

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – COLLABORATION / FEDERATION

Collaboration

What is a collaboration?

There are a number of forms of collaboration between schools (co-operation, informal collaboration and formal collaboration). Schools can collaborate on an informal, 'ad hoc' basis. There might be a joint committee involving governors from the collaborating schools operating as a discussion group but with no delegated powers. This form of collaboration has no legal founding but schools are working together to achieve a common goal. A more formal type of collaboration would involve the establishment of a joint strategic committee with delegated decision making powers operating under the Collaboration Regulations. The schools involved might share staff. Such a collaboration can involve all types of maintained schools. Committees are sometimes established with a time-limited role i.e. to look into federation. They can even have an executive headteacher.

Is there a limit to the number of schools that can form a collaboration?

No there is no limit.

Why would schools consider collaborating?

- To share effective practice.
- The current headteacher is leaving and there is a vacancy to fill.
- The current headteacher or another key member of the leadership team is leaving in the next two/three years and this is part of the succession planning discussions.
- The vacancy for the headteacher has not been filled and there have now been several adverts or an acting headteacher in post.
- Falling pupil numbers and low predicted numbers.
- The size of the school is making it difficult to expand and improve provision facilities.
- The school is already working closely with neighboring schools on curriculum planning and delivery.
- There is strong staff expertise which could be shared with others.
- There are concerns over workload and time pressures on the headteacher due to administration requirements and the role of a business manager is being considered.

What is the difference between a partnership and a collaboration?

Only maintained schools can formally collaborate. Partnerships can be developed across a much wider range of institutions such as CTCs, academies, independent schools and other private providers. These arrangements are backed up by SLA's and memoranda of understanding (MoU's) that gives partners security in developing systems and courses or employing staff to oversee or administer the partnership.

How does a School leave a formal collaboration?

There are no formal Regulations governing how a school goes about leaving a formal collaboration. This would be for local agreement. However, the decision to leave is taken by the governing body.

Federation

What does Federation mean?

Federation is a legally formalised arrangement between two or more maintained schools. Each of the schools retain their own identity but their governing bodies are disbanded and a new joint instrument of government establishes a single federated governing body.

What are the benefits of Federating?

- Raising standards e.g. by sharing staff training and supporting each other;
- Able to offer a wider range of opportunities and experiences;
- More able to develop extended services for community use;
- Improve leadership through shared management (headteacher and business manager);
- Maximise financial benefits by sharing resources and through economies of scale.

Can a Federation be established at any time or only at the beginning of an academic year?

Providing that the prescribed timescale for federation is adhered to, a federation can be established at any point during a school year.

How do we go about forming a Federation?

The process is summarised as follows:

- The governing bodies agree informally to investigate federation;
- Governors vote to agree federation as a principle at a meeting;
- Governors establish a joint committee with delegated powers;
- Inform all partners i.e. LA, staff, Diocese, parents;
- Joint committee write a report outlining reasons for federating;
- Individual governing bodies meet to consider the report;
- If a decision to proceed is reached, the joint committee must prepare and publish a formal proposal which will be used in the consultation process which must be at least six weeks. It must contain the names of the schools involved, details of the size and constitution of the federated governing body, staffing arrangements, proposed timetable and details of the admission authority;
- Send the formal proposal to all relevant bodies;
- Joint committee to meet after the end of the consultation period to prepare a summary of responses and make a recommendation to each governing body;
- Joint committee meets to consider responses;
- Individual governing bodies meet to make the final decision on whether to proceed;
- Inform all parties of decision.

What would be the constitution of the federated governing body?

All existing governing bodies are dissolved and a new governing body established which has the skills and aptitude to be effective. The membership is not about representing a geographical catchment area of a school. Good practice is for a skills analysis to help determine who should govern.

The constitution (size and governor category) depends on the categories of school which are federating but in any event there shall be no fewer than seven members and large enough to undertake the necessary roles and responsibilities but be manageable and effective. The average size of a maintained community school governing body in Shropshire is 14.

The Law requires there shall be two parent governors elected from across the federation (not one from each school if the federation is of 2 schools), a headteacher/executive head, one staff governor and one local authority governor. In addition, the governing body can appoint as many co-opted governors as they wish providing that the balance relating to foundation and voluntary schools is maintained. Further details can be found in the School Governance (Federations) (England) Regulations 2012, and as amended in 2014 and 2016, and in The School Governance (Constitution) regulations 2012.

At what stage are Governors appointed to the Governing Body?

The date on which the governing bodies of the federated schools are dissolved and the new single governance structure is achieved is known as the incorporation date. The Local Authority, where applicable the Diocese, and the schools involved ensure that as many of the governors to

serve on the new single governing body are in place prior to the incorporation date. The Law states the headteacher (s), staff governor and Foundation governors may be appointed or elected to post prior to incorporation. The parent governor election process takes place after the incorporation date and prior to the first meeting of the new federated governing body at which co-opted governors are 'co-opted' and the LA governor nomination is approved by the governing body and appointed to post.

