren't in a Trust.

9) What are the advantages for pupils of becoming part of MECMAT?

Schools joining the Trust will be given greater opportunities for collaboration and the sharing of good practice. The expectation is that this will have a positive impact on teaching and learning, although immediately there is no expectation that the move will have any significant impact on students and families. Each school will still be led and managed by the headteacher and governors. The Trust structure will provide greater opportunities for curricular and extra-curricular activities and possibly transition. Also, some jobs will be done by the central team of the Trust, leaving the Headteacher to focus on teaching, learning and pupils' spiritual development.

10) What are the advantages in general of becoming an academy in a MAT?

There are many advantages of being part of an academy trust, from working together to preserve and improve Catholic education in the area, to educational, financial and spiritual benefits. Essentially, a group of schools working together in a single body can do lots of things that are harder for stand-alone schools to do. Teachers work and learn together to improve the way they teach and schools can share practices that make a difference to the quality of teaching. Teachers and leaders can work together on the things that matter – like curriculum and assessment. In addition, schools can challenge and support each other to continually improve.

The Multi Academy Trust model allows us to preserve, protect and develop our schools and secure Catholic education in the long term. It will better support the long-term goal of developing our future leaders of education in the Diocese. Improvements in school standards can be secured by developing and resourcing a strategic vision for leadership development, through pooling expertise and knowledge on standards and buying in specialist support as well as facilitate school to school support. Greater control over the curriculum allows flexibility in terms of the balance and mix of subjects. A curriculum tailored to the needs of a Catholic school could be more fully developed. Stronger collaboration between schools in the Trust is beneficial, but this is not expected to be at the expense of retaining and supporting the development of strong local collaborations which will provide a long term future for the schools as Catholic academies.

11) What are the main benefits for schools within the Mater Ecclesiae Catholic Multi Academy Trust ?

The benefits of joining a Catholic Multi Academy Trust are many and varied. As the Bishop of Lancaster states, Catholic MATs are a secure way to protect, preserve and improve Catholic education across the Diocese.

Being a member of MECMAT means all of the schools in the Trust working together to provide a first-class Catholic education, valuing staff and pupils, investing in their future, working in true collaboration and partnership with others.

Working in partnership, all of the schools in the Trust work closely together to create a sustainable model of high-quality education for all pupils. We believe that sharing ideas that work, learning from each other and

allowing leaders and staff to focus on the core purpose of education enables us to move forward as a family of schools. As a Trust, with shared central services, schools can also benefit from economies of scale when purchasing and commissioning external contracts. The work of the central team at the Trust will free up leaders to focus on school improvement and enhancing the academic and spiritual lives of pupils. The Trust can provide great opportunities for staff recruitment, retention and professional development

12) Why change if things are working well with everyone?

This is the Bishop's plan for the future of education in the Diocese of Lancaster. Partnership working is strong in the Diocese, but not every school collaborates well with others. We know that being in a Trust will enable schools to grow even stronger as we learn from the strengths of other schools. We will create improvement projects together and further strengthen our Catholic family.

13) Will schools lose their identity and will there be big changes?

No. Each school will become an academy in its own right and will be part of the Trust. The scheme of delegation protects the uniqueness of each school. The Governing Body's role is to ensure that the Catholic ethos is strong and the unique identity of the school is maintained. There are no significant changes which will affect pupils on a day-to-day basis. Uniforms, school day, free school meals, school name and holidays will not change.

14) What will the direct impact be on families if our school joins a Trust?

The move will not have a negative impact on families. The school will still be led and managed by the Headteacher and a Governing Body.

15) Is Lancaster the only Diocese changing in this way?

Many other Dioceses are also developing structures to further preserve, protect and develop Catholic education, for example, in Nottingham, Leeds and Newcastle Dioceses, all of the Catholic schools are academies in MATs.

16) What are the legal responsibilities towards children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND)?

Pope Benedict reminds us, 'Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary'. In a Catholic school and academy, our responsibilities to all children extend beyond curriculum standards so that children flourish. Academies must follow the SEND Code of Practice and work closely with the Local Authority, just like other schools.

17) What about safeguarding?

The same expectations for schools about safeguarding would be in place in the Trust.

18) How does the school convert to an Academy?

Firstly, all of the schools will be recognised equally in the Trust, The cost of the process to become an academy is met by a grant of £25,000 per school. Subject to approval by governors, the timeline for the school to convert is 1st September 2022. The current Governing Body will become the Local Governing Body (LGB) under the Trustees and Members of the Trust.

19) What is the role of parents?

All schools that convert to academies must ensure that parents are consulted. Parents are important in the work of a Catholic school and schools looking to become part of a MAT must seek to work in partnership with the families who entrust their children to their care. MECMAT will become the Admissions Authority although each school will have their own admission policy which they will follow. There will be no change in policy or pupil admission numbers. Our catchment area and our partner schools will remain unchanged too. Admissions will still be administered by the Local Authority. The MAT board is responsible for arranging for an admissions appeal if there are families who wish to appeal for a place in a Trust school.

20) What is the leadership structure in the Trust?

There will be a Chief Executive Officer and a Chief Financial Officer. Each school will have its Headteacher as it does now. These roles will not be diminished. The Trust and the Local Governing Body will be involved in the appointment of Headteachers if and when vacancies arise. Each school is an equal partner in the Trust so that there is no school more important than another. Each school will retain and manage its own budget but will contribute for key roles and projects within the Trust. This is not an additional financial strain on the school but it will come from the money formerly top-sliced by the Local Authority.

21) How will governance work?

There will be three layers of governance. The Members will be the Bishop of Lancaster, the Episcopal Vicar for Education and Formation and the Diocesan Board of Trustees. Then there is a Trust board made up of at least five Trustees/Directors, who are not paid and the majority of them are practising Catholics. Each school will have its own Headteacher and Local Governing Body. The powers and responsibilities of each of these groups will be outlined in the scheme of delegation. The LGB will carry out many of the functions they presently do. For instance, the LGB will ensure that the standards in the school are as good as they can be and that the school is delivering the improvements needed. This will be supported and monitored by the CEO and the Board of Trustees.

22) What services will the Trust provide?

The Trust will establish a core central team. The core team will offer support for schools around standards, finance, school improvement and the operational running of schools. They will continue to work with the Catholic Education Service to offer strong support in developing each school's Catholic life. The Trust will be required to purchase services that are of the best value and the best quality. Local Authorities retain their statutory responsibilities for areas such as safeguarding and SEND. The Trust can make savings by economies of scale. This money can then be used for the education of children.

23) Who owns the buildings and how are they maintained?

The ownership of sites used as Catholic schools is held by the Diocese. This arrangement will not change when the schools become academies. The Church's ownership of the land is acknowledged in the Church Supplemental Agreement which is signed by the Diocese and the Secretary of State for Education. The schools and in turn the Trust will continue to be responsible for the day to day management and maintenance of the sites and the Trust will have access to a standard capital allocation to enable significant works to be carried out when needed. In some cases, the playing fields used by the school will be owned by the Local Authority. They will be expected to grant a 125 year lease of the playing fields to the Trust.

24) What happens with finances and resources?

The Trust Board will be responsible for presenting the consolidated accounts for the Trust as a whole. The Trust will provide opportunities for centralising contracts and service delivery that we hope will yield considerable savings for school budgets. The Local Governing Body will be responsible for managing the delegated school budget, with oversight from the central team. The Trust is responsible for the central service fund and for strategic planning across the whole Trust. The LGB is responsible for staffing structures. As now, they will need to ensure that the structure is sustainable within the delegated budget. The central Trust team will support in this area if needed.

25) What will happen to the existing school reserves or deficits? Any transfer of assets?