Are the schools within the federation inspected jointly or separately by Ofsted

They are still inspected separately and listed separately in league tables. It would normally be appropriate to ask Ofsted to inspect the schools in the federation at the same time so that a rounded picture of the work of the federations can be formed. Ofsted is increasingly aware of and interested in the role that federations and collaborations play in improving standards. Inspection providers have been asked by Ofsted to use the same team when inspecting schools in a federation. Some federations produce a joint SEF and indicate which sections applied to which school using colour coding. Currently, the government publishes performance information for schools individually.

What are the main issues that should be considered to ensure the success of a Federation?

The DfE list the following conditions as being important to success:

- A sense of shared identity between schools e.g. a close proximity or Church ethos;
- A sense of common purpose through a shared vision for improving attainment, achievement and progression of pupils;
- Strong leadership;
- A strong management infrastructure;
- A trusting relationship;
- A system of overview;
- Commitment on the part of all schools involved;
- Communication between schools;
- A clear sustainability strategy.

How does a school leave a Federation?

If a school wishes to leave the federation they must:

- Make a written request signed by either two or more governors, one fifth of parents of registered pupils, two fifths of staff, the authority, the trustees of the school or the body entitled to appoint foundation governors (usually the Diocese);
- The governing body of the federation must give notice of this request (within one week of the request having been received) to all relevant authorities; the headteacher of the federation and the headteacher of each school within the federation; any trustees and the Diocese, all staff at the relevant school, every parent at that school and anyone else that the federation considers should know;
- The governing body must consider the request not less than 14 days after it was made and decide whether or not the school should be allowed to leave and, if they can, when or should the federation be dissolved and, if so, when;
- They then tell everyone concerned within a week what they have decided.

Can a school in a federation apply for academy status?

Yes it is possible for a school within a federation to apply for academy status without having to seek agreement of the other schools within the federation. This is covered in Part 9 of the 2012 Federation Regulations.

Staffing Issues

Can staff be appointed to a federation and not to an individual school?

The contractual arrangement for all shared appointments can vary depending upon the type of schools involved. If the schools share the same employer (for example, a group of community schools or a group of voluntary-aided schools) then contractual arrangements are simply a matter of agreeing working practices. If, however, the schools in the federation have different employers then contractual arrangements become slightly more complicated. For instance, each employer in a federation might have its own contract detailing its part-time obligations in the contract arrangement; or a federation may identify a lead employer, draft its contract accordingly and then draft separate contracts for any other employers who may, for example, set out their obligations to buy back time and thus contribute to the cost of the overall federation. In practice, new staff are often employed on federation contracts with time allocations to the schools within the federation being a matter for the leadership team. In many cases, existing staff also welcome federation contracts because it gives them greater flexibility in career options and the possibility of employment elsewhere in the federation should budgets in one school become an issue.

How do school leaders get paid for work outside their own school?

The School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) has been asked by the Department for Education (DfE) to develop a consolidated system for rewarding school leaders working outside their main schools. They have also been tasked with providing greater flexibility to encourage schools to share their expertise at all levels. Currently, the reward of teachers with duties outside their main schools is a matter of individual negotiation and arrangement.

Does there have to be a federation to be able to appoint an executive headteacher?

The decision to appoint an executive head can be made in a number of circumstances. In federations, there are often co-leadership models as well as executive leadership models. For collaborations, an executive head can be appointed, reporting to the joint committee between the governing bodies of the schools concerned. Partnerships can also appoint executive leadership through the use of a service level agreement or memorandum of understanding. This range of shared leadership models can also apply to other appointments which might include curriculum specialists, such as modern foreign languages teachers in primary schools, or expert support staff such as school business managers.

What is an executive headteacher?

Federations are sometimes, although not always, led by executive heads. These are headteachers who have responsibility for more than one school. However the schools for which executive heads are responsible are not always in a federation. For example:

- Governors may want to share a successful headteacher with another local school, especially when the school is under notice to improve and the other head's school has been designated as outstanding by OFSTED.
- When two neighbouring schools are anticipating amalgamation because of falling rolls and one of the heads leaves, appointing the remaining head as executive over both schools may seem to be sensible.
- Executive heads are also commonly appointed to manage more than one small school as heads of small schools are the most difficult to recruit.

Executive heads usually spend part of their week in each school and focus on overall strategy and policies. The day to day running of the schools is managed by associate heads who report to the executive head. Often it is the Local Authority that approaches governors to suggest executive headship as part of their statutory powers of intervention for the reasons above. There is no template for executive headships. The executive heads are paid by their substantive school and a payment is made to that school by the second school.

If in a federation with three schools where they currently have three headteachers (as opposed to an executive head and three institution leaders) one headteacher leaves, can the school employ the two remaining heads to lead the federation?

Depending on circumstances, yes. The governors must be confident that the work of the federation is effectively distributed. For example, can the distribution of responsibilities across the group of schools be rearranged to effectively remove the requirement for a separate head? Every school must still have a nominated leader, but there is no reason why an individual cannot lead more than one school. In these circumstances it is unlikely that a national advertisement would be required.

Is it easier to appoint an executive headteacher than the headteacher of a single institution?

There is certainly growing interest in executive headteacher positions from experienced leaders who are looking for a new challenge. It is not yet clear if these types of roles produce ease or difficulty from a recruitment perspective.

General - Advantages/Disadvantages

Other than the pooling of resources, what other benefits and deficits does this bring?

Shared resources can give schools much greater buying power, and thus influence, with suppliers. This may allow the schools to achieve economies of scale. Shared requirements and pooled resources may also allow collaborations to afford new services that are beyond the reach of the single school. Each school in the federation may maintain its own budget and agree how much is put into a shared pot for joint provision or, under recent Regulations, budgets may be pooled at the outset. This is a matter for the federation. However, the budget share generated by each school is important for the viability of the school and care should be taken to ensure that any shared commitments are realistic, especially in the long-term.

Can a federation be time-limited?

Federations are seen as long-term commitments and a strong model which is able to operate as a single legal entity. Federations are more resilient to changes that can happen, in relation to staff or governance. However, it is possible for schools to withdraw from the federation but it is rare, and the amount of work involved in such withdrawals can vary depending upon how centralised the running of the federation has become.

Collaborations are often used as a short-term measure to bring schools together to develop more long-term structures for collaborative working. Collaborations are easy to set up but also easy to leave. For this reason they are seen as a weaker model, often leading to more permanent outcomes.

In some cases federations appear to be used when the school is in difficulties. Are there examples of federations being established in more positive circumstances?

There have always been examples of federations where the driving force has been a shared vision and positive opportunities rather than a deficit situation. This is now increasingly the case as schools come together to strengthen leadership capacity, support the development of leadership, look to economies of scale and create a sustainable future for high-quality educational provision.

What are the benefits for primary federations in isolated rural communities?

Small, isolated schools in rural locations can be limited in the breadth of resources and services they can offer individually. By working together, schools can offer and share complimentary

services and thus provide a wider range of services, which could include specialist teaching staff, support staff, transport links, greater professional development and working jointly with partners. Rural schools may also choose to use a federation as the base for a more fundamental reorganisation, such as moving pupils to different sites based on their age. The sustainability of small rural schools will continue to provide challenges for leadership recruitment as the role of the headteacher becomes ever more demanding. There is emerging evidence that recruitment is enhanced where there is a supportive leadership model rather than leadership in isolation. Federation can help to address this issue.

How would we overcome any differing ethos associated with federating schools from different backgrounds (for example, faith/community schools)?

Federation must be driven by a shared vision that cannot be 'forced' or 'created'. All parties must be fully engaged and proactive around overcoming barriers.

What is meant by an all-through school (0–19, 3–18 etc)? And would such schools automatically be seen as federations?

An all-through school links the stages of education together in a shared context. This may be through collaboration, or maybe formalised through a federation, trust or academy/academy chain model.

There is growing interest in all-through schooling structures. The five main drivers for all-through schools are:

- personalisation (raising achievement)
- pedagogical (shared expertise cross phase)
- care and support (every child matters and shared ethos)
- community (engagement in learning)
- organisational (shared expertise and resources)

Different structures of schools and leadership emerge in response to local needs and priorities. All-through schooling structures can provide locality solutions which work together across phases to provide the best possible learning journey for children. Such structures are also more efficient service delivery mechanisms for children and families.

What happens when one or more of the schools in a federation becomes an academy?

The federation regulations (School Governance (Federations) (England) Regulations 2012) allow a federation to continue in existence if a school leaves the federation, as long as at least two schools remain in the federation. No consultation is required but there would be a need to review the instrument of government according to regulation 31.

Where an academy wishes to be part of the federation, this can be achieved through partnership agreements which do not use the regulations but which enable all the schools in the group to function much as they would do under federation regulations. It is up to the partners to agree the form and structure they wish to put in place to deliver their joint vision for children.

Finance

Does a Federation have a single budget share?

Regulations introduced for the financial year 2011/12 allow local authorities to calculate a single budget for schools in a federation with a single governing body. The data would be entered into the formula as if they were a single school.

Is a Federation financially disadvantaged?

No, if the federation has a single budget it is conditional on the federation receiving a budget which is no lower than they would have had if the schools had received separate budget shares.

What are the financial benefits for schools?

The benefit would be the way that they manage and account for the single budget share. The governing body will be able to plan the use of this budget across the schools within the federation to the best effect. The federation would have greater opportunities to achieve economies of scale savings.