All assets and existing reserves or deficits will be retained by the school on conversion, having been contractually transferred by the governing body to the Trust pursuant to the terms of a Commercial Transfer Agreement. The Local Authority is obliged by statutory regulation to transfer any school surpluses to the academy within 4 months of conversion, though typically it happens more quickly than that.

26) What happens with teachers and support staff employment?

Teachers and support staff employed by the Governing Body at the point of the transfer will transfer to MECMAT on their existing Terms and Conditions, There is no expectation that staff would work in different schools. However, future posts might be designed to do this.

Questions Received from Consultation week ending 10/12/21

What happens to staff who are on temporary contracts until the end of August 2022 – will they get carried over on a temporary basis or what happens if they staff are appointed on a permanent basis?

Staff on a temporary contract until the end of August 2022 should have the contract reviewed at the appropriate time in the usual way. If the school decides not to renew the contract it will be brought to an end. If the school decide to renew or extend the contract then it will continue.

Please note that temporary staff are not covered by the TUPE regulations. However, any staff on a temporary contract that is then appointed to a permanent contract with a start date up to and including the 31 August 2022 will be covered by the TUPE regulations. Any staff appointed to start on 1st September 2022 will not be covered by TUPE.

If my role changes in school and a new contracted is implemented, may I then be expected to move to another school?

New posts may be designed to enable the MAT to move the members of staff, within reason, between schools. These posts would be based on a need for the role across the Trust and would be specifically advertised as such.

If my hours are increased, will that mean that I will have a new contract?

Any staff currently on a variable hours contract will transfer in accordance with TUPE regulations with that contract, any change to hours will take place within the terms and conditions of the existing contact and will not be replaced by a new set of terms and conditions.

Are there any services which LCC are expected to provide to schools e.g. SEN and EHCP documents?

Schools will still need to apply to the LA for statutory assessments including EHCPs. The responsible LA is the LA where the child is resident.

Will school club staff be TUPE too? (They were employed by the management committee of the club and the club is run as a charity).

If the Governing Body is named as the employer on the contracts of the staff employed to work in the school club and are paid from the school budget and on the school payroll then those staff will also be protected by TUPE.

Questions Received from Consultation week ending 18/12/21 and 08/01/22

As a SENDCO I was wondering how the procedures, forms, etc will change?

There are no planned changes to these procedures. Schools will still need to apply to the LA for statutory assessments including EHCPs. The responsible LA is the LA where the child is resident.

Is it possible that in 2/3 years' time, new pay scales (for support staff) could be established, effectively lowering the wages that people earn?

This would require a full negotiation exercise with staff and their representatives, this is not planned for now or the future. All Trusts in the Diocese are required to adopt/continue using the NJC Green Book pay and conditions for support staff. Staff would TUPE transfer on their current scale points into the trust. At some point in the future, the Trust may wish to get consistency across the Trust on the support staff pay

scales. However, should differences exist in these areas it would be something the Trust would need to discuss with HR and its legal team regarding future harmonising of contracts across the trust. Almost certainly this would mean 'levelling up' and not down.

Will staff and employee contributions to pensions stay the same?

TAs they are now, the contribution rates are set on a tri-annual basis by the pension funds and increases are based on many factors. Any future changes are not in the control of Trust.

Will the fact that we are a MAT 'dilute' the Catholicism of the school?

No, the Bishop of Lancaster has stated that it is his wish that all Catholic schools in the Diocese of Lancaster move to become academies as part of Multi Academy Trusts by 2026. He believes that by doing so, this will in fact protect, preserve and promote Catholic education across the Diocese.

How long are we guaranteed the same terms and conditions that we are currently on? (e.g. maternity pay, sick pay, continuity of service).

Staff Terms and Conditions are protected by the TUPE process, these protections do not have an 'expiry' date. Any proposed changes to current terms and conditions must be declared as part of the TUPE process and can't be altered in the future unless a full negotiation process has been undertaken.

Is there any vision for an increase in 1265 directed hours?

The Trust will adopt the School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD) and follow the guidance on working hours therein.

What will be the changes for the children at our school?

There are no significant changes which will affect pupils on a day-to-day basis. Uniforms, school day, free school meals, school name and holidays will not change. However it is hoped that through working in partnership and closely together the Trust will create a sustainable model of high-quality education for all pupils. We believe that sharing ideas that work, learning from each other and allowing leaders and staff to focus on the core purpose of education will enable the Trust to move forward as a family of schools for the benefit of the children.

What is the anticipated annual holiday and holiday patterns (i.e. 2 weeks in October/Whitsun half-term)?

It is not anticipated that there will be any changes to the current holiday pattern.

How much will it affect our curriculum?

Through the Trust's Scheme of Delegation the Governing Bodies of the schools will retain responsibility to review and set the curriculum. The CEO will have oversight of this.

Is there any obligation for the Academy Trust to honour any national pay increase and would this be for all staff across the school?

The Trust will adopt the School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD) and follow the guidance on obligations to apply national pay increases. As Governing Bodies do now the Trust Board will set a Pay Policy in line with the national guidance and take decisions on what is affordable.

Is there any obligation for the Academy Trust to follow the progressive pay scales for teaching and non-teaching staff?

The Trust will continue to follow the obligations provided by the NJC Green Book and STPCD recommendations on pay scales.

Is there any obligation for the Academy Trust to consult teaching and non-teaching staff with regard to start and finish times for the school day?

Any proposals by the Trust to change to the length of the school day would be consulted in the same way that they would be now.

Is there any obligation for the Academy Trust to consult staff about the length of the school day or which days constitute working days (Saturday, Sunday commitments)?

The Trust will continue to follow these obligations set out in the STPCD in terms of what constitutes a school day and when time can be directed

Any proposals by the Trust to change to the length of the school day would be consulted in the same way that they would be now.

Is there any obligation for the Academy Trust to consult teaching and non-teaching staff regarding school holiday patterns?

Consultation on any proposals by the Trust to change school holiday patterns would be carried out in the same way that they would be now.

Is there any obligation for the Academy Trust to consult staff regarding directed time - the length of time this might constitute and how it should be distributed/organised?

Consultation on any proposals by the Trust to change the way that directed time is distributed/organised would be carried out in the same way that they would be now.

Is there any obligation on the Academy Trust to consult school staff on policies, uniform, mission statement, corporate Identity?

Consultation on any proposals to change policies, uniform, mission statement, corporate Identity would be carried out in accordance with the Trust's Scheme of Delegation and current processes.

NB

Technically the 'obligations' for the Trust to consult on changes for many aspects may be slightly different to those obligations for maintained schools and indeed for VA schools. Whilst moving forwards proposals may, in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation, originate at different levels the Trust has no intention of diluting or undermining the consultation processes that currently operate.

Questions Received from Consultation week ending 14/01/22

Will maternity leave stay the same or could it change?

Whilst employed by the MAT your Maternity Leave provisions are protected by your continuous service.

Is there any guarantee that our school won't be financially worse off?

The school will not be 'worse off' as a result of joining MECMAT. The funding it receives now is determined by the National Funding Formula and the Lancashire Schools Forum local factors. The ESFA will replicate this formula with a monthly payment. It is then up to the school and the Trust to ensure spending decisions, are they do now, enable a balanced budget.

What if school " goes bust" – who would support the school financially then – not protected by County?

This should never happen as regulations for the management of academy finances are extremely robust and they are monitored by the ESFA on behalf of the government. In the same way that a maintained school

would be supported to balance its books by the LA the ESFA does the same for academies. All LGPS liabilities are underwritten by the government in the extremely unlikely event that this did ever happen.

If some staff are appointed to work across the schools and some work at just the one school – could this lead to division amongst staff?

If new roles become available which involve working across more than one school then all staff will have the opportunity to apply for them. Some staff will relish this opportunity and some will prefer to continue to work in one school. These roles will be very few and very specific and should not cause division.

Will our holidays be changed?

It is not anticipated that there will be any changes to the current holiday pattern.

As teachers, do we lose all the service we have accrued should we swop back to LCC. Therefore our sick pay and maternity pay etc would be compromised?

Is there anything in place to safeguard this or for LCC to acknowledge it in the instance where staff didn't join the academy through choice as such.

As long as there is no break in service, continuous service is preserved for redundancy calculation purposes in accordance with the Redundancy Modification Order, so a move back to the LA or to another academy trust would not affect this.

Aggregated sickness absence provisions are covered by the Burgundy Book, so assuming the LA or another academy trust adhere to the BB this would be preserved.

Continuous service for MAT leave provisions is discretionary and would need to be checked before accepting a role in a LA maintained school or another academy trust.

The suggested annual contribution for each school is 5% of GAG (General Annual Grant). I am still trying to clarify exactly which income streams are included in GAG but my understanding is that Early Years Funding, Pupil Premium, PE/Sports Premium, UIFSM and High Needs and Self-Generated Income are NOT included. If that is the case then, based on our latest 3 year forecast and anticipated 2022/23 Revenue Income (excluding income streams above) of £1,571,252, we would be expecting to pay in the region of £78,500 annually (figure would rise year on year as income increases).

Feeding that figure into the 3 year financial forecast, we would be seeing a deficit balance by 2023/24. I am not confident that with the size of the initial MAT that economies of scale for the purchase of SLAs will positively impact on this figure to any major extent.

The 5% member contribution is a figure that is widely recognised as an appropriate level to cover 'typical' central services. However some Trusts levy more and some less. Following the financial due diligence to be undertaken in the spring term the Trust Board will agree a contribution fee that is affordable for schools. Many trusts set a sliding scale contribution in the first few years that schools join the trust to allow economies to be realised as the trust grows.

If MATs are not allowed to set deficit budgets or borrow money, then my understanding is that all schools/academies within the MAT would need to contribute a proportion of their budget share to support any of the schools which are not financially sound?

The MAT does need to set an overall consolidated budget but individual deficit budgets may be approved by the Trust if there is a sufficiently robust recovery plan. There is no intention to pool GAG and therefore funds will not be vired from one school to another to 'prop' them up.

Do we know the financial situation of each of the schools who are intending to join the MAT? Will there be any financial difficulties to address immediately?

All schools in wave 1 have declared themselves 'academy ready.' However financial due diligence will be independently taken in the spring term and any if there are any financial issues that will prevent the schools from joining the trust in Wave 1, they may be deferred.

The current budgeting software used by the LCC Finance Officer is extremely complex. If we were to move away from LCC Financial Services, are there comparable systems out there to fully support a school budget? Schools who have bought into the LCC Financial Support SLA are unlikely to have SBMs who would be able to set and manage their budgets without this kind of software and expertise.

To ensure compliance with the Academies Trust Handbook all schools in the Trust will use the same finance system and support. Schools will therefore move away from the LA finance system and support. This will be provided by the Trust central finance team. The Trust must employ an appropriately qualified and experience Chief Finance Officer (CFO). They will manage the Trust's finance system, processes and procedures. The Trust will tender for a new system in Spring 2022 and intend to include representatives of the schools in Wave 1 to be part of the selection process for the new system. There are many finance and budgeting software systems on the market that have been designed to meet the needs of academy trusts.

In the absence of an experienced CFO, who will guide and manage the financial and HR transition (new bank accounts, payroll provider, contracts, budget setting etc) for each school? None of the existing SBMs will be in a position to do this without significant guidance and support.

The Trust's experienced project management team will support these processes and the SBMs whilst appropriate CFO support is put in place.

The current Oracle/Payroll system (due to be upgraded to Fusion in July 2022) is a bespoke system specifically designed to support schools and the roles and functions within it. Will we be able to maintain this provider? If not then are there comparable companies and software available to support the schools' needs?

The Trust are looking to tender for a new payroll/HR system in Spring 2022. The Trust intend to include representatives of the schools in Wave 1 to be part of the selection process for the new system.

Are we confident that the appointed Trustees and Trust Board have sufficient skills, knowledge and experience of both secondary and primary education and the necessary financial expertise to run the MAT and manage the CEO and CFO?

There will be three layers of governance. The Members will be the Bishop of Lancaster, the Episcopal Vicar for Education and Formation and the Diocesan Board of Trustees, they are also the founding Members of BEBCMAT and MCMAT and directly accountable to parliament for the performance of the trusts.

Then there is a Trust board made up of at least five Trustees/Directors, who are not paid and the majority of them are practising Catholics. The trustees will be appointed by the Members based on the mix of skills and experience they will bring to the Board. These appointments are scrutinised by DfE and any concerns about their abilities to run the MAT will be taken up with the members.

What assurances do we have that there will be a transparent culture of financial decision making and that individual schools will be involved in financial decision making?

Some of the first documents that the Trust Board must approve and have in place is a full suite of finance policies, processes and procedures which will be published and shared with all staff. Financial decisions will be made at different levels in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation. As they are now minutes of the Finance and Audit committees will be available for public scrutiny.

Could schools find ourselves in a situation where the Trustees decide that we need to revert back to full class sizes and be forced to reduce the number of teachers?

Schools will continue to be responsible for setting their curriculum model in accordance with what it can afford. However the Trust will expect schools to use the principles of integrated curriculum planning to set reasonable and efficient levels of pupil:adult and pupil:teacher contact which affect class sizes.

Do the interim CEOs have the right management style to ensure a connect between the local schools and the central Trust? For a new MAT to succeed then the MAT model needs to be well executed and well communicated. Headteachers, Governors, Staff, parents etc all need to have confidence and trust in the CEOs.

Two experienced Headteachers from the wave 1 schools are currently coordinating some aspects of the work to however no formal interim CEO(s) have been appointed for wave 1 as yet; this will be the responsibility of the Trust Board to put in place.

Do we maintain our full cohort of Governors for each school? Do we still maintain our LEA Governor (DT)?

Local governing body members will be appointed in accordance with the Diocese of Lancaster Model Articles of Association. LAs do not have governor representation on academy local governing bodies but, post conversion, any individuals may apply and be approved as foundation governors.

Who are the trustees- as they will be our employees how do we have confidence that they have the right skills set, knowledge and investment in us to make sure the MAT is successful? As these are not in place how do we even know if we want to work with /for these people? As a staff we feel we need to do due diligence to ensure that the 'company' we are working for has the right structure, values, operations and staffing model that is sustainable both now and in the future.

Then there is a Trust board made up of at least five Trustees/Directors, who are not paid and the majority of them are practising Catholics. The trustees will be appointed by the Members based on the mix of skills and experience they will bring to the Board. These appointments are scrutinised by DfE and any concerns about their abilities to run the MAT will be taken up with the members. The names of the trustees will be confirmed and shared when they have been appointed by the members which is currently ongoing.

Is there a growth plan for the MAT?

Yes, this is in the document 'Implementing the Bishop of Lancaster's Vision for Academisation' which has been previously shared.

What do the policies look like- scheme of financial delegation/ pay policy?

The trust will adopt the model Diocese of Lancaster Scheme of Delegation, the schools will continue to use their current Pay Policy until such time as the Board need to review it.

Who will be the CEO in the absence of any head from the current group expressing an interest/wish/has the skills and knowledge of academy CEO leadership?

The appointment of the CEO will in, all circumstances, be appointed from a full external recruitment process. Existing Headteachers in wave 1 schools may apply for the role as a matter of individual choice.

As staff we feel there needs to be a 'leadership' firmer structure of the trust board and CEO/CFO in place in order to feel we are not falling off a precipice. The CEO and trust board needs to be much more established at this stage in preparation to drive the change, set up the academy and reassure staff by their actions that we are not walking blindly into a mess.

The consultation phase has not yet finished, it would therefore be incongruous to have all of this detail in place for a newly forming MAT. There is a clear and well used timescale for establishing MECMAT which has been shared with wave 1 schools. This timeline is currently on track. Once the company is established, the Board is in place and the Academy Orders have been approved then much of the work that needs to be done can pick up pace.

Questions Received from Consultation week ending 21/01/22

As a staff member I have concerns that our current roles and pay could alter, although we have been given verbal reassurance this will not happen, I would feel more confident in the academisation if this could be given in writing.

Current roles and pay scales are protected by statutory legislation that the Trust can't disregard. TUPE stands for the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations. The main purpose of the TUPE Regulations is to preserve continuity of employment and to safeguard the employment rights of all employees whose employment transfers to an academy trust as a result of a relevant transfer i.e. transfer to MECMAT.

I also have concerns that staff may be asked to work in other schools, perhaps to cover sickness, would this be expected, would staff have a choice to refuse?

No this would not happen. Staff terms and conditions are protected by law. Nobody will be told to move to another school. Occasionally, there may be job opportunities in other schools and staff could apply for those, as they could if they weren't in a Trust.

Currently we have a strong Pastoral staff who have previously been Teaching Assistants, would they be expected to go back into class as T.A.?

Staff will transfer on their permanent substantive contract and the terms and conditions of the contract will be protected. If these pastoral roles are temporary then they may, as now, be subject to future change; if they are permanent roles protected by a new contract they will be protected and not subject to change.

Considering pensions what will happen to L.A. pension, will when transferring it stay the same? What reassurances can be given?

MECMAT will be a member of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) and the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) and your pension is protected as part of the TUPE transfer. Therefore, your pension will be unaffected by the transfer.

If you have already provided an opt out form and are currently not paying pension contributions you will be automatically enrolled into the TPS or LGPS in accordance with Auto Enrolment Regulations as your new employer is required by law to enrol you into an appropriate occupational pension scheme from the date of transfer. As a member of the Scheme you will be required to contribute a percentage of your salary to that scheme. Your employer will also contribute to the Scheme on your behalf, with the employer contribution to the Scheme being determined at each triennial valuation of the Pension Fund by the Fund's appointed actuary.

If you do not wish to be a member of the Scheme (or decide at some later date that you do not wish to be a member), you can obtain an opting out form from the relevant pension scheme administrator via the website, but please note, your employer is not permitted to provide you with an opt out form.

If you make a valid opt out within three months of being enrolled you will be treated for all purposes as not having become an active member of the pension scheme on this occasion and we will refund to you any contributions paid by you through the payroll system.

Staff development opportunities - will there still be access to the current ones available?

School staff development opportunities will be able to continue if beneficial to the school. Existing and new opportunities developed across the trust will be invaluable for all involved as support for professional development is essential to school improvement. One of the key principles of the Bishop's strategy is that schools will work even more collaboratively in the future and therefore opportunities for shared professional development will further strengthen our Catholic family.

I am currently paying into an AVC with my pension. Will this continue as it is now, or will it change after the academisation?

If you choose to continue to make Additional Voluntary Contributions you will be able to continue to do so directly from your salary.

Would we still have access to the Portal and information from Lancashire?

If the schools continue to purchase services from the LA, then it is assumed that this would be the case but this would be a decision for the LA.

Would we still receive support from Lancashire Assessment Team? - it is a statutory service!

Yes, schools will still need to apply to the LA for statutory assessments including EHCPs. The responsible LA is the LA where the child is resident.

Who would support us with census etc returns?

Support for this would be provided from the Trust central finance team.

Would we still have access to services for supporting/ identifying Free School meals?

Yes, as this service is provided to the schools by the LA as part of an SLA. Schools can use any specialist services and SLAs as appropriate. Some SLAs will not be renewed, some will be negotiated across the Trust and others will continue – this will be looked at in detail in the due diligence aspect of the conversion process.

How does TUPE affect staff who are on Fixed Term contracts?

Staff on a temporary contract until the end of August 2022 should have the contract reviewed at the appropriate time in the usual way. If the school decides not to renew the contract it will be brought to an end. If the school decide to renew or extend the contract then it will continue.

Please note that temporary staff are not covered by the TUPE regulations. However, any staff on a temporary contract that is then appointed to a permanent contract with a start date up to and including the 31 August 2022 will be covered by the TUPE regulations. Any staff appointed to start on 1st September 2022 will not be covered by TUPE.

As an ICT Technician, what things would change for me ?

Your current roles and responsibilities will remain the same and be protected by TUPE.

Would I be expected to visit other schools ?

No this would not happen. Staff terms and conditions are protected by TUPE. Occasionally, there may be job opportunities in other schools or to work across multiple schools and staff could apply for those, as they could if they weren't in a Trust.

At the moment we decide as a school what is best to spend our ICT budget on for our school. Will the MAT decide what equipment we buy and if we choose to have apple devices or Microsoft windows devices like other MATs?

In the short to medium term decisions like this will remain with the school. In the longer term the MAT will develop an ICT strategy based on the needs and resources of the schools, however schools will play a full part in developing the strategy.

What will the process be of procuring ICT systems such as SIMs or FMS which staff are already familiar with and have had extensive training on?

Decisions on the procurement of ICT systems, in particular the FMS will be made in order to meet the with the requirements of the Academies Trust Handbook.

The Trust will have to procure a new finance system to be in place for September The Trust intend to include representatives of the schools in Wave 1 to be part of the selection process for the new system.

If we are moving away from the LA for some services what are the advantages of moving to other service providers?

Academy trusts benefit from the National Deals for Schools scheme and national procurement frameworks for the purchase of many types of goods and services including energy, ICT equipment, recruitment, insurance, payroll and HR. The Trust and schools will still be free to procure LA goods and services should they represent best value.

How much consideration is currently being given to the ICT services in all of our school going forward. Can reassurances be given that the level of customer service will be the priority over cost.

It is not possible at this stage to give detail about the specification or award criteria for the procurement of any particular system in the future.

During Covid the DfE provided our school with an allocation of ICT devices the number of devices varied from school to school. If in the future the DfE provide further support, would the MAT decide which schools gets the devices and how many we get? As our school will be under the MAT the DfE would allocate devices to the MAT and not the school directly.

Under current guidance a MAT can choose to have these devices allocated to either the MAT centrally or to the individual schools. In either event the devices would always follow the children that have been identified as needing the support that generated the allocation.

Would we expected to have moved over to all new systems by 1st September or could we do a phased transition after we have become an academy? The timeframe for sourcing and implementing new packages along with training all office based staff is very tight if it is to be done by 1st Sept.

Not all the systems will change for September 2022 and will of course be phased in if needed. The Trust will look to start the procurement of systems as soon as the Academy Orders have been received, ready to be set up in the summer term.

The Trust will look to provide any training before term finishes although this would depend on the start date of the system. ICT support staff, school business managers/bursars would be key drivers in setting this timeline with the Trust.

What are the Trust's plans to appoint a CEO and how will this be done, and by when?

Until the Board is clear about which schools will join in wave 1 it is unable to finalise its plans for the appointment for the CEO. Details of their plans will be shared following the first Board meeting after Academy Orders have been received.